



MEDIA@LSE

Department of **Media** and **Communications**

MEDIA@LSE Electronic MSc Dissertation Series

Compiled by Professor Robin Mansell and Dr. Bart Cammaerts

**Global TV and Local Realities:
*Constructing narratives of the self***

Sunandini Pande,
MSc in Media and Communications

Other dissertations of the series are available online here:
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/mediaWorkingPapers/>

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, September 2007, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Media and Communications. Supervised by Prof. Sonia Livingstone.

Published by Media@lse, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright in editorial matter, LSE © 2007

Copyright, Sunandini Pande © 2007.
The authors have asserted their moral rights.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this dissertation are not necessarily those of the compilers or the LSE.

Global TV and Local Realities: *Constructing narratives of the self*

Sunandini Pande

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of global TV (represented by the American sit-com Friends) in the lives of young urban Indian women, and explores their interpretation and perception of the show given the differences in location and context of the show vis-à-vis the local realities of its reception. By highlighting the ambiguities that currently exist in the lives of these young women, there is an attempt to use the show as a platform to delve into their everyday dilemmas and negotiations. The research explores how a show like Friends can be seen as a 'symbolic resource' enabling its viewers to construct their own imagined selves and imagined worlds. By conceptualizing viewers as an active audience, the research will understand cross-cultural viewership of Friends – the areas of convergence and discrepancy – and how Indian women can translate the show to fit into everyday settings, and how these young women balance between new possibilities and old realities and negotiate their sense of self.

The research highlights how local audiences integrate global media into the rhythms of their everyday life and find meaning by negotiating meanings around the text, and through a sense of distance from the show which allows a process of 'selective reality'. Watching a show like Friends is a way to come closer to the imagined global youth culture and offers 'safe recklessness', which allows participation in the anticipated experience of modernity without leaving the boundaries of your home. Global TV provides a space for imagination and for the construction and redefinition of selves and aspirations, which are sometimes questioned and resisted but which are transformed into symbolic resources to make meaningful worlds and identities. Given the constraints of local realities, it is the re-definition and re-casting of the show within permissible boundaries that ensures that it continues to be relevant to the lives of the viewers.

INTRODUCTION

Implicit in talk about the “shrinking world” or “global village” is the acknowledgement of the ramifications of globalization and the cultural change that comes in its wake. It is to talk about blurring boundaries – between global and local, national and transnational, public and private. One of the many ways to explore the facets of this change is to explore it through the lens of identity – how individuals imagine the world and how that imagination influences their ideas about themselves.

As India gets closely knit within the world economy, the forces of globalization – especially global media – are getting more intricately involved in the everyday life of Indians. For the youth, this is a far more intense and deep-rooted equation as they typically lead the most ‘media-rich’ lifestyles in which the boundaries of geography and nation-states dissolve in the ubiquitous presence of global media. Over a decade has passed since the process of economic liberalization in India, and the current generation of young people is possibly the first generation in India to experience a globally mediated life, and grow up with an increasingly hybrid identity which fuses together influences from all over the world.

Following from Thompson (1995) and Giddens (1991), the media can be seen to offer symbolic resources for the construction of the imagined selves & worlds so that the role of the media becomes to transform the everyday discourse and enable experiments with self-making. Because of the rapid way in which electronic media move through daily life routines, they provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project, for regular, ordinary people who have begun to deploy their imaginations in the practice of everyday lives.

This research is an attempt to explore the lives of young urban Indian women and through the platform of global television, understand the daily negotiations and dilemmas that they undergo while moving across multiple parallel worlds. While the scope of the study would stretch across various dimensions of their lives, there would be a specific focus on exploring their ideas of identity and how those are challenged or re-defined. By looking at the local reception of global TV, the research will highlight the confluences and contradictions of living in an increasingly mediated world.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Exploring conceptualizations of identity in the age of globalization

As per Giddens (1991), *"in the post-traditionalist order of modernity and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor"* (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). It is not a set of observable characteristics of a moment, but becomes an account of a person's life. Identity then is not inherited or static but an on-going biographical narrative which helps answers questions like *"What to do? How to act? Who to be?"* (Giddens, 1991, p.71) through everyday activities and routines.

The self, as per Thompson (1995) , can be seen as *"a symbolic project that the individual constructs out of the materials which are available to him or her, material which the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity"* (Thompson, 1995, p.212). Symbolic resources can be both Lived experiences – the activities and face-to-face encounters in our everyday lives which are situated, immediate, and largely non-reflexive, or mediated experience - the ability to experience events which are spatially and temporally distant from the practical context of daily life. Taking the responsibility for one's self, understanding oneself as making choices and determining one's own life is a matter of learning particular technologies of acting on the self and of constituting the self as one's own project. (Johnson, 1993, p.17). Or in other words, transforming *"the standard biography into a chosen biography, a do-it-yourself biography or a 'reflexive biography'"* (Beck, 1994, p. 15)

The media as symbolic resource for the imagination

Rather than being seen as powerful sources of dominant ideologies, the media should be conceptualized as a *'symbolic resource'* which people use in making sense of their experiences, in relating to others and in organizing their daily lives. In this sense, the media can be seen to offer material for experimentation with alternative social identities, if only at the level of fantasy or aspiration – although the identities and perspectives they make available can be far from neutral. (Buckingham, 1993)

Appadurai in his seminal account refers to the 'mediascape', *"the image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality and what they offer to those who experience and*

transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299). He argues that electronic media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds. It has been the electronic media that has been credited with altering the '*situational geography*' (Meyrowitz, 1985, p.6) of social life, and opening new possibilities and placing new demands on the self in a way and on a scale that did not exist before.

Changing times and changing lives: Global Media and local realities

Globalization can be seen as a "*deeply historical and uneven process and to the extent that different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently, it is also, paradoxically, a localizing process*" (Appadurai, 1996, p.17). It is then interesting to consider India as a site of negotiations in which complex historical processes come into conjunction with global processes. Constructing and experiencing these processes draws together social groups in unexpected ways, "*creating new solidarities but also new distinctions and oppositions*" (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1995, p. 15)

Given the centrality of media in the processes of globalization, it is important to explore how the media have transformed the meaning of locality by creating complex images of distance, self, other, and social transformation. Imagination has emerged as a new force in social life, largely as a result of the spread of electronic media, in the context of rapid flow of resources, images and persons across national boundaries. In an interesting study on exploring impact of globalization on cultural identities, Scrase opines that "*the media in India play a powerful role in defining, or more accurately, re-defining what it means to be modern*" (Scrase, 2002, p.335), re-iterating how the media influence our ideas about experiencing modernity and negotiating globalization

The implications of global media flows are many, with long-standing divisions between those who see the media as large-scale instruments of global capitalist hegemony and those who see the hybridization of the cultural forms generated by the spread of media. However, instead of re-visiting the debate, I would like to move ahead with the view that instead of a singular and consistent homogenization, the spread of global media has led to the mixing together of seemingly disparate media forms and audiences.

Audience research exploring the popularity of (largely) Western (US) media in new territories and cultures have proved testament to the active viewer who often finds new meanings in supposedly foreign texts. Through past researches, we now know that gender, race and class can imply radically different practices of reading and pleasurable viewing (Radway, 1984; Ang, 1981; Allen, 1995). Researches such as by Purnima Mankekar (1999) demonstrate that television is a site of resistance and empowerment as well as of compliance and dominations and viewers display complex subjectivities that are shared by personal and social experiences as well as structural inequalities. Thus, going ahead, for the purposes of this research, exploring the individual-media equation in a closer light helps examine the ways in which individuals negotiate with media texts.

The active audience – viewer’s work in meaning making

The development of audience reception studies within the broader media studies discipline has been marked as a distinctive turn. Reception research rejects the idea of the ‘passive viewer’ and questions earlier critical theory (namely the Frankfurt School). Instead it focuses on the way that audiences resist the constructions of reality preferred by the mass media and construct their own, often oppositional, meanings for media texts. Here, audiences are seen as active producers of meaning who decode media texts in ways which are related to their social and cultural circumstances and the ways that they individually experience those circumstances.

The idea of the ‘active viewer’, though seemingly obvious, still remains a largely vague concept. Fiske’s (1984) idea of ‘semiotic democracy’ is an extreme which celebrates viewer agency and power, yet may remain a largely theoretical notion with limited real-world application. At the same time, the fact that viewers actually do have reasonable, and often significant, autonomy cannot be denied. It is then reasonable to assume that the active audience is a real one, a supposition backed by numerous empirical research examples, however the actual nature and extent of activity is often limited by the range of the media text itself, instead of offering unlimited possibilities.

For this research, audience reception provides a suitable starting point, given the tradition of past researches which explore the media-viewer interplay, without according complete power to either side. Instead the interaction is seen as a contentious one, which cannot be studied

without the broader contextual understanding of social and cultural paradigms. In this light, it becomes appropriate to argue that while the producer may suggest a preferred reading of the media text, it is still polysemic – containing multiple meanings – and it is the prerogative of the viewer to interpret the text in oppositional or negotiated readings as well. (Hall, 1980). To take a closer look, I will be highlighting a few key researches which have focused on local reception of global television

Cross-cultural research studies

Katz and Liebes' landmark study of cross-cultural Dallas viewers in Israel (1993) was among the first to demonstrate that viewers were a good deal more critical and creative than previously assumed. Their findings clearly showed that the meanings of a TV programme are not fixed and cannot simply be read off the 'text'; at the same time, the process of meaning generation is not totally open-ended and that one can trace similar patterns of meaning as each cultural group found its own way to negotiate with the program.

