



# CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL STUDIES

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## Stencilled Occasional Paper

'LIFE'S MORE FUN WITH YOUR NUMBER ONE SUN':  
INTERVIEWS WITH SOME SUN READERS

by

Mark Pursehouse

Media Series: SP No. 85

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November 1987

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Introduction

This work on The Sun newspaper arose out of concern for the conflict between the widespread rejection of The Sun as 'just a comic' despite the knowledge that an estimated one-third of adults in Britain read the paper every day.

The interviews were conducted in the early summer of 1985 as part of an undergraduate media course project.

There is still considerable work to be done on audience related issues and this paper's attention to popular media reception represents an ongoing concern of the Centre.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Michael Green, Ann Lane, Maureen McNeil, Ina Purchasehouse and Debbie Steinberg in this work.

The Sun's text is complex. Populist interests in individuals, personalities, sex, scandal, violence, sport and amusement are presented in a lively, identifiable language and format which ideologically layers a heterosexual, male, white, conservative, capitalist, nationalist world view. Since The Sun appears to be read by more people every day, than any other commercial reading material, we should pay attention to how it is read. As Paul Hoggart says, 'readers do to a certain extent exercise control over content by choosing not to buy. The history of the medium is littered with the corpses of failed attempts to impose constructions of reality'(1). The Sun's circulation figures show it is not one of these failures. The Sun has a distinctively cross-class audience but the particular relationships of working class people to The Sun seems a key area to explore. For instance, The Sun may be seen as an ideological replacement for the diminishing everyday relevance of initial structuring systems such as parents, education and comics. It is only by exploring real readings that we can begin to question The Sun's powers of ideological reproduction.

Post-structuralism shifted critical focus from the text to the reader, by emphasising the creative act of reading. This critical approach moved beyond the idea of a text being able to convey unambiguous 'meanings' to 'passive' receivers, and then had to guard against the opposite extreme - a text being completely open to any individual's 'personal' interpretation. The resulting style of analysis focuses on the codes which allow 'meaningful discourse' between a text and a reader.(2) Not only is the text encoded but it is emphasised that readers take to the text their own cultural codes so that attention should be given to structures governing meaning from the view-point of the reader.(3) Such audience theories form the background to this paper.

Frank Parkin drew particular attention to class inequality creating 'competing meaning systems'. He developed a model attempting to 'usefully, distinguish three major meaning-systems. Each derives from a different social source, and each promotes a different moral interpretation of class inequality'.(4) Parkin argued that readers' 'meaning-systems' would be derived from their social setting and reflect their interpretation of class inequality. He identified a 'dominant value system', where messages are decoded in accordance with the 'preferred reading' of the dominant ideological codes, stemming from the hegemonic order; a 'subordinate value system' where the decoding is negotiated from the setting of the working class community; and a 'radical value system', which makes an oppositional decoding of the dominant ideology and has a social source in left politics or in marginal, sometimes socially 'deviant' groups. The difference between the first and third of these categories in terms of their created 'meaning-systems' is undeniable and provides an important argument for the consideration of class structure in audience research. However, in between these two categories is an almost all-embracing category of people who will read with the

'negotiated code'. Hartley expresses the danger: 'Given the multiple discourses within which all individuals interact, and given that certain of these discourses will contradict each other, whilst others confirm and reinforce each other, there is a sense in which all decoding is 'negotiated''(5).

The crudity of this set of three 'meaning-systems' is recognised by Morley while he praises the conception of a socially structured audience. Morley advocates: 'We need to understand the relation of the two dimensions - that of individual, varied, experience and response, as it exists in a particular social context, working with the cultural resources available in that context.' 'Then we can begin to build a theory of how differential individual decodings are patterned by cultural and structural factors' (6).

Questions about the degree and type of reader reception and awareness cannot be answered by theory and argument without concern for readers' own comments. The method by which information on reader reception is obtained poses many difficulties. It is too easy for theories of audience research to dominate, direct and distort the readers' own version of their reception. This effectively crushes or hides the readers decoding and shows more about the initial hypotheses.

Any written research contains this danger, but taped interviews can also be heavily structured by the questions. Furthermore, answers are transformed from everyday reception to 'responses in the context of an interview'. Some of the structures and transformations affecting the constructed responses cannot be avoided, but they must be reduced to a minimum. In order to tend towards this aim this research makes some modifications to David Morley's method in 'Interpreting television: a case study'. His research addressed groups such as shop stewards, bank managers and black further education students, which makes it possible that answers were structured precisely by the immediate awareness of being asked to answer as members of an occupational group. The question and interpretation of answers could also be structured by the very idea of dealing with a 'sample', 'representative' group. Furthermore, the study of the audience and Nationwide was based on an initial viewing of the programme in groups, an odd environment since the normal environment is early evening relaxation at home. If the audience had watched the programme and given its response in this normal situation the decoding formed by the occupational or class groups would still reveal itself among the other codes taken to a discourse, but would not have been so directly given by the researcher.

It is a notable feature of Dorothy Hobson's research that the media reception must be put into the correct context of the audience's everyday life.(7) It is a method which involves individual interviews in a relaxed style, amid the natural reception environment of their own home, rather than Morley's occupation based seminars. Consequently, while this research

uses Morley's theoretical background of individual readings on top of socially formed meaning-systems it expects greater accuracy of audience response from Dorothy Hobson's less-structured interview technique.

The method in this research was, above all, based on giving the reader the maximum opportunity to express their articulated version of their own reception. It is what Dorothy Hobson calls 'creative research' and it is characterised by the interviewee having the freedom to say as much as is wished with a minimum direction contained in the questions. It would be ideal if mentioning The Sun sparked a reader to speak continuously for half an hour on the subject. While a university student may relish this opportunity, the regular readers I interviewed, who do not buy The Sun to make a critical study, look for prompting and direction. Not only do they come to a halt, but can digress into other areas, such as what they believe other people think, which, while of value, can detract from the exploration of their decoding. For these reasons a large number of prepared questions were at hand, to be used in a flexible way.

For example, questions on the media generally reveal something of its 'placement' in the context of everyday life; questions on reading habits (where and when) reveal something of The Sun's role in daily life; questions on the content of The Sun reveal what 'uses' it serves; and questions on The Sun's representation of the world reveal something of the reader's ideological structure.

The research involved only four interviews, which lasted between fifteen and thirty-five minutes. The reason so few people were spoken to was partly dictated by the number of readily available, willing contacts and partly by the feeling, after the four interviews had been transcribed, that there was more than enough material. There are distinct advantages to this small scale study. Firstly, it removes any temptation to consider the interviews as a representative sample. More important, it means very full attention can be given to each interview, allowing a good airing for the readers' comments on The Sun and providing the necessary detail to help even partly understand reader reception.

The four people were all reached through close connections around my local area of Cannock, Staffordshire. This location involves some notable structural influences. All four have lived in or near the town positioned on the edge of the West Midlands conurbation and connected in terms of jobs to the Black Country and Birmingham.

The town developed as a mining town, but now suffers the same high unemployment as the rest of the industrial West Midlands. This environment and the immediate background of all four interviewees might be expected to produce different responses to that that could be obtained from suburban Surrey.

It now remains to concentrate on what was said. In order that the recorded comments receive due emphasis, and some of the feeling and direction of the interviews can be recreated on paper, an edited, but full transcript of each interview will be presented, initially without commentary.