Similarly, Ien Ang's study of Dallas fans in Denmark (1985) stemmed from her interest in understanding the popularity of an obviously American show in a distinctively different culture. Among her findings she notes that viewers do not perceive Dallas as realistic on the surface but however, if read at the connotative level, the people, relations and situations can be seen as entirely recognizable. She argues that "*what is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: "a structure of feeling"*" (Ang, 1985, p.60) where emotions occupy a central place and the viewer relates to the emotional power of the show rather than a realistic depiction of their own world.

Youna Kim's research (2005) suggests that young Korean women make sense of their lives through the cultural experience of globalization and she suggests that the practice of reflexivity is a defining characteristic of the cultural experience of globalization where television culture has become a critical condition for reflexivity. As per Kim, these young women engage in a process of self-analysis and self-discovery through continuous interaction with the global world of television which "*opens up a rare space in which Korean women can make sense of their life conditions in highly critical ways*" (Kim, 2005, p. 460)

Focusing on studies centered on female readers of romance novels presents an illuminating perspective in line with the proposed research. By revealing the ways in which romance

readers appropriate the novels into their own lives and manoeuvre through the text to construct meanings and make possible new imaginations, the studies emphasize the pleasures and contradictions of the reader's equation with the text.

For women readers of romance novels, the practice itself becomes an act of cultural resistance as it allows readers to seek escape from the domestic pressures laid upon them in their daily lives and celebrates the semiotic resistance of the studies' subjects (Radway, 1984). In a similar study done by Jyoti Puri of young urban women fans of English romance novel fans in India (1997), the novels and its characters are seen as alternatives to the structural inequalities and uncertainties experienced in the lives of the reader and in the process of reading, the reader defines their own expectations and ideals of relationships, sexuality and gender roles, yet often offering only limited re-ordering of social reality. Radhika Parameswaran's work on romance reading among young Indian women (1999, 2002) demonstrates that the practice of Western romance fiction is embedded in patriarchal discourses of feminine respectability, and that the women's fascination for western fiction is located in their desire to experience their identities as cosmopolitan, global consumers.

Taken together, these studies reveal the way in which global forms of culture pervade diverse sociocultural settings, and highlight the process of contesting meanings. Specific to the Indian context, it is seen that negotiating the boundaries of tradition, Indian women readers construct the romance novels as modern manuals on sexuality and romance; however have a contradictory relationship with the same which highlights the complex dialectic between global media and local realities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH QUESTION

By drawing together the various perspectives elaborated earlier, I would like to present a conceptual framework on which this study would be based.

Framing globalization in terms of identity involves understanding the ways in which an individual uses the symbolic resources available to construct ideas about the world and self. The advent of electronic media (especially global reach and availability of television) has enabled conceptualization of numerous alternatives in terms of life choices and the individual can choose to draw on these mediated experiences to construct the self. The imagination thus, becomes a social practice as it transcends previously impermeable boundaries and allows the global to fuse with the local.

Through the increasing interactions between different parts of the world, instead of a ubiquitous homogenization, there is a form of cultural mixing that leads to hybridization with an emphasis on the global-local dialectic that poses a challenge to earlier cultural imperialism thesis by incorporating the idea of individual agency. The conceptualization of the 'active audience' taken from reception studies articulates the idea of an involved and independent viewer, which has been validated by many audience research studies that have given credence to the same.

By focusing my research in India, I want to explore an area which is of great fascination, both in terms of potential and personal interest. The past decade has seen significant economic growth and progress as India has been 'opening up the world'. With increasing influences of the West (through media, consumption, travel and business), the middle-class urban Indian lifestyle is undergoing tremendous changes, many of which are often contradictory and complicated. For a generation of young Indians growing up in these times, living on the cusp of change means an on-going process of re-defining themselves and their worlds. Previous research studies based in India have highlighted the complexities that abound, and the way in which individuals negotiate between the parallel worlds that they live in.

To explore this site of change, I have chosen to focus on the negotiations between global TV and local realities to understand how individuals use the symbolic resources available to power the imagination yet remain the boundaries of their worlds. The decision to specifically

looking at young urban women stemmed out of the desire to capitalize on the abundance of knowledge and research that was already available, as well as a personal choice to delve into something close to my heart.

Focus on Friends

For this research, I have chosen to focus specifically on the American sit-com Friends. The choice of the show was based on many factors, the primary one being the popularity and wide-ranging appeal of the show. Through my own experiences, and the ones of people around me, I have first-hand experienced the 'Friends frenzy' and I was curious to explore this and understand how the show finds meaning within the lives of young girls living half-way across the globe from Manhattan.

'Friends' is the American TV show (sit-com) about six friends and their lives as they live together in New York City. Marta Kauffman (co-creator and executive producer of Friends) says 'Friends' is about people whose lives are in front of them, whose choices aren't made yet. As per Kauffman, *"They want love and commitment, they're afraid of love and commitment. Some of them have made career choices, some of them haven't. The most important thing is that their emotional situations are, we hope, universal, not just something that happens to someone in his or her twenties"* (Owen, 1997, p.112). Friends was aimed at young adults who, during the early 1990s, were identified by their café culture, dating scene and modern independence¹.

As a show, Friends is known for its realism, and low-key, humor based narrative as opposed to anything overtly dramatic or serious. As popular culture, Friends has had sizable impact on language and fashion along with inspiring countless spin-off shows².

Although Friends is a sit-com, for this essay, I will be studying it along the lines of previous studies of soap operas. Both allow for reflexivity on part of the viewer which invites a critical distance. At the same time, Friends also inspires a sense of familiarity and association which only gets built over time. Friends has managed to bridge the gap of the so-called 'disengagement' of sit-coms by ensuring a close connection with the audience and the characters and context of the show. As given by Chitnis et al., *"Friends is an episodically*

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friends>

² <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/bin5/040107a.asp>

'closed' text, but as a genre, ongoing and open-ended" (Chitnis et al, 2006, p.141) and for this research I will be continuing with this understanding of the show and thus studying it in a similar fashion.

Research Question

Through a detailed investigation into the lives of young urban Indian women, and by exploring viewer interaction of the TV show 'Friends', there is an attempt to understand how individuals construct imagined sense of self and world through the symbolic resources available in the guise of global TV, and how they maintain the fine balance between *global media and local realities*

Some of the key research questions would be:

- How does a culturally and geographically situated TV show like Friends become a source of pleasure for young Indian women?
- How are the messages within the show incorporated into their daily lives, and is there any resistance?
- How do they reconcile differences between the contrasting worlds off and on screen?
- How are conceptualizations of 'Indian' identity challenged by the 'Western' perspective?
- In what ways does a show like Friends impact or enable experiences of modernity, and how does it compare with available Indian programming?
- How does Global TV in general contribute to fueling the imagination of these young women, and where do the boundaries get merged?

Following the tradition of cross-cultural audience reception research, this area of study has been chosen given the relatively limited focus accorded till date. While there are innumerable studies focusing on India and/or media, only a very few number of such studies have focused exclusively on this generation of Indian urban, middle-class youth, who have possibly experienced global TV through most of their lives (since satellite TV first came to India in 1991). In addition, given the changing pace of modern India, it remains of interest to capture the moments-in-transition as they happen and I hope that this research would provide a snapshot of a life-stage and moment in history which may otherwise go unrecorded.

Also, in line with Parmeswaran's view, this research is an intervention against First World stereotypes of Indian women as being subjugated and submissive victims, which are reflected in majority of researches undertaken. By focusing on young women of middle-class backgrounds, I hope to reflect an alternate perspective where their agency and autonomy are vocalized, done by way of deploying *"the analysis to demonstrate the inability of*

categories such as resistant/compliance or powerful/subordinate to encompass women's relationships with popular culture" (Parmeswaran, 2002, p.833)

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Given the nature and scope of the research, the choice qualitative research as the methodology was a fairly easy one. Since it is an exploratory study and would be delving into a relatively unknown arena, there was a need for a flexible research process which would allow for more digressions and changes. In fact, the choice of qualitative research mainly stemmed from the need to have a more dynamic approach which could allow for experimentation and adjustments along the way.

In addition, qualitative research "*emphasizes the value-laden narrative of enquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.8) and "*attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view*" (Kvale, 1996) which would be critical given the socio-cultural research context and the necessity of providing a greater understanding of the individual's life and her worlds. Hence, the research methodologies were chosen to ensure richness of data, attention to detail and the ability to vividly capture the tone and texture of the experience of being a young woman of a specific demographic and socio-cultural background in India today

The research was undertaken in a two-step process.

- Post recruitment of the participants, there was a detailed process of getting to know them better. At this stage, there was an initial interaction over email and phone conversations aimed at understanding the suitability of the participants, after which there was an in-depth interview with each participant.
- After all interviews were completed, a group discussion was conducted in which all participants were invited together to take part together.

A multi-stage research methodology was chosen to ensure depth and comprehensiveness in a narrow profile as given the limited number of participants, the scope of the study was restricted to a specific profile of participants.

The decision to conduct both focus groups and interviews, as part of the research process, was taken to capitalize on the strengths of both methods. While the interview would allow in-depth probing of individual perspectives, the focus group would allow a first-hand experience of observing audience reception as well as encouraging a more participatory viewing process.

The objective of the first stage of the research process was to understand the individual and her world. In anticipation of the broad context within which media plays a role in a person's life, exploring various facets of a person's life - from social relations to personal ambitions to the joys and vexations of daily life - was seen a necessary first step to understand the person's motivations and contextual background. For this purpose, the depth interview ensured a free-flowing and dynamic 'conversation', which would be as equally driven by the participant as the researcher. The participant's concerns about privacy and inhibitions which may impact response, especially when exploring personal and intimate areas, such as sexuality, were also considered.

For the second stage of research, there was a need to explore some macro-level concerns and also generate discussion and debate to get a cross-section of opinions and explore social dynamics at play. In addition, to provoke responses, there was a plan to show an episode of the chosen TV show – Friends – and then collect responses. The expectation from this stage of research was to observe how the viewer constructs and negotiates with meaning. As with similar reception studies, in this study as well *"the audience is seen... as individuals located in concrete social groups who construct meaningful social action partly through the discursive interrogation of the text. In this context, the focus group is...used to examine the everyday ways in which audiences make sense of television"* (Livingstone & Lunt, 1996, p.8). In addition, use of groups to discuss similar issues have been successfully used in researches like Radway (1984) where such groups work as an 'interpretative community' and bring in a broader social perspective.

There were some concerns on the choice of research methods; the primary one being the limited number of respondents and concerns about validity, which has been clarified as not being representative of a wider population. Another concern (which developed later in the research process) was regarding the analysis of data and the lack of established norms for the same

Initiating the research

For this study, the respondent profile was chosen as young Indian women – in the age group of 17-23 years, unmarried, who were either studying in college or working, and who were currently residing in New Delhi.

The respondents were selected through snowballing i.e. contacting friends and acquaintances and asking for references. A detailed email listing the preferred profile and commitment involved was circulated among university mailing lists and personal contacts. While the initial enquiries generated considerable interest, after an initial screening, a total of 7 suitable profiles were generated who were eminently suitable for the research. After the interview, 1 of the participants had to leave as she had a sudden job transfer to another city, so the group discussions were conducted with 6 participants. However, given the quality of data it generated, I have chosen to include the single interview in the analysis.

While the selection process cannot be described as representative, every effort was made to include only those who fitted the target profile. Keeping in mind the disadvantages of word-of-mouth recruitment, close friends of the researcher were automatically disqualified from the research process in order to ensure objectivity.

Two discussion guides – for the interview and the group discussion - were prepared on the basis of the literature studied. A specific technique used in the interviews was asking for a biographical narrative, in the form of a fictional TV series based on the participant's life. Inspired from Giddens' concept of '*autobiographical thinking*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 72), it was used to encourage the participant to develop a coherent sense of self and bring in a more reflexive mode to the interview.

The research process

The Interviews and Group Discussion were conducted in a sequential manner. All interviews were completed over a span of 2 weeks after which two group discussions were held with the same participants. Due to logistical constraints, it was not possible to co-ordinate a single group discussion and hence the participants were met across 2 group discussions (each with three participants).

While an attempt was made to conduct the interviews at the participant's house that was not always possible and some of the interviews were held at coffee shops and cafes. For the group discussion, the participants were invited to a central location – a restaurant – where the discussion happened over a meal.

All interviews were conducted with informed and consenting participants who had agreed to participation and recording prior to the interview. Details regarding the research purpose as well as clarifications about confidentiality and anonymity were given at the start and permission for recording the discussion was taken from the respondents before starting. The interviews were approximately 40 minutes - 1 hour long, while the group discussions were approximately 1.5 hours in duration. Despite asking the respondents to focus completely on the interview, there were minor interruptions and on such occasions, the interview was halted momentarily. Since some activities were conducted at a public place, there an attempt was made to ensure reasonable privacy and a quiet atmosphere, while choosing the restaurant.

In order to ensure that the respondents felt involved and empowered in the research process, the aim was to make the participant more of an equal partner where instead of stimulus-response so that there is a '*discourse between speakers*' and an attempt to view the participant as '*a productive source of knowledge*' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). This was sought to be achieved by encouraging a free-flowing discussion and often letting the participant guide the flow, instead of sticking to a regimented set of questions.

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher within a few days of being conducted. Transcription was done from the recorded tape, and post transcription, the transcript double-checked with the researcher's notes, to add any missing details. Recognizing that there is nothing as complete transcription (Kvale, 1993) and that a transcript should be acknowledged as a coauthored and possibly incomplete conversation-in-context rather than as data frozen in time and space (Poland, 2003), an attempt was made to capture not just the actual words but also the specific pauses and any other verbal utterances to highlight not just what was said but how it was said.

Some thoughts on the role of researcher

In the attempt to "*make the familiar strange*", through the research I had to ensure a constant and conscious position of not allowing my own experiences and ideas to overwhelm the process. Both the closeness to the research subject and locational/ cultural context had its ups and downs. On the one hand, there was an easy connections with the participants given the similarities in background (albeit the age difference!) and their comfort level ensured that the discussions were frank and intimate.

Yet, the familiar turf was also a concern as I did not want to fall into the trap of making pre-conceived assumptions and hence often followed a very long-drawn and convoluted process to ensure the validity of any observation or analysis that I was undergoing. "*Research is an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen....and see the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process*" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.18). Focusing specifically on my own subjectivities as a researcher, I often found that that distancing myself from the field of study was a complicated issue, and perhaps would never be completely possible. Instead, knowledge should be accepted as socially situated – where the research undertaken is accepted within the context of the time and place and as likely to be an incomplete partial truth, given that it is itself mediated by the researcher.

Approaching an area of this degree of complexity and expansiveness, I was also consciously aware about the limited time and scope accorded this study, which perhaps was not adequate to do justice to the research subject. Despite my attempts to try and narrow the focus of the research, I often felt overwhelmed with the magnitude of data and the intricacies of linkages and fine lines. Hopefully future researches will be able to delve deeper and undertake a more exhaustive and holistic effort, which should ideally be carried out over a longer period of time.

RESULTS & INTERPRETATION

I) Setting the context

The new-age 'global' Indian youth?

*"The teenagers... belonged to the first generation of young urban Indians for whom commercial satellite television and a profusion of multinational brands were a basic fact of life. Crucially, this point was constantly being underscored in the life-style features and editorial columns of the mass media... **This was a generation that was constantly being told that they belonged to a new global class**"*
(Mazzarella, 2003, p. 241)

William Mazzarella, while researching for his book 'Shoveling Smoke' during 1998-99 observed the self-conscious awareness among Indian teenagers about the sense of advancement and progress expected in times to come. Almost a decade later, the young Indian women I met spoke confidently about the benefits of living in a time of change. Coming from the upper middle class, most of them have an adequate share of opportunities and privileges and had grown up in the comfort and security of their positions and through all our discussions, a sense of buoyancy remained a constant.

But, scratching the surface beyond the glib assurances highlights the challenges of straddling across multiple parallel worlds and attempting to fuse together a hybrid identity. India as a country is "*emerging from the shadows of history into the glare of a globalizing world*" (Varma, 2004, p.1), and in a true testament to the power of globalization acting as a force that is '*in here*' rather than '*out there*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 95), it is the intimate everyday lives and dilemmas of the young women I met which demonstrates the clash between the old and the new, the influences from the 'West' and 'Indian' tradition and between what the girls watch on TV and what they see all around them.

For the girls that I met through this research, there are new possibilities today which would not have been available a generation ago, but there are also some continuing traditions and legacies which keep them bound to a lifestyle which is often policed by others. Instead of leaping head-first into a new world as promised by globalization pundits, there is a cautious

advancement. The movement may have been set in motion but the pace is often determined by others around her.

The American way of life was a constant reference point. While their expectations of the American culture and life was primarily guided by the media (except for one, none of them had traveled to the US), they considered themselves as very well-aware of the intricacies of American life and society as *'it is not like we don't know how things are there'*. Freedom and a liberal / permissive atmosphere were the most envied, for allowing independence and autonomy, while at the same time there were concerns about having an overly "modern" life.

The joys of 'English TV'

Almost all girls I met said that one of their favorite past-times was 'watching TV'. When asked why that was preferred over others, often it was a de-facto choice given parental restrictions that often left them house-bound, especially during late evenings/nights. And so, watching TV was a very regular and well-entrenched routine which was seen as being an integral part of the day.

Although before the research, I had screened participants to ensure that only regular viewers of American shows are invited to take part in the study, the surprising discovery was the overwhelming extent to which the girls preferred to watch English language shows. Indian TV (especially the soaps which were in Hindi) was criticized for their representation of women restricted to within the domestic spheres and the black and white caricatures. In addition, the melodramatic style and complicated story lines (most of which revolved around the family) made it seem very artificial. While for most parts of India, Hindi and vernacular TV is the staple, for this group of girls who have grown up, studied and interacted socially in English, there are no language concerns and often since they have been living in an English-saturated media environment, it is the Hindi TV shows that seem alien.

For these girls, watching English TV shows was a familiar turf. The idiomatic phrase – English TV – is an Indian invention. Used as a contrast to Hindi/ vernacular language media, it comprises of a set of TV channels (Star World, Zee Cafe, Star Movies, HBO, AXN, Discovery etc.) which broadcast TV shows in English – mostly American sit-coms, soap operas and talk shows from the past few years. All participants claim to have watched these

since class VI-VII (age 12-13 years), and very well versed with most of the popular shows on TV.

The close identification with English TV shows is a dominant theme which is explored in greater depth through the analysis but for now, it is an interesting starting point to understand the degree to which these shows are integrated in the rhythms of the everyday life of these girls, and are reflected in both their understanding of their own worlds as well as their imagination of the possibilities that lie outside it.