1. Adrian. He is a white 20 year old from Cannock, working for a local building company as a qualified brick-layer - a job he has held since leaving school at 16 years of age. He has a "Labour" back-ground, with his father a member of N.A.L.G.O., but is a very staunch fan of The Sun. (M = Mark, A = Adrian)

- M. Describe what you do on your working day?  
A. Well, it consists of getting up around 6.45. Down at work for 7 o'clock, going from the yard in Cannock at 7 to the job. Arriving there, unlocking, going to the cabin, having a quick cup of tea and a glance at the paper - at this stage only the back page.
- M. That's the first look?  
A. That's the first look of the day - not even when I buy it - I've got to be in the cabin first. Then it's never opened - it's only the back page, due to the quick rush of having a quick cup of tea and going straight out - just a quick read.
- M. You've got to do some work then?  
A. Yes well, until half-past nine breakfast time.  
M. Is there another look at the paper at breakfast?  
A. Yes we do. We get to breakfast; at this stage it's straight to the front. Then it's a read of the front page and then the highlight of the day, turning to page 3. Just a quick glance like opening it up - never before. If anybody asks me 'what's on page 3?' which some do like, in the morning as soon as we get there, I always open it and never show me, so they can see and they'll comment - I don't look myself. Very, erm, specific point that is to save that till breakfast. Of course, page 3, apart from the picture has also got more - what's the word? - more scandalous type news - waffle - and possibly - if there is any sex news about a randy farmer or whatever - that kind of mode, like, you know. You seem to find that on page 3, so that's interesting reading. Page 2 always gets a miss - possibly a quick glance at the weather.
- M. Where do you get to at breakfast?  
A. At breakfast I get to the 'Telly Page'. Don't actually turn-over, because I save 'Bizarre' till dinner-time. You can always tell the next page is 'Telly' and 'Bizarre' and you don't look at that before dinner-time.
- M. Does everybody have to join in?  
A. What's this? At the breakfast session? What in reading my paper, or asking questions, or -  
M. Well is everybody talking about it?  
A. Oh well, you do get some comments like. If somebody's reading the same paper you always get a comment like - oh it always says, say if somebody's been transferred, it says something like £500,000 in The Sun and £600,000 in The Star. The Sun always comes out worst. The Sun's always known as waffle - they don't believe that; they always believe The Mirror. I'd say a good 75% of the chaps in there read The Sun. We've got one that brings

- The Express every day - just for the racing page. We do have one Daily Star in the cabin and one Daily Mirror.
- M. What other papers would you look at?  
A. I look at the Daily Star - I like the Daily Star - especially 'Check-out girl'.
- M. Would there be any papers you wouldn't read?  
A. Yes, well I wouldn't even look at The Times or The Guardian of anything like that, but there's not many blokes at work have that. I don't mind looking at The Mirror, but it'd take me 5 minutes at the most to read that.
- M. What do you think of The Mirror?  
A. The Mirror's a pretty average paper the way I look at it - compared with The Sun and The Times like. The Mirror's a more sensible paper to me. The Sun is really all scandal and stuff like that, it's not actual - there's not really much news in it.
- M. Why would you say the main reason, if you just had one reason, why you have The Sun instead of any other?  
A. I think it's gotta be because it's not - it gives you the news, but it's not an exactly - what's the word? - It's not exactly complicated or anything like that. It's more of a scandalous type paper. What's the word? It's not erm, - It's not as, erm - give me time, the perfect word.
- M. There probably isn't one.  
A. It's not in fact, serious. It's not as serious as you get papers like the Daily Mirror.
- M. What do you think The Sun does good about not being serious?  
A. Well erm - The Sun's more of a gossip paper in't it? Every day you'll find there's something 'we are sorry that we have offended so-and-so', because they've complained like. It's not actual news. It's more exaggerated. It's got more light-hearted kind of news in it as well - more of everyday life in it like. They'll do a report on things like, sex, in more detail - like what's happened, like rapings, divorces, affairs and romantic affairs, whereas The Mirror won't really print much like that - it'll print national news such as - stuff that you'd actually see on The News - that you can watch anytime on The News. I mean stuff in The Sun - you've only got really, perhaps the main headline and a few things. The rest of it nobody else would bother about - you wouldn't get it on national news. But the Mirror's got stuff that's actually been on The News - the more serious side of it.
- M. Let's move onto your dinner-time - where do you start at dinner-time?  
A. With, erm, a glance at the 'Telly Page' - just a quick glance to see if any of the regular programmes are on, or any special films or new series. Then it's straight on to 'Bizarre' for very trendy pop gossip and stuff like that. I like to read what's happened between different pop stars, and different trends in London. You do get

- the odd stupid joke coming up.
- M. What items do you deliberately look for or go to?
- A. In a morning I look at the cross-word - that's a pretty important section, to see what was got right the day before. When there's a gang of us we can easily crack it. I like to read 'Bizarre' and I also do the 'Name Game' every day and I always read the cartoons. I always used to read the horoscopes but I just haven't bothered lately.
- M. What about the cartoons?
- A. Yes, erm, you do get the odd cartoons, yes, I look through them but lately they've been after the cross-word page and between the cross-word page and the back-but-one page, where you get the racing and lots of adverts - I only skip through that part of the paper. When you've finished the cross-word at dinner-time it's time to get up so that's as far through the paper as you've got.
- M. What's the routine for the evening at home?
- A. When I'm not going out, downstairs for the tea roughly around six, watch a bit of telly, possibly the national and regional news - cricket if it's on.
- M. What else would you watch on the telly?
- A. On the telly in the night-time you've got a definite Coronation Street and a definite Brookside - classic soaps. Eastenders I used to watch quite a bit, but at the moment it's died off - it's awkward time of the night really. Erm, most sport that's on I'd probably watch. You can forget programmes like Panorama and World in Action.
- M. What about reading anything?
- A. Apart from the papers - car magazine monthly. Can't think of anything else in fact.
- M. So you've finished with The Sun by dinner-time then?
- A. I never actually pick it up again - I've already read it thoroughly like. I've had a good 45 minutes on it then and a good 20 minutes in the morning.
- M. What story has caught your imagination lately? What can you remember?
- A. Well you've got a lot of this 'Live Aid' lately. You can remember stupid ones like, erm - that farmer - you always get the randy farmer, who's been having a bit of a go with the stable maids. You get the stupid 'Sunspots' as well - they usually stick in your mind like - one's I can't think of. We had a bit of Nick Faldo scandal today I think. We had a new girl on page 3 today. The 'Name Game' was, err - Oh. I know Jimmy Cricket, it was. We had a bit about Ian Botham on the back page today.
- M. What do you think of the style of writing and the kind of language they use?
- A. It's more everyday in't it? It's like - the way they actually put it across is like as if you've got somebody writing it who is the same as you like. You get some people in the Mirror who seem to put it across in a complicated way - big, flashwords, but The Sun's more -

- the reporters seem more everyday type people. And, erm, always on the sports pages - they seem to give you a lot of gossip. Like some foreign club's after Bryan Robson and nothing comes of it. Then they get the odd time, like I can remember last week they said Andy Gray was going back to Villa, and then cause he did - they's got The Sun told you so first. Most of the time they wouldn't mention it again because it was wrong.
- M. What sort of things has the paper annoyed you with?
- A. I wouldn't say it really annoys me with anything. That's a bit annoying what I've just mentioned - the way they brag about things when they get it right. Apart from that there's not much else - there's a lot of wasted space with adverts.
- M. How would you criticise The Sun? What sort of things could it do to be better?
- A. I don't think you could alter it to make it that much better cos they've got a certain system - it's set out in a certain way that - it's the top selling British paper and I don't think they could change it. So I don't really think you could change it that much. If I criticise it for certain things other people would probably like them.
- M. What could it do that would make you stop having it?
- A. Nothing really - I don't think I would stop having it. If it started to get more like the Daily Mirror then I would stop having it and have The Star like. If it started to get more - to into things in more detail and get more complicated, more serious.
- M. What do you think would be The Sun's view of England? What sort of attitude do you think it shows?
- A. I don't think it criticises that much - as much as some papers. It doesn't criticise the government as much. It does - it gives it's fair share, but not as much as like some political papers, like you get the Mirror criticising a lot.
- M. What do you think about politics in the paper?
- A. I don't think The Sun actually - another reason why I like The Sun it doesn't actually dive into politics as much. You get page 2 but after that you don't get any politics at all really - unless it's scandal with MPs.
- M. What about the editorial comments-page 6?
- A. I read them sometimes. I agree with most of them. You get the odd one that you disagree with, but most of them are pretty fair comments from my point of view.
- M. Have they ever written an opinion that's sort of affected the way you think about something, that comes to mind?
- A. No. I don't think so. If they started slagging off something that I agreed with or I liked, then I wouldn't like, agree with them, but they don't really do that - they seem to think on the same wave-length as me. They seem to have that - the, erm, working class-type attitude.
- M. What about their attitude towards black people?