As critically analyzed in the literature earlier, the global reach of TV today has brought validation to the idea of the 'active viewer' and through this research as well, there was a very clear response of viewers playing an active and conscious role both in terms of choice and preference of shows, as well as their construction of the meanings of the same. This was a role that the girls were extremely comfortable with, and they selectively chose parts of the show that were of interest and re-interpreted or ignored what did not seem fitting.

"You are watching a show from a different culture...so it is bound to have a different perspective and you have to watch it like that. Like when they show dating or people living together... you know that that's not your life. You can take bits of it but not all"- Nivedita

The girls felt almost indignant that it could be suggested that their media choices are restricted by language or geography. There is a sense of emotional attachment and connection which was often spoken about with seemingly universal situations sparking similar responses.

"Just because it (TV show situations) happens somewhere else doesn't mean it cant here... Its human drama... People will reach to things in a similar way across... it doesn't change with state boundaries. The fact that it happens in New York or London doesn't matter because what is it about? It's a friend and another friend and someone in a house, someone in a courtroom. The situation remains more universal so its not a restriction that you wont watch it because its set in a stage that is not familiar with you" - Aditi

For many, the TV shows helped define life 'out there' and became the benchmark for understanding the so-called 'Western' culture which for many was a synonym for American culture. So, in a way, the practice of watching these shows becomes a process of

participating in global youth culture and a way of assimilating the established symbols and rituals that define modernity, and coming closer to the new and exciting world that is believed to exist beyond immediate borders. For the girls that I had met, watching the show is a way of knowing about life in a different world, and often would be expressed as keeping you updated on what is happening.

"When you watch Friends... you feel good that you understand and get the jokes...and then something like Sex and the City, you can see the latest fashions and pick up some interesting ideas...like the episode of 'he's just not that into you', that came on Oprah also"- Shalini

The practice of watching this specific genre of shows is also an assertion of identity, which was often contrasted in opposition with the alternative – people who watch Hindi programming. While not expressed overtly, it was seen as a signifier of social order and position, and cultural expertise.

"(When asked what kind of people will not watch English sit-coms) People in villages... or those who don't have TV..."- Neha

"I think TV gives you a certain amount of perspective. Like if you have someone who watches Ekta Kapoor shows (popular Hindi soaps) then that tends to colour their perspective and if you watch American TV shows, then you think in a certain way"- Gauri

However, this positive response was also often contradicted and opposed and as discussed later in the analysis, there were numerous aspects of the show which were questioned and often disregarded in favor of their own interpretations and ideas.

When talking specifically about the show – Friends - seemed to generate affection and instantaneous appeal from its viewers and was invariably cited as one of the all-time favorite shows. The reasons for this overwhelming popularity seemed to stem both from its position within the gamut of other contemporary shows as well as from the format and characterization of the show itself.

"I absolutely love Friends. I can't think of a single person who didn't like Friends"- Neha

II) Analyzing the Results

Working with the participants through the research process, it was clear to see that there were many interesting individual facets along with common threads running through. In order to capitalize on the distinctions as well as bringing out some of the prominent themes, I have chosen to first present three profiles as representative of distinct attitudes/viewpoints among the participants followed by a detailed exploration of the significant spheres in which the potential of the imagination collide with the confines of the real, and have attempted to place the media within these everyday negotiations.

The Individuals

I chose to highlight the three profiles presented below (Nivedita, Neha, Arundhati) as being distinct perspectives about the show, which could show the possible spectrum of ways of thinking about the show. An interesting hypothesis developed through the analysis was the difference due to age and life-experience. For the girls who were working, there seemed to be a lesser attachment to the show and they seemed to be more critical and questioned it far more. While they were still very affectionate about the show, it was expressed more as nostalgia. However, the college-going girls were actively demonstrative about their interest in the show, and also treated it with more reverence and aspiration. Possibly further research into age/profile differences could provide a deeper perspective, but it was an interesting observation.

Nivedita, the expert – Having recently finished undergraduate college, Nivedita has been working for the past year or so, and is still coming to terms with her life as a working girl. TV viewing, one of her erstwhile favorite past-times, has now been relegated to weekends and few free hours during her hectic work day. She calls herself crazy about Friends but also admits that for her the show no longer holds the appeal that it did earlier. She finds it a little contrived now and “*a little silly*” although she still thinks its one of the funniest shows on air. One of her pet peeves with the show is about how everything is “*always fine*”: “*There are no fights about money, no bitching or complaining about friends... It is just too perfect sometimes. And everyone is just obsessed with love... Rachel is looking for love... Monica is looking for love... even Phoebe with all her flakiness is looking for love!*” She has just recently started watching Sex and the City and considers herself absolutely hooked... “*They talk about real issues... I learn so much more from the show. Not just sex learning but about man-woman dynamics*”

Neha, the enthusiast – In her second year at college, Neha is a Friends-junkie. She knows every episode and can almost remember the dialogues. She finds the show perfect for her *"It is so cool... they are all so funny and are so great together. You really want a life like that"*. While she believes that you can't have such a life in India, mostly when watching she likes to think about being part of the gang at Central Perk *"Like even when you are watching, you would think that ok what if I was staying in New York or with my best friends... then what would you do."* All her friends are crazy about the show as well and it becomes a regular part of their conversations... *"On Orkut, I am on the 'I love Friends community', and online there are tests about which Friends character you are like, and I am like Rachel"*

Arundhati, the exception – Arundhati was the only person whom I met who said that she likes watching Friends but only sometimes. She enjoys the show for its story and humor but sometimes found it just too bizarre. *"When they have things like Phoebe having triplets and that too her brothers, then that's just very weird, and some of the clothes they wear are very provocative"*. Another problem was with understanding the show... *"The accent is quite hard to follow sometimes, and often I just don't know what they are talking to. Like all the sports references or some of the places they talk about"*. But she still watches the show off and on because that's all her friends talk about... *"My friends used to say that I am like Phoebe, so I started watching just to see what she is like... it's good to keep watching once in a while but not everyday for me"*

Thematic analysis

To provide a more comprehensive snapshot of the lives of these young women, this part of the analysis highlights some of the key spheres which are remain contentious for the girls, and which can be seen as themes running through the research. By directly placing the show Friends within these themes, I have also attempted to detail the specificities of how the media actually plays a role within everyday life of its viewers.

Theme I: Looking for 'my own life' - Living within boundaries

Among all participants a common desire expressed was to *"live life by your own terms"* however, for most, the practical realities of day-to-day living were fraught with negotiations

with parents and authority figures and a constant struggle to live 'as you please'. With the exception of one, all others lived at home with their parents and were subject to regular rules and discipline. While the positive changes in parental attitude and social pressures were acknowledged, there were still a significant number of restrictions, which often led to a sense of antagonism.

"The fact that they (parents) are still paying for me makes a huge difference. I mean they are still paying for my education and my food and all so I just feel obliged to tell them what is happening. It sounds very rude but it's a reality" – Gauri

Mankekar (1999) argues that middle-classness as a moral virtue is predicated upon a girl's moral behavior and propriety and for most young women life is carefully monitored and scrutinized. While the girls I had met, by virtue of their education and professional ambitions, had relatively more privileges than most, there were still restrictions in terms of behavior, movement, activities and social deportment to maintain the appropriate standards.

"My mother gets very upset that I come home late or go out partying. And I have come to believe that it is because I am a girl and there is this question of shame and honor that the girl shouldn't do anything wrong... It's a constant battle and I have realized that even if you wish to be a certain way, sometimes you just can't do that" - Shalini

For all the talk about changing times and circumstances, the girls were very aware about the boundaries within which they could operate, and often had to walk a fine line between parents and larger social demands and their own expectations. The balancing act mostly involved minor deviances where you try and 'bend' the rules rather than 'break' them outright. In some cases, where the struggle was seen as 'acceptable', there could be direct confrontation such as for Nivedita who despite her mother's worry, was planning to go abroad to do an MBA.

"Like with my MBA... my mother is saying 'you are 22 and when will you start studying... you want to study for 2 more years. You will be old when you finish'. So you have to explain things to her and have to understand her insecurities... But if she (mother) doesn't still get it, then I just tell her that I am doing this so make your peace with it"

But at the same time, Nivedita also feels that while she can push her way for an MBA, there are other limitations that she cannot cross, which were more in terms of personal relationships and behavior, and so talks of boyfriends are completely off the table.

"My mom will never approve of me my boyfriend.... I know that she will just blow her top... then no logic, no reason... she will just say 'nothing doing... you can't do that'. But I guess then I will compromise and do what she says"

For Aditi who was choosing to move out and live away from her parents, the freedom from parental control was hard-won, and finally acquired under the pretext of moving to another city.

"It (moving out) is like strive for independence. I mean, I don't want to have to move out just when I get married...that's ridiculous"- Aditi

There is a constant and automatic self-policing which is the result of constantly being told what to do to ensure socially appropriate responses, and not broach the restrictions. Often it was even during interaction with peers when the moral standards must be maintained.

"Girls think about sexuality but can't talk about it. If in one conversation I say that 'oh, I am bi-curious...and I really want to know what its like to be with a woman' and immediately the way my guy friends react will change... apparently it means that you are sexually available"- Arundhati

Through our discussions, one of the most envied aspects of Friends was the freedom and autonomy with which they seemed to live as they please. While this was seen as an example of being modern, it was also very closely associated with living in a city like New York, and living away from home. Since most of these girls would possibly never be allowed to live away from home, it remained a very wistful idea for most of them.

"Something like friends living together has just about started in India. Like in Bangalore, I have heard about some of my friends taking up a flat together... but its very very rare"- Shalini

In addition, there was a sense of vicarious living through the show in watching a sort of life which would not be a possible alternative for you, especially associated with aspects that are seem as indicators of 'fun' and being young and reckless. Experiencing the events provided a sense of 'safe recklessness' which allowed gaining the experience without necessarily undergoing any overt pains or causing controversy.

"(With reference to an episode where Phoebe has a bachelorette party and gets a male stripper to perform) I have never seen a stripper and even if I do have a bachelorette party I highly doubt that I will call a stripper to that. I don't even know where I would get one in Delhi" - Gauri

For some, there was also defiance in the act of watching the show itself, especially for the few girls whose parents did not approve of the show. While often the reaction from parents was mixed, the girls often used the show as a way to push the limits and claim a small victory by watching the show despite opposition.

"Earlier when my father was around and there was some part of the show which showed sex or had double innuendos, then I would change the channel... but now I am 'dheet' (obstinate)"- Namrata

This follows close parallels with earlier researches about readers of romance novels for whom the act of reading itself became an act of resistance by negotiating the surveillance against their actions and finding pleasure in their own non-conformity. (Parmeswaran, 2002)

"Initially when the show started, my mother wouldn't like me watching it, so I would pretend to go early to a friend's house for tuitions and watch it there" - Shalini

Theme II: Framing the feminine – analyzing sexuality and romance

Today new demands and opportunities have created changes in how girlhood is defined, the social expectations young women encounter and their performance of identity (Aapola, 2005). Instead of being a life stage driven by biological or psychological processes, it is important to understand 'girlhood' or femininity as being constructed socially and the result of competing discourses which define what it means. (Aapola, 2005; Bloustein, 2003; Lees, 1993; Sharpe, 1995)

Studies exploring women readers of romance novels (in India and outside) have highlighted the ways in which they are seen as an informal reference guide to framing their ideals about sexuality and romance (Radway, 1984; Puri, 1997; Parmeswaran, 1999, 2002). In a very similar vein, for these girls the show becomes a way to pick up nuggets about the seemingly mysterious arena of dating and romance. Given the aspirational value of an American lifestyle as well as the relative level of expertise and maturity of the characters, the shows were seen as idealizing their expectations of love.

"I think Monica and Chandler are perfect for each other. He respects her so much and lets her take many decisions.... He is even so romantic. When he proposed to Monica, it was so beautiful and I cried so much" - Neha

However, this was the one area which was equally contested, especially around concerns about sexuality. While the idea of 'American' independence and freedom was admired in many aspects, it was also contested when applied to sexual preferences and behavior. Typical responses would question the validity of what is seen as being applicable only in other countries where the society per se is seen as more permissible and open. Indian society was considered too conservative to allow such behavior which augmented the sense of distance from the 'Western' society. While bringing about this Them vs. Us perspective, many participants shared their own inhibitions about such behavior as not being appropriate for them. The typical sentiment was 'I can see but I will never do this' highlighting the boundaries of reality which made this specific aspect of the imagined sexual morality of American life too alien to be considered.

"They are a lot more casual about sex and you can't expect that here... but then you know that its not here... it is New York so some things are different. But they are too flippant; they should be more serious and not just date any random person you meet"- Gauri

"Phoebe has made out with all of her three guy friends... that's not going to happen with me! Kissing someone or having sex is no big deal there but then it crosses the line"- Namrata

This was also an observation during the focus groups as the participants often just chose to not initiate the topic of sexual morality since they had their own reservations about it. During discussions of the show that was watched, all aspects would be brought up except any references to explicit sexual behavior, until probed about the same. While the justification that 'it' is allowed in American culture, was not far behind, there were initial hesitations about even broaching the subject.

Theme III: Marriage vs. Career - walking a fine line

All the girls interviewed were ambitious and professionally driven and looked forward to a rewarding job and there was open acknowledgement of changes over the past decades.

"My mother can see me doing things that she never had the opportunity to do. She had limited menu card of choices... but she thinks I have so many choices... so she thinks let me live my life".- Shalini

At the same time, the most contentious area for the girls I had met were expectations of marriage. As has been marked by many other writers (Kakar, 2007; Mankekar, 1999, Parmeswaran, 2002), the mixed messages for Indian middle-class urban girl oscillate between culturally designated feminine roles of being a good wife and new modern imports which stress individual achievement, leaving them with *'contradictory cultural expectations'*

"The emphasis on marriage has not changed... not just marriage but the focus on institutions that will give you stability. The word stability and the word responsibility are very Indian in nature... and that hasn't changed but has just become greater"- Nivedita

"Marriage is one thing where no matter what you say or what you do, the things are the same. The girl turns 21 and immediately parents start looking for boys"- Neha

This was borne out in the research as well, as marriage and relationships were a common source of anxiety and problems for the girls. While they acknowledged their parents' expectations of them and were mentally prepared to live up to those, yet there were some dissatisfactions.

"I know that when I get married and I have a kid, then that will be my responsibility. It will be expected of me to take care of the child and run the house"- Shalini

In contrast to their own set of limitations, media was seen as a source highlighting alternatives. The availability of lifestyles – choice within a plurality of possibilities that *'is adopted'* rather than *'handed down'* (Giddens, 1991, p. 81), helped provide a sense of perspective about life-choices that were otherwise not seen around as explicitly. For Gauri who was actively resisting marriage plans at the moment, looking at Rachel on Friends was a way of re-thinking traditional roles.

"For instance, when you see a 30 year old woman who is not married but she goes and has a baby and she is still dating after that and hopeful about finding love... then you think 'yeah... maybe that can happen"

The female characters on the show were both commended and critiqued for their life choices. On one hand, they were seen as independent, 'modern' women who were leading the lives that they wanted, and tackling challenges head-on.

"If you look at independence, then Phoebe has lived on her own and Monica is super organized and super efficient and totally in control of her life. Rachel was the one who was least interested in venturing out and she finally did so in dire circumstances. It was a very patient wait for her to find her feet... but she struggled and made her way"- Neha

The characters were perceived as unapologetic about their choices and not succumbing to social pressure as compared to the participants themselves who were constantly second-guessing the consequences of their actions and possible repercussions.

"Many times women do things and it's so easy to get castigated or stereotyped because of it. If you go to a club, and you see a women smoking, all the men will try and pick her up because think that she is open or liberated so it would be ok to go and hit on"- Namrata

On the other hand, for some participants (especially the older ones) the characters were seen as eventually falling into the stereotypical clichés, and in some ways not living lives very different from the participants.

"Even they're (the characters) all the same. They're also obsessed about guys and who likes whom. Its like when I am 30, then I hope that I am not looking for love desperately and think that if I don't get married this year then I am a failure"- Aditi

Rather than being seen as black and white polarities of being sinners or saints, Rachel, Monica and Phoebe inspired a sense of empathy – struggling with similar problems and dilemmas – which brings them close yet does not prop them up on a pedestal.

III) Juxtaposing imagination and reality

In the following section, I will use some of the concepts introduced in the literature review to reflect on the findings and provide a sense of perspective about how to integrate this research with previous learning, and highlight some of the interesting parallels.

Moving from the TV screen into real life

Despite the differences in cultural and social context, Friends has its focus on the everyday life of young people, an idea that finds immediate resonance with the girls that I had met. Many girls mentioned that watching the show was like a 'reflection of your life', which just goes to highlight the way in which by mirroring the rhythms of daily life, the show managed to resonate and provide a sense of 'reality' that overpowered the differences in social and cultural context.

"When you are with a group of friends then there are some kinds of dynamics that happen which are very similar to this. I mean, you don't really live with your friends... but there are some friends whom you have a history with. Like Monica and Rachel have known each other since school. Chandler and Ross are friends since college... so it's like your old childhood friends whom you have known for many years" – Neha

This blurring of boundaries reflects the constant commuting between the lives on the show and the lives of the viewers as for the girls, some aspects of the show, such as interest in characters and appreciation for the story, were very intimate and attracted much attention and ensured detailed involvement. Rather than responding to the specificities of the story or plot-line, the girls had an emotional engagement with the show where they responded to the 'emotional realism' (Ang, 1985).

"Its like you know them in real life... and you understand the problems they are going through. I feel very close to Rachel... she goes through so many bad times, and so I feel like telling her to be brave. And Chandler and Joey are like your silly friends you keep you laughing. It's not the situations but the people and the feelings. What they do and how they talk about things and the way they take care of each other"- Shalini

While almost all TV viewing is personal in a sense, this form of intimate engagement can be seen as parasocial which 'invites and solicits viewers into their daily lives and settings' (Illouz, 2003, p. 62). By reflecting the daily life of the viewer, the show invites a 'referential

mode of viewing' (Katz and Liebes. 1985), where the personal is integrated into the viewing experiences and viewers relate their own subjective experiences to television texts. In close comparison with soap operas, Friends seems to build a close rapport with the viewers, many of whom have been regular for many years, and extends from fiction into a part of their everyday. The familiar mediated experiences of global TV also then lead to a feeling of '*reality inversion*', where the awareness and intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness, often makes real experiences have a less concrete existence than a media representation (Giddens, 1991) which could explain why Central Perk in Manhattan seems so close to home for the participants in my study.