A. Well I don't think they - they don't go too far into it do they? You know, I wouldn't say it was really a racial paper, against them. You do get the odd bits where you can see something like that, but nothing much. Probably half of the people who buy it are black anyhow, so I don't think they could afford to offend that many.

M. Why do you think so many - you've said why you buy The Sun - why do you think so many other people buy it?

A. Well cos it's a very basic paper. It's not a hard paper to understand, it's very run-of-the-mill type - compared with like the average person. There's more middle-class and lower-class than actual upper-class like, which is what The Sun really caters for. I mean I wouldn't say that it's an upper-class paper that 'toffs' would read. You don't find the F.T. index in great detail in it or anything like that. It just gives you basic news and basic waffle and - for the everyday person.

M. Do you think there's many other parts of the media generally television, radio, the lot - that cater for working people like that?

A. Erm - I think Radio 1 does. It has a laugh and it's not too serious. Stations like '3' and '4' are in my opinion, boring. You get a different breed of people who enjoy those types of programmes.

M. What do you think of the British media?

A. I think the British media's pretty good. It's got a lot of different views - covers a wide range, wide area. It's got something for everybody. They've got to cater for everybody so I don't see how you can like everything and not find anything to criticise or anything that you wouldn't like cos you've got somebody who does like it.

It would be possible to say something about every one of Adrian's remarks, but this would provide a rather incoherent, jagged commentary. However, the fact a statement by statement commentary would continually shift the area of analysis is itself an interesting revelation. It proves the existence of different levels of 'negotiation' which must be organised to study reception.

Adrian's remarks are particularly important because his reception of The Sun is notably sympathetic and contented. His feelings respond to the 'fun' persona of the paper and he largely agrees with its representation of the world. This ready intersection of meaning suggests an affinity with the hegemonic order which in 'real' class relations should arguably not exist. It is by examining the different levels of the negotiation process that it is possible to see how The Sun achieves this ideological coup.

One 'reception site' on which The Sun's discourse will be welcomed or repelled is the personal level of 'uses and gratifications'. Firstly, The Sun fits into Adrian's life in a very neat and satisfactory way. The paper has become part of the

routine of his working day. It is habitually bought, and read at regular times of the day. It is a means of entertainment during work breaks and provides companionship as the entertainment role is enjoyed by fellow workers. The routine regularity of The Sun's content, style and lay-out creates this comforting, reliable intersection with the regularity of the working day. The Sun's unified packaging, compared to other papers, assists the level at which it fits the life-pattern. The extent to which the media must accommodate itself with the day's routine is highlighted by the fact that Eastenders is not watched because 7.p.m is inconvenient while Coronation Street at 7.30.p.m suits the evening's schedule.

The next level of intersection or conflict is the area of personal feelings and interests. Adrian finds an identification and involvement in the paper which makes for an 'active' reading (as opposed to 'inactive' reading, at the conscious level of simply finding something to do, or the 'detached' reading of critical analysis). This active reading is supported by the fact that his only other deliberate reading is a car monthly, which is directly practical to his life-style. When Adrian reads The Sun this 'involved' reading is evident in his search for sports information, his search for a laugh, a glance at what is on television, and the pleasure he obtains from the sexual presentation of females. Not only does the paper intersect with his entertainment interests but it also meets the world of a socially active young man by being loaded with people. It is notable that when asked about what he remembers from the paper he produces a catalogue of names, not issues or incidents (Nick Faldo, Jimmy Cricket and Ian Botham). The people become particularly interesting if they are surrounded by sex and scandal, just as a conversation with mates often tends towards young ladies and acquaintances' affairs. The key to this personal level of intersection is that the paper is 'not serious'. The Sun is given credit over other papers for its efforts in satisfying the workers' search for pleasure. This pleasure is actively found in personal interests, people and 'titillation'.(8)

It is not a pleasure that can be found outside the personal world. The world of class, economics, politics and the State is separated off and termed 'serious'. It is rejected if it appears overtly. For example, the Mirror is rejected as 'serious' and a political paper, and there is no chance of him reading The Times or watching World in Action. A clear distinction is drawn between The Sun's fun and scandal and stuff that you'd actually see on the news. This shows the important site of negotiation between the level of the personal discourse and the wider area of the discourses offered about the world outside direct, personal experience. Adrian's comments show how whole areas of the media can be rejected by working class people if this site is not favourable to the personal level. Yet it cannot be forgotten that the pleasure and personal uses of The Sun are structured by his view and understanding of the world, and that the success of



the level of 'fun' only makes the structured ideology more elusive.

The fact Adrian is so active and enthusiastic in his reading makes the meaning he takes from The Sun's representation of the world important. There are obviously areas where the representation is recognised and he either agrees or disagrees with this view. At this level Adrian reveals an interesting amount of agreement with The Sun. He relates closely to the male dominated, heterosexual world and recognises that you do get the 'odd bits' of racism. He has no major disagreement with The Sun's view of the world and sees the editorial as 'pretty fair comments'. It is this conscious level of intersection with the text which determines his attraction to the paper. However, this does not consider Adrian's unconscious acceptance of The Sun's version of which world events deserve to be turned into 'news events' and the angle from which they should be viewed. Adrian accepts as legitimate The Sun's choice of sites and is not aware of any ideology encoded in its voices and themes. It becomes apparent that it is the elusiveness of this ideology which attaches him to The Sun's world. He finds that 'they seem to have that - the, erm, working class-type attitude', 'the reporters seem more everyday-type people', and it is, 'For the everyday person'. Adrian's understandable failure to read with consideration of the encoded structures creates exactly the sympathetic meaning which makes The Sun such an important ideological implement.

The importance of this 'meaning' created without full awareness is intensified by the fact Adrian does recognise class conflict in the world. He uses class terms and sees a type of person who wants The Times and the F.T. index. However, he at least partially accepts this class division. The media is seen to have parts that are for him (Radio 1, soap operas and The Sun) and parts that are not (Radio 4, Panorama, and The Times). He is happy that the British media covers this wide range and offers something for everybody. He does not consider there are people and issues not adequately covered by the media, which indicates how the existing media range defines his spectrum of consideration. It is by providing the satisfaction of fitting Adrian's needs that The Sun can form and limit Adrian's perspective, thereby reinforcing acceptance of the dominant ideological structure.

Adrian's decoding intersects with The Sun at the following sites of negotiation: linguistic understanding, the life-pattern, personal pleasures, and, agreement with the overtly expressed and recognised representations of the world. The ideological framework of reference and its significance is not one of the negotiable areas for the reader, which is why class-conflict does not oppositionally affect Adrian's creation of meaning. The class situation does not appear as one of the major negotiable sites with which a discourse has to intersect. Ideology remains hidden. Adrian does not ask himself about class and power when

reading. He asks, 'do I understand?'; 'does it fit in my life style?'; 'do I feel any pleasure?' and 'do I mainly agree with its view-point?' These are the questions which are formulated by Adrian's upbringing in Britain's class-structured culture from the time he first learned to read. Adrian is satisfied by The Sun's answer to these questions.

2. Sara, She is a white 20 year-old trainee nurse still living with her parents in Pelsall (between Cannock and Walsall). She can claim a notable period of time spent without work. The Sun is read as the family newspaper. The day's edition was available for her comments.