Seeing is not believing – The paradox of selective reality

However, in many ways, the show still ensured a sense of distance from the viewer's actual reality, but this sense of disparity between on-screen and off-screen life was accepted with pragmatism and a sense of status-quo. The '*selective reality*' (to quote one of the participants) allowed the viewer to participate and appreciate the show without having to subscribe to its inherent moral or political ideologies.

Given the differences between American and Indian culture, the widest disparities arose with respect to relationships, sex and gender expectations. As discussed previously, while attitudes are changing in India, there is still a strong streak of conservatism and expectations of sexual propriety with the young women that I had met, and they would often acknowledge the differences between their lives and the lives on the show.

"We have a selective reality process. We will forget that they are living with their boyfriend... we will enjoy the show anyway without worrying about the moral or value fit in a way"- Nivedita

As a strategy to cope, this process seemed to work for most of the respondents, who chose to justify their behavior as the most rational thing to do. It also seemed to be a way of keeping in sync with the prevalent local realities whether by design or not.

"You can't identify with everything but then its television. You are not expected to identify with everything... that's a little dramatic. I think when you are watching the show you kind of assume that it's not going to happen to you"- Arundhati

This is also closely linked with the work done on cross-cultural comparison of Friends viewers in US and India by Singhal et al. (2002), which also showed that unlike the American audiences, Indian youth found frank discussion of sex as taboo and culturally inappropriate, and instead chose to ignore the sex-related elements of the show, and concentrate on the other 'permissible' topics.

In an interesting extension, often when talking about the more dis-similar aspects, the participants would bring up the fact that Friends is an American show, in order to highlight the distance and 'exotic' appeal of the show, while when waxing eloquent about their affection for the show, it would become 'just like home'.

Negotiating modernity – is this the American dream?

Despite the recent changes, English TV remains closely associated with conceptions of modernity and one of the more complicated aspects of this research was exploring the position of Friends as a symbol of modernity and progress. While this is not to imply that the show's appeal lay only by virtue of it being from another country, one of my initial hypothesis was that there would be a significant amount of 'cool' associated with these shows. However, through the research, I discovered the tricky and often contradictory position of these shows in the lives of my participants which belied any earlier ideas of a linear understanding.

Almost all participants attributed their initial interest in these shows to curiosity and a desire to be a part of the cool syndrome. The initial buzz around the shows, especially the more popular ones, ensured that initial viewing was driven by word of mouth recommendations and media hype.

"Like you initially watch Friends because you think that's so cool... and you think you are cool because you watch Friends... so you will watch the show and then discuss it with your friends and think that you are all so cool. It's like this whole bonding thing over Friends"- Namrata

However, given the significant duration of time since most participants first started watching the shows, what is of interest are the motivations that kept them interested, and in most cases this was only partly driven by the 'cool' syndrome. Instead there seems to be a

genuine appreciation of the shows although the sense of aspiration associated with the show continues, especially with the younger girls, even if it may not be overtly expressed.

What does seem to have come in over time for these girls is a more critical perspective. Over time and repeat viewings they seem to have started questioning the show and perhaps losing the sense of importance that it was given when they started watching. This sense of jaded interest could also be due to the plethora of new programmes available which may push even an old favorite into the backseat. Sex and the City was mentioned by many respondents as being the '*hot favorite*' although it did not seem to hold the universal appeal of Friends and was often becomes too risqué and is seen as '*too much*'.

English TV by and large does set the standard for being 'modern' for these girls. While a few did question the whole ideal of replicating 'Western modernity', in most cases the shows are watched, at least partly, to access the view from the global (Western) stage and be a part of something that goes beyond your immediate world.

Modernity remains a contentious arena. Given the differing conceptualizations of modernity, it often becomes another word for the 'West'. While it is highly desirable to acquire and be familiar with the symbols representing modernity such as brands, cultural icons, fashion, music and entertainment (most of which are centered strictly around America/ Hollywood), there is also a sense of disloyalty or guilt in abandoning what are believed to be traditional Indian values. The tussle is almost palpable, with the seductive imagery of the imagined 'West' enticing with a promising utopia of freedom and excitement but the inner conscience reminding of the so-called 'dangers' of letting go and advising morality and propriety. It is here where the disjuncture exists which restricts a seemingly smooth transition from one world to another and instead poses difficult choices.

Ironically, I think this could also be one way in which a show like Friends becomes a convenient choice. It promises a safe middle ground, allowing for the vicarious pleasures of living single in Manhattan without moving out of your room. It allows involvement in a global youth culture that is exciting yet won't get your fingers burnt. It is 'safe recklessness' which allows the individual to negotiate modernity and annex the global into the local, without crossing any 'real' boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Towards the close of the research, I was left with mixed feelings. Studying the media is a challenging and tedious journey and through the course of the past few months, I realized more than ever before, how this is just a drop in the ocean given the potential to explore further. To quote Silverstone, "*the media have become part of the grain of everyday life*" (Silverstone, 2005, p. 194), and it is not possible to observe or imagine the media without the nitty-gritty details of the world that it is part of. It is thus the individual viewers on whom I have attempted to focus, and through their everyday life and dilemmas, try and draw out some details of where the media fits in. While the individual has been given prerogative, this still remains a study of the power and potential of the media to bring new meanings and cross geographic boundaries which can fuel the imagination and transform our sense of selves.

Globalization today can no longer be spoken of as one-sided imperialism. "*Action at a distance is always a two-way process*" (Giddens, 1991, p.96), and in this process, media messages are not just blindly assimilated but often questioned, resisted or adjusted. For the participants in my study, local everyday realities often became the check-post, creating a sense of distance and a wedge in case of marked cultural differences. Yet, the show also inspires a fierce loyalty and sense of belonging at an emotional level and reflected in the incorporation of the show into their everyday lives.

Global TV provides a space for imagination and for the construction redefinition of selves and aspirations, offering alternative lifestyles and empowering role models which are appropriated and transformed into symbolic resources to make meaningful worlds and identities. However, viewer agency and choice means that the electronic media are not '*opium of the masses*' (Appadurai,1990) but that the consumption of the mass media may provoke resistance, selectivity or re-definition, as can be seen by the many ingenious ways in which the girls fitted the show around their own lifestyle. Watching Friends is a way of participating in the global youth culture without any associated risks. It is a way to access symbols of modernity and incorporate them into your lives. It becomes a way of self-definition and often represents social currency, especially within the peer group.

Yet there are limitations, and the restrictions of local realities often stand deterrent, and individual ideas of morality and propriety (often assimilated from other sources, especially

cultural benchmarks) often over-ride the images on TV. It is the re-definition and re-casting of the show within permissible boundaries that ensures that it continues to be relevant to their lives.

Kim (2005) in her work on young women, comments on how global TV provides a space for reflexivity for young women to think critically about their lives, and that could be an appropriate conceptualization of a very complex phenomenon. Reflexivity of the self is continuous and pervasive, and it is through the platform of shows like Friends, that young Indian women can question their lives and identities and imagine new world of possibilities.

REFERENCES

- Aapola, S. et al. (2005). *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Alasuutari, P. (Eds.) (1999). *Rethinking the media audience: the new agenda*. London: Sage.
- Allen, R.C. (1995). *To be continued: Soap operas around the world*. London: Routledge
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas*. London: Methuen
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, culture and society* 7 (2), 295-311.
- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Appadurai, A. & Breckenridge, C.A. (1995) Public modernity in India. In Breckenridge, C.A. (Ed) *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian world*. (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Beck, U., Giddens, A. & Lash, S. (1994). *Reflexive Modernization*. Cambridge: Polity
- Bloustien, G. (2003) *Girl making: A cross cultural ethnography on the processes of growing up female*. London: Berghahn
- Buckingham, D. (1993). *Reading audiences: Young people and the media*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Chanda, I. (2003). *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and popular culture*. Kolkata: Stree
- Chitnis, K, Thombre, A, Rogers, E, Singhal, A. & Sengupta, A. (2006). (Dis)Similar Readings: Indian and American Audiences' Interpretation of *Friends*. *The International Communication Gazette*, 68(2), 131-145
- Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-28). Sage: Thousand Oaks
- DeZengotita, T. (2005). *Mediated: How the media shapes your world and the way you live in it*. New York: Bloomsbury
- Durham, M.G. (2004). Constructing the new ethnicities: media, sexuality, and diaspora identity in the lives of South Asian immigrant girls. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 140 - 161
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J.H. (2000). From structured questions to negotiated texts. In Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 645-672). Sage: Thousand Oaks
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self Identity*. Cambridge: Polity
- Gillespie, M. (2005) *Media Audiences*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Hall, S. & du Gay, P. (1996) *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J.F. (2003). Introduction. In Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J.F. (Eds.), *Inside Interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. (pp. 3-31). Sage: Thousand Oaks
- Johnson, L. (1993). *The modern girl: girlhood and growing up*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Kakar, S. & Kakar, S. (2007). *The Indians: Portrait of a people*. New Delhi: Penguin
- Kim, Y. (2005). Experiencing globalization: Global TV, reflexivity and the lives of young people. *International journal of cultural studies*, 8(4), 445-463
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage
- Lees, S. (1993). *Sugar and Spice – sexuality and adolescent girls*. London: Penguin
- Liebes, T. & Katz, E. (1993). *The export of meaning – cross cultural readings of Dallas*. London: Polity
- Livingstone, S. (1990). *Making sense of television*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann Ltd
- Livingstone, S. (2002) *Young people and new media*. London: Sage
- Lunt, P. & Livingstone, S. (1996). *Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research* (online). London: LSE Research Online. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>
- Mallan, K. & Pearce, S. (2003). *Youth cultures: Texts, images and identities*. London: Praeger
- Mankekar, P. (1999). *Screening culture, viewing politics: an ethnography of television, womanhood and nation in post-colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Mayer, V. (2003). Living telenovelas/ Telenoveling Life: Mexican American Girls' Identities and Transnational Telenovelas. *Journal of Communication*, 53 (3), 479-495
- Mazzarella, W. (2003) *Shoveling Smoke- Advertising and globalization in contemporary India*. Durham: Duke University Press
- McKinley, E.G. (1997) *Beverly Hills 90210: Television, Gender and Identity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- McMillin, D.C. (2003) Marriages are made on television: Globalization and national identity in India. In Parks, L & Kumar, S. (Eds.) *Planet TV – A global television reader*. (pp.341-360) New York: New York University Press
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Owen, R. (1997) *Gen X TV: the Brady brunch to Melrose place*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press
- Parameswaran, R. (1999). Western romance fiction as English-language media in postcolonial India. *Journal of Communication*, 49 (3), 84–105
- Parameswaran, R. (2002). Reading fictions of romance: Gender, sexuality and nationalism in Postcolonial India. *Journal of Communication*, 52 (4), 832-851
- Poland, B.D. (2003). Transcription Quality. In Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J.F. (Eds.), *Inside Interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. (pp. 267-288). Sage: Thousand Oaks
- Puri, J. (1997). Reading Romance novels in Postcolonial India. *Gender and society*, 11(4), 434-452
- Radway, J. (1984) *Reading the Romance – Women, patriarchy and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press
- Rogers, E., Singhal, A. & Thombre, A. (2004). Indian audience interpretations of health-related content in the Bold and the Beautiful. *Gazette: The international journal for communication studies*, 66(5), 437-458