- M. You've got to go to work for the day, what sort of routine have you got?
- S. Well I don't have one do I really? Because I'm at work at different times so I don't have a set time everyday.
- A. What would you do on your, on - ?
- S. On an early?
- M. Yes alright - we'll have an early.
- S. I have me breakfast, leave the house at ten past seven, get to work at twenty five past, have me report of the patients and we make the beds, give them breakfast. Then we do the baths, then it's the drugs, and I have a coffee break.
- M. What do you do there?
- S. I don't read the paper. Cup of coffee. Back at work. I have me dinner hour at 1 o'clock which I have me lunch in. I looks - me friend has The Sun at work - I look through it occasionally, but not very often at work.
- M. When does the paper enter the day?
- S. About half past six, cos me dad brings it from work. I read it then - after me tea.
- M. What about the telly? What sort of things do you watch then?
- S. Soap operas. Falcon Crest. It depends what's on - Well that's the first thing I look at in the paper - what's on the telly.
- M. What about reading? Would you read anything else?
- S. It depends what mood I'm in. I have fads on books. I'm not a person that reads you know.
- M. Would you look at any other newspapers?
- S. Yes, there's one I prefer to The Sun.
- M. Oh, what do you like?
- S. The Daily Express
- M. Why do you like that?
- S. I just do. I think it's a better paper - there's more to read in there.
- M. What sort of things would you read in The Express?
- S. Depends what was in it.
- M. Are there any papers you wouldn't look at?
- S. Erm, not The Times or The Guardian. I mean - I can't read them - don't appeal to me - too - too much.
- M. What would you look at in The Sun?
- S. Telly first. I suppose the headlines - what's happened - what's the big thing, and then just skip through it.
- M. A nice front to back skip through - straight the way?
- S. I never ever read past that page - never (the page before the sport starts).
- M. You're stopping on the sports pages. Anything else you miss out?

- S. Page 3.
- M. What do you think of page 3?
- S. It really doesn't turn me on.
- M. What do you think of having this topless female in the same place everyday?
- S. I don't know. There's nothing wrong - well, there's nothing wrong with it. I mean I suppose it's because you accept it, don't you? It's always been there now - but I say it don't do nothing for me.
- M. How would you describe the paper's treatment of women generally?
- S. I think that with The Sun the woman - it's a sex object in't it? Very sex-object orientated paper really. I mean, you've got page 3 and any bit of scandal as far as sex goes, to do with the woman - I mean you always find that in The Sun. Very often in the centre-pages you get something to do with love-making.
- M. What about the stories of sex and scandal?
- S. I read some of them, if they're good. I don't know - I suppose it does really expose the woman, don't it really? In a way.
- M. What would you like about the paper?
- S. It's easy reading in't it. It's not very heavy going. If you just want to sort of see what's happening that day and - I mean sometimes you can't really be bothered, can you, to sit down and - I suppose the pictures in a way isn't it? There's as many pictures in it as there is writing.
- M. Pictures would make quite an impact?
- S. I think it's like anything isn't it. If you've got a page full of typed writing and a page full of pictures and typed writing - and you're not in the mood, you've had a long day at work, you're tired - it's quite - to skip through it's a lot easier.
- M. And what about the style of writing - the style of language they use?
- S. It's very basic isn't it? You never get a word in The Sun that you don't understand.
- M. What story have they had in lately that you'd remember?
- S. God knows - I don't know.
- M. You don't think you remember much?
- S. I tell you the only things that I ever follow in the paper is when there is something like, for example, 'the Fox'. There was a lot about him and explaining how he was doing it.
- M. The crime stories?
- S. Yes, I suppose so really. Erm, when I was little - do you remember during the 'Black Panther'? I was obsessed by him - I used to read that in The Sun.
- M. Why do you think you like that?
- S. I used to think he was going to get me. I suppose it's because that's the thing that has more impact on me, more than anything. Not so much the crime, sort of like the 'Yorkshire Ripper', 'The Fox' - the men, perverts like -

cos I mean, really, I don't think any woman could say that they don't bother them really. I think anything that you read in the newspaper - you read things that you can relate to or interest you. I mean, I am interested in sport, but not - I like to play sport, but not all sports, so I don't read the sports pages.

M. What people seem to be in the paper a lot lately? Who's making the appearances?

S. Maggie Thatcher, Reagan - the Princess of Wales is in the paper every day.

M. What about this royalty coverage?

S. They know they've got to accept it up to a certain extent but I do think they take it a little bit too far. I mean in today's Sun it's going on about Princess Diana buying 'Opal Fruits' - I mean what the hell has that got to do with anything really.

M. In The Sun you've noticed old Reagan and Thatcher making their appearances -

S. Cos what is The Sun? Is it a Conserative paper? I know the Mirror's a Labour paper isn't it?

M. Do you notice the politics in it or -?

S. The only thing I ever notice the politics in is cos they're always in the joke aren't they? I don't know cos I never read anything unless it's something like - There's Reagan having his operation at the moment, I've read that. I could relate to that in the way - trying to find out what operation he's really had. But if it's something just about who is winning - got the most votes at the moment - I can't be bothered with that - politics don't interest me.

M. What would you criticise The Sun for? What don't you like about it?

S. It's hard to criticise because - how can - You can't criticise something if you read it, buy it and read it. I dunno - I don't like everything about it, but there's nothing I could criticise about it.

M. Why do you think other people like The Sun?

S. It's a very cheap paper isn't it? It's very corny and I suppose in a way - I'm not being a snob. But it's - I mean like that on the front - straightaway what do you notice about that? Walloping boobs. That isn't for me - a housekeeper shot by a randy farmer's wife - that isn't a headline to me. I think there's more important things than a randy farmer's wife. They bring out a lot of scandal - it's a very - a lot of the stories are scandal aren't they?

M. What sort of attitude do you think it's got towards the world going on?

S. I don't know what you mean.

M. You said, say the 'serious' things you get in The Express, how do you think The Sun looks at that kind of thing?

S. It tries to scandalise everything doesn't it? I don't think they ever take things in the right perspective.

The good things they don't emphasise but the bad things they do. Well, if somebody does something wrong who's in the lime-light, I mean that hits the headlines. But something somebody probably does good, who's in the lime-light, doesn't hit the headlines does it?

M. So you think that's got the most appeal to people - the fact that they do that - that's what people buy it for?

S. I suppose so. Why do people buy The Sun instead of another paper? I don't know. I suppose the person that buys The Sun is interested by the things The Sun writes - the way in which they write it. I mean you wouldn't get a sort of an accountant reading The Sun would you? It's for the, erm, how can I say it? It's for the - you don't have to have a super-brain to read it do you? Anybody can read The Sun.

M. What about the British media? You think we do a good job?

S. It's debatable - No - I don't think the television is. There's a lot of rubbish on the television in't there? I mean, if you was to look in the paper at what was on at this precise moment you couldn't say there was something of interest to everybody. You can't say that whatever time of day you decide to watch the telly there'd be something on that interested you. I think the television's very poor.

Sara's reading of The Sun, considered on the same negotiable reception sites as those revealed by Adrian (life-style, personal feelings and interests, agreement with the view of the 'outside world) produces less intersection with the encoded text than the virtually ideal discourse between The Sun and Adrian. While she does not fit the mould of Parkin's 'oppositional' reading there is more opposition in her negotiation of the text. The fact that she provides a woman's perspective on the paper proves particularly valuable.

The male dominated ideology of The Sun is indirectly evident in Sara's reading pattern and the fact the paper does not fit into her working day. It is partly a matter of occupation and shift work that stops the paper becoming part of her daily routine, but Sara is able to read the paper at work, and occasionally does. The fact it is not very often is more due to lack of a relevant role for the paper than inconvenience. Quite simply, Sara's coffee-break conversation is unlikely to be about speculative football transfers and page 3 girls. There is no female equivalent for this companionship the paper provides for the men on the building site. The Sun does not enter, or even recognise, the female working world. It is interesting that Sara does not spend time with The Sun until her father brings it home from his working day.

The only life-pattern The Sun fits for Sara is the early evening relaxation after work and a meal. The Sun has a 'use' as a means

of winding-down. This relaxation results in a light, mainly 'inactive' reading. Adrian's thoroughness is replaced by a 'skip through'. Sara expresses a preference for The Sun in that the pictures (and I suspect the layout generally) break-up the daunting sight of solid typed print and it provides a relaxation when 'you're not in the mood' for more substantial reading matter. However, there are clues that this light 'inactive' treatment is also a result of there not being enough of personal interest to read. For example, she disregards entirely the sports pages knowing her sports interests will not be there (9).

Sara also states that she does appreciate there being more available to read, since this is the reason given why she prefers the Daily Express. Light, 'inactive' reading may be 'personal', but it is also a result of the male-dominated encoded text.

The Sun is used more for information by Sara than Adrian's involvement in its 'fun'. Sara expects the newspaper to present something rather nearer a 'mirror' of the real world than The Sun actually does. She is consciously reading it to see 'What's happened - what's the big thing', which means she tends to see the paper as performing this function. In Sara's case the fact that The Sun is seen as not very good at reflecting the real world is a reason for criticism ('I think there's more important things than a randy farmer's wife'). While she recognises the dominance of scandal over serious issues in The Sun it only leads her to place more trust in the Daily Express. The replacement of the voice of 'fun' by the voice of 'sense' strengthens the legitimacy of the world view offered by the Daily Express despite the similar ideological structure underpinning both newspapers (i.e. heterosexual, male, white, conservative, capitalist and nationalist).

Sara articulates a recognition of the personal 'uses' level of intersection when she says, 'you read things that you can relate to or interest you'. Particularly notable at this level is the emphasis she gives to the feelings raised by sex-motivated crime. A real concern is felt when she reads about the danger of serious sex attacks and it is cited as the area where the newspaper has the most impact (becomes most 'active'). The importance of this goes beyond the comment it makes on the society women have to live in, to the fact that Sara looks at newspapers for accurate information when such newspaper constructions largely over-dramatise the events, under-play women's issues and partly feed off the sexual connotations. Sara may gain some of the 'shock and horror' and insight into the criminal's manoeuvres, but she is not offered a view of the seriousness of the problems around sexual abuse. The fact Sara is not aware of, and consequently does not demand, this viewpoint shows an important example of the dominant male encoding preventing a more oppositional reading..

Sara shows a passive acceptance of page 3 because 'it's always been there now'. Similarly, recognition that The Sun is a 'very

sex-object orientated paper' does not lead to any statements of condemnation. Such sexist items are by-passed at the personal 'uses' level as of no interest, and at the level of the representation of the world they are legitimised. This confirms that an entrenchment of a male ideology builds into Sara's reading process.

Other elements in The Sun's representation of the world are consciously ignored ('politics don't interest me') or vaguely legitimised. For example, it is only by noting the number of Thatcher and Reagan appearances that makes Sara ask, 'Is it a Conservative Paper?' (It is notable that Conservative politics are reinforced by reducing it to a level of coverage of personalities). Sara negotiates an acceptance of The Sun's representation of a male, lustful world and does not even have to negotiate with the imperial, white, conservative features. Once more the reader's upbringing has not structured class issues as a question for negotiation and 'reading' and 'meaning' remain trapped within ideological limitations. Sara almost talks in class terms when she says an accountant would not read The Sun, but in a struggle to explain this statement she stops at the related question of different intelligence levels. It's again an acceptance that there is something for everybody's taste and intelligence, with no awareness that class structures formulate these possibilities.

3. Jane. Jane is a white 17 year-old, half-way through a 6th form A-level course at a local Comprehensive school. This combines with a social background of a one-parent family and a life-time spent in one of Cannock's more deprived areas (Huntington). She lives only a few hundred yards from the Littleton Colliery, in a house initially built for pit employees.

- M. How does The Sun fit into your typical day?  
J. I'm usually the first one to read it because I'm the first one to get to the door. And I sit here (kitchen) - I read it in the morning and then I go to school and when I come home, if I'm, a bit bored and got nothing to do I read it more thoroughly.
- M. How long have you spent with it in the morning then?  
J. In the morning it depends how much time I have.  
M. It has to fit in?  
J. Yes, sometimes about 10 minutes, but nothing more than that usually.
- M. What parts would you read in the morning?  
J. First of all, I just like, flick it through and if there's anything catches my eye I read that. Then, like, I go straight to the stars and the cartoons and then I usually - the television. Then the centre pages to see if there's anything interesting. And that's about it when I'm - in the morning. And if I come home and I've got nothing to do I read it all through and read all the little stories. I read my stars again to see whether they've come true or not. That's about it then - I read the last page, but I don't usually, really like, go further from the back than the last page. I'm not interested in racing and that.
- M. Is there anything else you miss out?  
J. The 2nd page, yes, I'm not interested in politics.  
M. What other newspapers would you look at?  
J. Nothing really cos I don't have any others - I mean, I can't really see me reading The Guardian or The Times, - so that's out.
- M. What about the Mirror?  
J. We have the Sunday Mirror.  
M. What do you think of that then?  
J. It's got more stuff in than The Sun. The Mirror's more informational I suppose.
- M. What do you think you like about The Sun?  
J. Erm - It's not too heavy, first thing in the morning. It's light and that - that's about it.
- M. What do you think The Sun's good at?  
J. It's not good at giving information I don't think. I mean the headlines are nothing really are they? They're not information at all - it's just, you know 'a vicar kills 6 people', something like that. It's nothing really topical or anything like that.
- M. What sort of thing has caught your imagination, to say talk about later?  
J. The centre-pages aren't too bad - I mean, it's got the

- pop concerts and things like that and you know, you can talk about that.
- M. How about all the scandal?  
J. No, not really - it's nothing.  
M. What about, this, erm, page 3 thing?  
J. Erm, I can't say I really look at it, no.  
M. What's your attitude towards having some topless female glaring at you when you turn over every morning?  
J. I'm not against it - I mean it's their choice isn't it? If you don't want to look at it you don't have to look at it really - you don't have to buy The Sun if you don't want to.
- M. What do you think of their portrayal of women elsewhere in the paper?  
J. Erm - it's a bit sexist in 'George & Lynne' - it used to be then some person wrote in and complained about it - so now they have to show George half-naked as well as Lynne.
- M. What people seem to be in the paper the most at the moment?  
J. The Royals - and just people who are in the headlines most of the time. It's not politicians - I mean, they don't care in The Sun. Just people - somebody who does something bad or something like that.
- M. What about the royalty coverage?  
J. It's so stupid. It's in every single day. It's amazing - I mean, today - that's so stupid - 'Flying visit'. Cos her's got a fly on her hat.
- M. What do you think of the style of writing?  
J. Erm - It's, err, simple really isn't it? Something like a few thousand words vocabulary
- M. Do you read the editorial on page 6?  
J. No I don't. I'm not interested in what they say.  
M. You said about putting the 'bad' things in - why do you think they do that?  
J. It's what people like isn't it. They've got to put what people like - people are more interested in that than - I don't know - what the politicians are saying or anything.
- M. Do you think they've got any sort of attitude that comes out from all the different stories, so they've got one sort of outlook on England or the World?  
J. Well, they like to think they're helping people don't they? Was it 'a tiddler for a toddler' or something? - when they collected all those 1/2p's. There's been quite a few things in there where they've pretended to help people and that. Err, I mean - And it's a Conservative paper isn't it as well? So, that comes out, I think, really.
- M. Yes, what about the politics? You say you don't read it, but you've still noticed it's Conservative  
J. Yes, well, from what 'Franklyn' says - you can tell from that. If there's something on Page 1 about politics and I've started to read it then I do turn over and carry on reading, but it's not very often. But I think you can tell from the other pages it's Conservative.