- Schroder, K. et al. (2003). *Researching audiences*. Arnold: London
- Scrase, T.J. (2002). Television, the middle classes and the transformation of cultural identities in West Bengal. *The International Journal for communication studies*, 64(4), 323-342
- Sharpe, S. (1994) *Just like a girl – how girls learn to be women – from the seventies to the nineties*. London: Penguin
- Shohat, E. & Stam, R. (2003) *Multiculturalism, postcoloniality and transnational media*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press
- Silverman, D. (2000). Analyzing talk and text. In Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 821-834). Sage: Thousand Oaks
- Silverstone, R. (1994). *Television and everyday life*. London: Routledge
- Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why study the media?* London: Sage
- Silverstone, R., (2005). The Sociology of Mediation and Communication. In Calhoun, C. Rojek, C. and Turner, B. (eds), *The SAGE handbook of sociology*. (pp.188-207). London: Sage
- Thompson, J. (1995). *The Media and Modernity: A social theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity
- Tomlinson, J. (1997) 'Cultural globalization and cultural imperialism' in A. Mohammadi (ed.) *International Communication and Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Varma, P. (2004). *Being Indian*. New Delhi: Penguin
- Williams, R. (1975) *Television, technology and cultural form*. London: Routledge
- Zacharias, U. (2003). The smile of Mona Lisa: Postcolonial Desires, Nationalist Families, and the Birth of Consumer Television in India. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20 (4), 388–40

APPENDIX I – PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Name	Age	Current profile	Family background
Nivedita	22	Corporate finance analyst (working 1 year)	Living alone in Delhi. Parents in the Army, and living in another city
Aditi	22	Working with an international NGO (working approx. 8 months)	Living with parents but has recently moved to Mumbai and is living alone
Arundhati	21	Journalism student currently working part time with a media company	Living at home with parents
Gauri	20	Studying in private college (affiliated with Delhi University) – Law – 3 rd year	Living at home with parents
Namrata	18	Studying in Delhi University – BA (economics) – 2 nd year	Living at home with parents
Shalini	19	Studying in Delhi University – BA (economics) – 3 rd year	Living at home with parents
Neha	18	Studying in private college (affiliated with Delhi University) – BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration)	Living at home with parents

APPENDIX II – DISCUSSION GUIDE (Interviews)

Researcher to provide introduction to the study

- Scope of the study
- Confidentiality and can leave any time

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. How would your friends and your parents describe you? How do you feel about that?
- If you had to choose three symbols that would represent you, what would those be?
- Imagine that your life was made into a TV show. It started when you were born and is still continuing till now. I have never seen that show so give me a quick re-cap of the show and what has been happening till date? What kind of a show is this? Are there any comparable shows that are on TV today? What are the themes/ idea behind this show? Who are the key characters and what role do they have? What are the highest rated episodes... the cliff hangers that have generated most interest? What have been the turning points in the show and how does the protagonist respond? Where is the show today/ what was in the last episode? What do you think is going to happen in this show in the future, in which direction is the show headed?
- What have been the big changes that have taken place in the last few years in life around you? How has that changed things in your life?
- Compared to your mother's generation, what are the differences in your life in terms of choices and priorities? How do you think these differences have added to or enriched your life?
- If you think about your life everyday, what are the kinds of complications or concerns that you have? What are the small things that trouble you?
- If you could change anything about your current life, what would you like to change? Why?
- Where does the media fit into your day? What are the 'musts' that you have to watch?
- Which is your favorite TV show? What do you like about this? In what ways does this add anything to your life?
- (Specifically about English TV shows) What is different about watching this as compared to Hindi TV? Which do you prefer?
- What are the kinds of things that go through your mind when you watch a show which is not from India? Does that ever become a concern for you?
- Is there any TV character whose life you would like to emulate? What aspects would you want to add to your life and what would you take away?
- (Specifically about Friends) Tell me about Friends... what do you think of the show?
- What is the experience of watching Friends? What is the mood like? What are you thinking?
- Is there any aspect of Friends that you are closest to? Which character do you like the most?
- What do you 'not' like about Friends? Is this something that would change how you feel about the show?
- Whom do you watch this show with? Would you see Friends with your parents? How do they feel about the show?
- If you could change anything about the show, what would you like to change?

END DISCUSSION

APPENDIX III – DISCUSSION GUIDE (Group Discussion)

- Re-introduce study and concerns about confidentiality
- Ask all participants to introduce themselves to each other

At the start of the Group Discussion, an episode of the show –Friends- would be shown. After the episode is over, researcher to start the discussion

- Let's talk about that episode... what did you think about that?
- Can someone tell me what happened in the show? Just tell me the story again
- What did you like or dislike about the episode? Is there anything that you would like to change?
- If we talk about the show as a whole, then what are the highlights that you look forward to? What do you generally not enjoy as much?
- The show is based in New York but you are watching in New Delhi. How does that impact your experience of viewing the show? Is that a problem for you?
- Do you have a life like that shown in Friends? What are the main differences?
- Do you want a life like that shown in Friends? What would you like to pick up from the show, and what would you like to leave out?
- If you had to Indianize the show, then what would do to it?
- Do you think Friends is an adequate representation of American life?
- Are the Friends characters – Rachel, Monica and Phoebe – modern women? Do you consider your self a modern woman?
- Do you discuss Friends with your friends? Would you discuss it with your parents?
- How did you start watching the show? Has that experienced changed from when you started watching to now?
- How does Friends compare with the other English shows that you watch? Which do you prefer

END DISCUSSION

APPENDIX IV – INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (Aditi)

M: This is a completely confidential study. Everything you say stays with me so don't worry. If you feel uncomfortable about anything then tell me to stop. Lets start with something about you...Tell me something about you as a person

R: As a person...(laughs)...Cant we start with something else.. some direct questions... because you have a tape recorder and all...so...

M: OK... Then tell me something about what you do these days?

R: Work is very boring (laughs). I have just started on my work...

M: OK.. what do you do?

R: Communications... the profile is communications but I think it's a little more PR than I bargained for...I thought there would be more active campaigning...but its more of being in touch with the media and flatter them and seeing what they do...stuff like that... so I am thinking of maybe running away (laughs)

M: (laughs) running away?

R: well...not running away but maybe moving away.... Maybe after a month or something... lets see... but I am now thinking I might rather go and work in a magazine or something.. I like writing... so

M: OK..

R: Its like... I was on gtalk yesterday with a friend of mine... and my boss was like.."don't be on the internet..and don't do this and don't do that"..

M: Oh my god

R: Yeah.. so it was very difficult... and that sort of thing... so I was thinking that I have to run away from here (laughs)... I cant do that sort of thing... cant have people bossing me around... anyway.. pata nahin.. dekhte hai (don't know... lets see)

M: OK.. what about your house? Who all are there in your family?

R: Father... mother... elder brother... army background...

M: OK

R: Father was in the army so have done a fair bit of India traveling...never abroad... my brother is in the army now... mother... she was an air-hostess for a while... really long...well not very long... 7 years... before she got married... and after that she has been dabbling in whatever she wants... so...

M: OK

R: So childhood has been a lot in the Nilgiris (mountain range in South India) because my father was posted in Wellington...

M: Oh... I have been there

R: Yeah... that's a beautiful place...

M: Yeah

R: So, about 6-8 years I have been there... so nice growing up in a hill station... Otherwise..its basically been small towns... Delhi was... We came to Delhi when ... 11th standard for me.. so we have been in Delhi for the last 5-6 years... so its not been that long...

M: OK... now suppose instead of meeting you... I met your best friend...and I asked her "tell me about Aditi... what would she say?"