- M. What sort of things does it come out in?  
J. Erm, I don't know - When they've got something to complain about - about the Labour Party or something. I mean, it doesn't always come on page 2, it comes all the way through sometimes. I can't remember what it was - something major - and it came out very strongly then I thought, that it was a Conservative paper.  
M. And that doesn't, like influence, how you enjoy reading the rest of the paper?  
J. No.  
M. Why do you think it's the best-selling paper?  
J. Erm - You can imagine like working men buying it first thing in the morning and having a quick look at page 3 before they go to work. There's more like working class people buy it. I suppose if there was more upper class people they'd want The Guardian - that'd be the best selling, but - it's just how many people - it's their life-style and that's The Sun so.  
M. How would you criticise it?  
J. It doesn't give you enough information - it just gives you stupid bits of information about major things. You know, about the Bradford Fire - it was just about one family and how they felt about one person dying. I mean it didn't give you all the information about how it happened and how it spread and all that - I didn't find that out from The Sun at all.  
M. What else?  
J. I'd complain about the royals being in every single day. Cos who wants to read about Princess Di every day? I don't know really. When they have the figures for how well the newspapers are selling they put that as the headline and that and I think that's mad. 'Flying Visit' - that really got me this morning.  
M. Corny headlines?  
J. Yes - I think that's stupid.  
M. What about the papers generally? Do you think people have got a good choice or - ?  
J. Yes. You choose what you want don't you?  
M. What about British television, or British radio? Are you happy with what you can get?  
J. Yes, I think it's alright.

The number of similarities in Jane's reading of The Sun to that of Sara seem to reinforce many of the discoveries about the type of negotiated reception required for a woman to enjoy participation in the discourse of a male-dominated encoded text. Once again it does not fit the working day, and inactively fills time, for ten minutes at breakfast and if there is nothing to do afterwards. Once again the search is for highly personalised interests among a light 'flick' through; for example, reading and later checking her horoscope is a pleasurable private communication with the paper. Once again this involves certain knowledge of areas that won't be of any interest, such as the

sports pages. It's a light, relaxing read, with its main advantage being, 'it's not too heavy first thing in the morning'. Jane has to find a 'compromise' with The Sun in order to meet its discourse within her life-pattern - selecting certain bits, reading it when there's nothing better to do, and treating it lightly.

Besides the necessary negotiation with the male encoded text Jane also makes a more oppositional criticism of The Sun's lack of "information". It is again notable that an accurate reflection of real events is required from newspapers, but her criticism shows an awareness that The Sun does focus on individual people and aims to evoke the readers' personal feelings, thereby detracting from larger issues. There is evidence of this more detached, critical reading when Jane notes the inadequacy of The Sun focussing solely on the level of the personal and dramatic when it covered the 'Bradford fire' disaster.

There is a genuine intellectual exasperation with The Sun when Jane says 'It just gives you stupid bits of information about major things', which is different from Sara's desire for more to read.

Jane does have a personal 'use' for the paper at the level of entertainment (a laugh at the cartoons, a look what is on television, and possibly some pop news or centre-page feature to talk about), but it is critically separated from the level of the representation of the world, which she negotiates in a more oppositional way; for example, ignoring the editorial comment totally. Jane's personal interests and feelings intersect with The Sun only on a small number of items of entertainment since being a woman involves some negotiation and her intelligence brings out some critical detachment.

While Jane sees through the voice of 'fun' to such themes as 'stars in trouble', royalty and the Conservative party (10), the ideological significance of these themes remains understandably elusive. She is still able to negotiate with some sympathy for the discourse because her decoding remains within the ideological framework. This is best illustrated, as was the case with Sara, by her attitude towards page 3. Jane is not interested, but is not against it because other people are interested, and 'it's their choice'. Similarly, she recognises the class issue and describes a firm image of the working man buying The Sun, but the class conflict is dismissed as 'their life-style', and that The Sun is the best selling paper becomes credited to the fact there are more working class people than upper class. Class divisions are accepted, and in Jane's remarks on the British media the theme of existence of a broad choice reappears. She says, 'you choose what you want don't you?' The increased breadth of Jane's reception and awareness means she disagrees with some of The Sun's representations, but this does not reach the level of negotiating the ideological structure. Her reception remains negotiated within the limitations imposed by her unprivileged

position in society. Jane's greater depth of negotiation only highlights the fact that a belief in free choice within the tightness of the ideological structure renders that structure more elusive and so resists further reinforcement.

4. Keith. Keith is a white middle-aged, unqualified worker at a paint and varnish factory in Willenhall. He is married with two young children and lives on a residential housing estate in Cannock.

M. How would you describe your typical working day?

K. Get up in the morning and have me breakfast. Do me breakfast for work. On the way to work I pick two papers up - The Sun and The Star. One's for me and one's for a chap at work I have a sort of swap and change. As soon as we get into work I have a coffee or tea - that's always the case - and a quick look at the paper.

M. What would you look at first then?

K. Well I start from the front and work to the back. I look at the front page you know. And then the 2nd page - but there's not a lot on the 2nd page. When I first have a look at the paper it's just a browse through it - you just really haven't got the time to sit and read it. And we always - no matter how many's in the room - we always stop at page 3 - sort of spread it round you know, 'who is it today? - it's either a 'ugh' or 'pew'.

M. What would you stop and read at that stage?

K. It depends whether there's been anything dramatic in the news - such as a plane crash, or these kids washed off into the sea. It depends - if there's nothing really it's just a quick browse through and see if there's another page 3 type of picture - really, I think that's all you look for first thing.

M. When do you look at it again then?

K. Break-time - I just sit and read through again - bits and pieces. I always stop at page 3 again. There's usually something sexually funny on page 3 of The Sun, like a vicar's been caught with another woman or something like that. But I just plod on then. I love television critics, you know that type of thing - I don't like the long boring political stuff.

M. What do you think of The Star?

K. I prefer The Star to The Sun.

M. Why's that?

K. I don't know. The Sun - you read The Sun and then you tend to read the other papers to make sure The Sun has got it right. I mean if there's been an accident and there's 4 dead, in The Sun it's 5. They're more interested in hitting you than telling you the true facts - that's my impression of The Sun.

M. What other papers would you look at?

K. The Mirror.

M. What do you think of that?

K. I look at the Mirror - I don't read that. I just look at the Mirror because they usually have somebody scantily clad, which is more sexier than a topless bird.

M. What papers wouldn't you look at?

K. I look at the Daily Mail but I find that a bore. That's more 'Right' than The Sun that is. I call that a paper

- for a reader - if you haven't got any work to do that's your paper, because you can find plenty to read. We used to have a chap who brought the Daily Express, but that was like the Daily Mail - it was all - there's no pictures. I think this is me social class you see - my social upbringing - if it hasn't got pictures I don't want to know. I like to read, but I don't like long drawn-out things.
- M. What about the politics?  
K. I don't like politics. If I'm given politics in a paper I like it to be like the Daily Mirror - that's subtle - subtle Labour. Or if it's The Sun, which is a 'Tory' paper, I like it to be subtle - I don't like it thrust at me which The Sun tends to do.
- M. Where do you notice the politics in The Sun?  
K. There's a little chap, he has half a page usually under the cartoon - Vincent. He throws it about a bit I think.
- M. What about the editorial comment?  
K. I never read that. If it stands out - as I say, the Bradford Fire Disaster, I'd read that. But, you know, I think there's enough being said in the paper as it is without reading that. When I see pictures of Maggie Thatcher or Kinnock or anybody, I just flip it over to the next page. I like to be entertained by a newspaper, not bored - I can have the telly news about politics as many hours as I want.
- M. What do you watch on telly when you come home?  
K. Again anything, bar politics - I like to see the news once a night if I can. But again I like to be entertained, I'll enjoy a good play, I like a good film and I like good comedies.
- M. You haven't read the paper again, once you've come home from work?  
K. The only thing I pick it up for again is to look at the telly page. Three things I read - I like 'George and Lynne', I think there's a bias to naked ladies in that - that suits me down to the ground.
- M. What do you think of The Sun's treatment of women?  
K. I suppose, to a feminist, it goes right over the top. I can only think that they must all be men on the work-force at The Sun. I don't think they do anything for women apart from - they usually have a woman's page don't they? I do like the woman in The Star - she really puts the woman's point of view - it, sort of, balances the paper.
- M. What do you think The Sun is good at then?  
K. They give, from my point of view, the working chap a nice, simple, readable paper. They give you news, they give you 'Funnies' or sport - in little bits. They don't tax you, you haven't got to sit down and strain yourself.
- M. Do they strike you as any particular style - easy or everyday language?  
K. I've never really thought about it in that way. I just sit down, have me breakfast and read a paper - I'm never

- M. really worried about how it's put out. I'm not literary. What story from recently would you remember?  
K. Oh probably the 'Bradford Fire' - yea, that gets you a bit that does. But then it was a different fire in The Sun wasn't it? It seemed a much better fire in The Sun. They can be crude at times in their writing I think. You know, unsensible, unfeeling, write it down and worry about the contents later. But then again, you know, you just buy a paper and how long do you have it for? I think I have a paper because if I didn't have a paper I wouldn't know what to do with my other hand while I was eating my sandwiches.
- M. Do you find it gives you anything to talk about during the day at work?  
K. Very little. I don't think it's got the impact the television has. As you come in the next day, 'oh did you see so-and-so on the telly?' You don't say, 'did you see so-and-so in the paper?' It probably educates you a little bit more, sometimes, because there's points that you pick up from a paper, where you probably wouldn't appreciate if it was on the telly.
- M. Would any ideas that you've read in The Sun affect your own thinking?  
K. No, I can't think - I wouldn't say that it would, no.
- M. How do you think the paper looks at England?  
K. I don't know - I don't trust The Sun. I sometimes think that all the journalists are from out of England - they sort of, pretend to be patriotic. I get this feeling, sometimes. I don't think I like The Sun much.
- M. Do you think it's got any attitude that it, sort of, looks out at the world?  
K. Yes. It's like a medium sometimes they could be right, sometimes they could be wrong, 'but we'll do our best to give you a rough idea of how it's going to be'. It's a little bit too - too mind - reading of a paper. I don't like papers that say, 'he's thinking now that such-and-such a thing should happen', and, I mean, how do they know? I like from a paper facts and The Sun tends to - They're very clever probably how they do it - but, you know, you tend to straight away think 'that isn't right'. I think, they probably think the majority of people who read - they probably cater for the majority of people who read The Sun - who are probably 'thickos', you know.
- M. Do you think many people would take it in if they do their guess-work?  
K. I wouldn't. If you read one paper most of your life then you could well believe it.
- M. And what sort of choice do you think people have got with all the papers together. Do you think there's something for everybody?  
K. Oh yes, without a doubt. Yes.
- M. Would you be satisfied with what you can get out of the British media altogether?



- K. It could be improved. I think you have to remember you are getting it from a chap who is similar to yourself - that he has his own personal views and biases and they are going to come over. You've just got to sort of, look around. It's your own personal needs in't it?
- M. What would you like to see different?
- K. In the national papers I'd like to see more local coverage. I tend to think this about newspapers - if it's not in London it's 'Kaput' you know - it's no news.
- M. What would you say was the main reason, if there is one reason, why The Sun has got the biggest daily circulation?
- K. You keep coming back to page 3. The best thing The Star ever did was put colour in once a week, then it dropped off and I'd love to bet sales dropped as well. Once you've seen coloured photos in a newspaper you cannot go back to black and white. What was the question again?
- M. Why do you think it's the biggest daily sale?
- K. Well, I think it's because it was one of the new papers to come out in that sort of format. The Daily Mirror was a bit above The Sun and I think it was simpler to understand than the Mirror. When The Star came out I think it had missed the boat. I think they tend to go to their first love you know, which was probably The Sun.

Keith seems to offer a more complicated discourse than the other readers. One factor in this is his preferences for another similar paper, the Daily Star, which leads to greater 'surface level' criticism of The Sun. Another feature is his greater consideration of the other side of the discourse. He meets the text with some firm ideas (right or wrong) of the encoding process, which notably affects his reading. There are also more contradictory statements than in the other interviews which result from the clash between personal 'uses' and entertainment with the 'real' world and information. The confusion of articulating responses at the two different levels produces some additional points concerning this ideological site.

There is a marked similarity to Adrian in the extent to which The Sun becomes part of the working day. The element of routine is again emphasised. Keith explains the element of habit is probably a major reason for buying a particular paper and a case for theories of 'empty' reception of media messages can be made from such comments as, 'I think I have a paper because if I didn't have a paper I wouldn't know what to do with my other hand while I was eating my sandwiches'. It must be noted that such a comment proves no more than an awareness that reading the paper is a habit that fits the life-style and it does not prove the non-existence of other levels of decoding. The detail of Keith's other comments prove he is 'doing something' with the text.

The pleasure of the male gazing at the female body is again a major 'use' for the paper. His comments on the Mirror are restricted entirely to their 'scantily clad' instead of topless

female coverage. This personal pleasure involves a level of some critical detachment because Keith accepts The Sun's treatment of women 'goes right over the top'. However, this reading does not reach the level of considering the possibility of offence to women. His level of reading for personal pleasure dominates over considerations about the paper's world view, in a favourable intersection with the male dominated structure of The Sun. The way in which he believes one page for women can 'balance the paper' confirms that a level of critical detachment does not necessarily produce an oppositional reading. It is also interesting that Keith considers the encoding of this male world: he states that The Sun must have an all male work-force. In other matters awareness of the encoding does produce critical negotiation, which only illustrates the massive power of portraying women as sexual objects in the media's address to men.

One area where an encoding awareness produces criticism of The Sun is Keith's use for information on the world. He is interested in 'anything dramatic in the news'. The examples he gives all show 'human interest' stories which he can relate to at the level of identification with ordinary people (drowned children, crashed planes and fatal fires). This is seen as a separate kind of news from 'long, boring political stuff'. The personal world is again shut off from the outside world at the level of personal feelings and interests. While this is typical of the other responses Keith criticises particularly heavily The Sun's treatment of 'human interest' stories. The Sun is criticised for factual errors and insensitivity. He also considers the encoding to be based only on a 'rough idea' of truth and that the text is deliberately aimed at 'thickos'. Keith has to negotiate his interest in 'human' stories with a dissatisfaction at the paper's professional competence. It may be a lesson for The Sun's own benefit that among its 'targeted' audience there is a wary mistrust of its portrayal of 'human interest' stories and a feeling that the readers' sensitivity and intelligence are being insulted. Keith accepts the 'fun' persona of the paper (he is pleased that The Sun gives you 'funnies'), but this is seen as separate from the fact that 'they give you news' and he criticises their coverage of this area.

The surface-level dominance of the personal world is explained to himself with, 'I like to be entertained by a newspaper, not bored'. This manifests itself in a refusal to read editorial comment, and automatic flip-over if he spots a political item and a firm conviction that The Sun would not influence his own thoughts. Yet the last of these comments proves Keith does think about the world outside his experiences and he turns to the television for such things as political news. Matters become more contradictory, however, when Keith accepts that the newspaper may 'educate you a little bit more' than the television. Also, Keith shows a firm awareness that the paper is Conservative and strongly pro-British (even though he is wary of The Sun's patriotism). The fact that he consciously attempts to shut off the paper's representation of the world and it still

infiltrates his reading shows the ideological success of The Sun's restricted representation of world issues. The 'serious' world does get through his personal world's defensive barriers. Keith can negotiate with The Sun about the 'outside' world using the range of other discourses that form his view-point, but it does not include an awareness that The Sun helps define and reinforce a narrow range of view-points. Neither does it include an awareness that such economic, social, and political factors form the environmental structure directing and infiltrating his search for entertainment, which is why he articulates apparently contradictory statements on the site of the gap between the personal and 'serious' worlds. The result of this is what, by now, has become expected, a satisfaction with the idea that The Sun services 'personal needs', a satisfaction with the range of British media and an acceptance of the class strata.

Whatever the variety these interviews present they have common features which reveal the success of The Sun. It is not read with any great detachment and fits into some relaxing part of the day as an 'easy' read. Each person also finds some surface-level 'uses' for The Sun and while page 3 may be a big draw for men, women can ignore its offensive treatment if it is over-shadowed by some other personal pleasure. The text is negotiated along the question of whether individual items relate to personal interests and experiences, but in addition to this all the interviewees showed a readiness to accept that items of no interest to them must be of interest to someone else. This notion of a range of tastes and choice stops readers considering the narrowness (and offensiveness) of the items selected. There is also no doubt that The Sun is seen to be addressing 'ordinary' working people. The interviewees seemed to think The Sun communicated as an easy-to-read paper for the 'everyday person' whatever the encoding involves and the known cross-section of the readership. There is every confirmation that the paper is something of a 'working class' institution. It is read as a routine, regular habit and joins the routine, regular nature of daily life, as a companion in the closed, personal world.

It is not read without criticism. Nobody is impressed with its record for accuracy and the 'scandal' element is not as welcome as the keener interest in more honest, human stories, which The Sun does not adequately cover. These features can detract from the success of the 'fun' persona. There is also a dislike of the 'hard sell' boasting of The Sun and a call for less strong political hammering. This suggests some of the bludgeoning directness of The Sun may induce opposition rather than attract support. There is a similar criticism of the overworked 'corny' phraseology, which is never mentioned as a source of amusement. It is also interesting that the excess of royalty coverage gets heavily criticised, which suggests the possibility that the media institutions are more interested in royalty than their readers and that if royalty is being used as a symbol of ordered, traditional Britain then overkill may bring a rejection rather than reinforcement.

Yet none of this criticism goes beyond the voices and themes of The Sun. It is a reading of The Sun which fulfils chiefly at the level of personal feelings and interests. The Sun appears to be an acquired habit, a 'light' read for limited information, entertainment, a 'consumer disposable'. There is virtually a unanimous denial that the paper has any notable 'meaning' to them beyond the personal 'uses'. Reading is seen as a personal search for 'uses' - a process that operates irrespective of the cultural structures forming these 'uses'. The fact that reading is such an unimportant surface - scanning process is itself a cultural structure. It results in the creation of only two levels of meaning of which the reader is conscious. The first is whether or not the codes of the text can actually be understood or not. None of the four interviewees revealed any difficulties of understanding the references of The Sun's language, which shows

the fundamental cultural intersection between The Sun and the four readers. The second conscious level of meaning is whether the reader can accept The Sun's representation of the world. The reader makes a conscious appraisal of whether The Sun presents a legitimate version of the world or not. Each interview reveals a negotiation of The Sun's representation which is restricted to whether they agree with particular aspects of the legitimised world or not. They recognise certain features as view points of The Sun but they are seen as an attempt to 'mirror' the real world, which is all that is required for the acceptance of meaning. Readers negotiated with the 'real' issues The Sun presents, but nobody offered other areas of debate. The fact there is no oppositional rejection of The Sun's framework of reference shows the successful intersection of the four readers at the level of their construction of their world. Since they each have an upbringing in the same capitalist Britain, with the same exposure to that society's media representations of what constitutes order and disorder, and no opportunities for a wider exposure, this structural intersection is explicable. This returns to the point that it is only possible for 'meaningful discourse' to be created when the reader can intersect with the encoding. What is not on the encoding 'agenda' is not questioned: it is meaningless to the majority of people who are not used to examining cultural structures. This is why reception of a text stops at the level of meaning and does not reach ideological considerations. The "working readers" reception is limited by these structural limitations on reading and meaning. The four people interviewed cannot receive an alternative view of the world in the newsagents on the way to work each morning. Neither have any of them been brought up in a social environment or in an education system which encouraged consideration of structures.

This is the ideological trap they find themselves in. The hidden nature of this structured ideology manifests itself in the way all four comment on a belief that the British public is able to receive a free broad choice of media output. Reading The Sun, for these working people produces meaning at the levels of understanding the 'common sense' level of language, accepting the representation these codes form, but not the third level of acknowledging the elements that construct the significance of the other two levels. It is this situation which results in the apparent dominance of personal preferences, uses, interests and feelings in articulating about reception. It is the working classes, operating within the ideology, who negotiate with The Sun mainly on the sites of fitting the life-style and personal 'uses' since their private world dominates over the 'outside' world. This is partly a result of the fact they do not like what they see in social, economic and political affairs and partly because the society is happy for them to be culturally distracted by entertainment in order that 'consensus' only is maintained. The negotiation site of agreement or disagreement with The Sun's representation of the world (on the grounds of sex, colour and nationality) is consequently less important in completing the

discourse with the text than the negotiations on the grounds of personal 'uses'. The questions asked of a text are a cultural product and in the hierarchically structured class system questions of class conflict do not appear in the dominant culture. In this ideological structure people are encouraged to enjoy their own personal pleasures and believe in their freedom to agree or disagree from within. While the class issues stay off the ideologically encoded agenda and the personal world is encouraged and reinforced, the gap between the personal situation, in terms of their social, economic and political situation, and the 'outside' world continue. The ideological situation which allows this gap is the fact 'ordinary' people do not consider that there are structures forming their personal 'uses'. It is the successful alignment of The Sun on the personal side of this ideological gap, while its representation of the world successfully infiltrates meaning because it has the whole structure of society supporting it at this level of the discourse which explains why what might often seem to be an 'anti-working class' paper (ideologically) appeals to the 'working class'.

It is hoped by now that some of the questions and leads offered in the introduction have been developed in a useful way. Certainly the interviews, in terms of the questions asked, were far from perfect, but the comments obtained justified the method. Maybe, also, some light has been shed on the different levels of meaning and the questions which formulate the ground for negotiated meanings, though no conclusive audience model of reception can even be attempted. The essay should also reveal the success of the ideological elusiveness (11) and how that ideology removes questions about the real conditions which form individual, personal worlds. Any attempt to make 'ordinary' people aware of external conditions, will have to break-down this ideological barrier. That is as far as this essay can go in its comments on media and society.

However, the final thoughts of this essay belong to The Sun and its readers. The four interviews have provided absorbing material. They do give a few clues as to how the ideological barrier can be approached. The most useful lesson seems to be that there is a need to transmit into wider areas of culture awareness of structuration. Yet this is a rather idealistic, academic point since there is already structured a rejection of such 'serious', heavy intellectual argument. Furthermore, the interviews also indicate a wide-ranging and very stern rejection of direct public politics. However, they also show that popular newspapers are read in some meaningful and important ways. The frequent, active and enjoyable level of engagement with this form suggests it is a useful medium for ideological work. Is there (irrespective of practical matters such as funding) a necessity for any alternative ideology to compromise with existing practices to the extent that it should operate in the realm of the 'ordinary' individual's daily routine and interests and present a light read, with a 'fun' persona?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Paul Hoggart's essay, 'The Commercial Literature Of Schoolchildren', in Media, Culture and Society, p.368.
2. The phrase is taken from Stuart Hall's essay, 'Encoding/Decoding', p.130 of Culture, Media, Language, CCCS (1980).
3. David Morley has expressed this clearly in Interpreting Television: A Case study, Unit 12, p.65 (from Open University U203, Popular Culture and Everyday Life): The meaning of a text or message must be understood as being produced through the interaction of the codes embedded in the text with the codes inhabited by the different sections of the audience.
4. Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order, Chapter 3 'Class Inequality and Meaning-Systems'.
5. John Hartley, Understanding News, p.148.
6. Morley, Unit 12, p.52 in his 'Critical Postscript', p. 66, he argues that 'there is a tendency to blur together, under the concept of 'decoding', what are probably best thought of as separate processes along the axes of comprehension/incomprehension of messages and agreement/disagreement with the propositional content of messages'. This essay will try to bear in mind this distinction.
7. See Dorothy Hobson's 'Housewives and the Mass Media' in Culture, Media Language and Crossroads, The Drama of a Soap Opera, Methuen, (1982).
8. In Steve Chibnall's Law and Order News (1977), Chapter 2, 'titillation' is listed as 'one of the professional news imperatives of journalism'.
9. Sara's sports interests happen to be badminton and squash, which despite massive participation remain treated as minority sports.
10. It is interesting that Jane cites the 'Franklyn' cartoon as the most notable place to recognise the Conservative stance of The Sun, showing the under-rated power of humour.
11. I would postulate that The Sun's 'ideological elusiveness' may be achieved by the text's shifting levels of discourse. For example, there are frequent shifts of language register ranging from colloquial slang, through journalist style, to combative Tory messages.

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