R: OK... well... that girl I was telling you about.. she is a very close friend of mine... nags me a lot... thinks I have no focus...thinks that I am very condescending... she called me last week and told me... these are the things that I think are wrong with you... (laughs)

M: (laughs) Oh my god

R: She thinks I am a very callous person (laughs) lacking in compassion...if I say something to her then she says that you are not like me...if I say something then I apologize for it... you will just not care (laughs) I don't know how much she means it but at times I think she thinks that I can be selectively compassionate...

M: Alright...

R: Umm.. all that condescending and humour and joking around and all.. that's not all there (laughs)

M: (laughs) OK

R: You know I love dogs and all that (laughs) Good one... plus point

M: (laughs)

R: OK.. what would they say... maybe I should name people...

M: No no... just what would they say about you... what kind of person are you... positives, negatives, problems... what they love about you.. what they hate about you...

(minor interruption)

R: Basically to a stranger, they will say that I am open... selectively extroverted I guess

M: OK... what about your mother..? What would she say?

R: My mother would say that I have terrible mood swings... that I have very caustic tongue and all that but she knows that I am sensitive... I am touchy and all that... One good thing is that I am a fundamentally good kid... temperamental but nothing basically wrong...

M: OK

R: My mother would just think that I need to be put in my place...

M: (laughs) I think all mothers would think that...

M: OK... now if I asked you for three symbols that would define you.. could be anything... brands...books... movies.. anything that you think of which would represent you... define you as a person

R: OK.. a toothbrush... an electronic toothbrush

M: Why?

R: I am very vain...yeah...that's another thing... I am quite vain.. to a fair extent I am quite a narcissist.. I don't look at other people because I am too busy looking at the mirror (laughs) but I this how I am... but its not like I am really vain...

M: (laughs) OK... Three things

R: Places.. one would definitely be Wellington...umm.. the other would be... Wellington would definitely be there.. apart from that I don't know..

M: It can be anything... anything that you think you associate with yourself... what you have told me till now if fantastic stuff... so stuff like that

R: Umm... ok... you know I have always like Alsatians... so definitely that would be there.

M: OK

R: I don't know... I think I have been defined a lot by my childhood... I mean its not like the last 5-6 years have had nothing to do but... ya... I think I have had a great childhood and my teenage years have been a little bit of a disappointment.. so from my childhood it would be Wellington, Alsatians... my dogs and a tooth-brush.. ya

M: Why are teenage years a disappointment?

R: Why were they a disappointment? I thought they would be a little more wild actually (laughs) but then now I am realizing that its never too late...(laughs loudly). I like greenery.. I like plants... I enjoy comics.. peanuts... and tin-tin and all.. yeah. I enjoy reading but comics is a different league.

M: Fair enough

R: Clothes... yeah... stuff like that... everyone likes clothes (laughs)

M: OK... so between childhood and now, what happened? What big changes took place in your life? 5 years ago to now.. what have been the big changes in your life?

R: 5 years from now... major changes... umm...(silence). I think I am a little more aimless now. Earlier I didn't think that I would be so ... OK.. I don't panic too easily... I have never seen that strain in me.. umm... but I think I have become a little diffident now... I don't even know if cynical is the right word... maybe cynical because I though there would be so much change..

M: What did you think would happen? What did you expect to happen... in terms of the change

R: (silence). I don't know if I had thought about it... but if I had, I don't think I would have been cynical... I mean, I was a really happy kid. And its not like I am not happy now, but there is a lot more pessimism now. I don't know what that is (silence) I am a positive person... to an extent I am practical. I have always been practical but that's taking it in a cynical kind of view. I am realistic perhaps. Yeah. I mean I have never thought about emotions and all that crap.

M: OK

R: Yeah... so I have always been practical but now I have become even more of a realist. And that's maybe brought in a bit more of cynicism

M: OK

R: Yeah... yeah

M: And what about your life priorities? What have been your expectations?

R: I have never had any priorities. (laughs)

M: (laughs) Fair enough

R: Priorities... ok... you know my very good friend, in the 9th standard, she asked me what you want to be. She is one of the sensible ones.. we have conversations.. its not just like oh what am I wearing today

M: OK

R: She asked me what I want to be and this and that... and I said you know as long as I can afford olive oil when I am thirty and that's ok. I thought that's a good yardstick... good crockery and olive oil...(laughs) so that sort of stuff..

M: OK

R: Yeah... good curtains and all.. I am very house-proud. I think I get that from my mother.

M: So ambition wise.. do you have any other specific things

R: I would like to travel... I would like to write and I would like to have a good house. And I think I am coming to terms with that I don't have to earn too much. But as long as I am content with what I have then that's ok

M: Sure

R: Uhh.. yeah.. I think that might matter more.

M: OK... where do you see yourself... in like 5 years or 6 years?

R: You know I think maybe in a travel magazine... or maybe freelancing. I am not sure. I don't think I would be able to sustain a very hectic pace in my life. I like things slow.

M: OK.. and that's a choice you have made?

R: Yeah... I mean I don't think I would like to do it otherwise. Like last week or something, I got a call for an airline interview and I just didn't want to go. I knew it would be shifts, 18 hours, no weekends, no time for myself. Things would just become even worse. So I decided not to go for the interview only. It would become too hectic. I would be 26 before I knew it.

M: OK

R: I am not saying that it's a bad age but I don't want it to slip by me. I am looking forward to being 26... I am looking forward to having grey hair but I don't want to...I should consciously get there and not say that I don't know what happened

M: OK

M: What do you think are the biggest changes that have happened in the last couple of decades... lets say from your mother's generation to your generation in terms of opportunities and lifestyle... in terms of the world around you and the people you see around you

R: (silence) Mothers generation? I have a very clichéd answers.. like the Internet and things..

M: I don't want macro answers like the economy and stuff... I want to know things in your life...like what are the personal changes. Like for example the choices you are making in your life and the choices your mother made... what has changed between those choices? Are you making the same choices?

R: Its too broad...Maybe I should give you instances.... Because I cant explain otherwise

M: Sure

R: Like my mother wanted me to go for airline interviews...and I did. I went for two and I cleared one... Singapore Airlines.. so qualified for that one.. like a feather in my cap and all (laughs). About two weeks ago I had this Emirates interview and I went for it very half-heartedly. I reconciled my self to it... kept telling myself that see it's a lakh a month... I get to travel and then maybe I can blog about it... some junk about the life of an airhostess... do it for three years and manage to afford a place and then do what I want. I was forcing the decision on myself. And then they tell me I am not selected and I was smiling. And I tell my mother that now just stop it. I cant do it anymore. She's really keen that I see the world and I travel and all. She thinks that people and places and experiences are important. I mean, its not like money isn't important for her but there;s an onus on glamour and lifestyle and being able to afford it... like she says that if you have five star habits, then you don't want to be

living in 3000 bucks a month. So my mother is not a very conventional 'see how the world has changed' person... she's been more of a wild child... she;s like go out and do things and all...

M: OK

R: Yeah... and there might be slight double standards there... she does... she does want me to go out and have a good time... I instinctively know that but she would have an issue with a boyfriend... that she wont like...I don't know how rational that is. She wants me to go out and have a good time and see places that there are to be seen.. and she cant be completely obtuse to the fact that it involves other things.. I mean there will be men.

M: OK... So what are the other kind of contradictions.. I mean this is one..like on one hand parents say go out and have fun... and on the other hand, come back... get married..

R: Yeah... the contradiction does exist.. My mother is very ok with me going out in the sense that she is like yeah... go out and party and things like that but because I am a girl, my parents are not going to sleep till the time I come back..I mean, they will say that they are ok but their door will be open.. now my house is... you have to wake up someone when you are coming back. And it's a pain..you cant come back otherwise. And I feel really guilty... so I cant go out drinking and come back at 1.30 and say papa please open the door... that's not happening (laughs)... umm.. (silence) what was my point? I don't know... the contradiction being that she wants me to go out as long as...(silence)

M: You come back within a specific time...

R: Yeah...And she wants to be ok with the guys that I know... Like I think she wants to be able to say that yeah.. that's ok. I mean... there is no blind acceptance that these are my friends and you know that they're ok. In the end there is always that little screaming thing happening and I am not OK with that... I mean, I am old enough and I can make my own decisions... You know... don't screen my friends... I am not 3 years old. And that just doesn't answer my question I know... but

M: No no.. that's absolutely fine. That's the kind of examples that I want to talk about. So how do you manage all this... I don't want to call them challenges because its not always that...

R: You mean like how I manage all this.. do I lie about this and all?

M: No..more like mentally how do you come to terms with all this.. how do you cope with them? Its like walking a fine line... parents priorities and expectations and yours...

R: I don't know if anything has changed... I mean.. do I seem any more grown-up to my parents today as I was when I was 17.. do they see me any differently? Umm (silence) Yeah.. I think it would be naïve to say no... I mean you cant believe that ..(silence) I don't think that they honestly believe that I am still 17. But in many ways, it hasn't seemed to change at all.

M: Like for example, you have just started work. You are not in college any more. So, what has changed with that?

R: OK... I was first working at HT... and I think it was still easier for them to know that I was still going to college and all that. You know.. there was that whole student thing so I think that could have been more of a comfort thing. Like to know that she is still going to college. That's easier to manage than that she is out there working. But I could come back later.... and more pride probably. Because I did have front page bylines while I was working and they probably were proud of what I was doing and they did think that its good but then they would be upset when I was on a short fuse because there was a lot going on but there would be pride... because I am working and I am studying. But now of course both have

blown up in my face but at that point there was just a little bit of conceit that she is doing well so fine. She is doing something... she is doing it on her own. They have to know that I need more independence now than I did before.

M: OK

R: I may have shown it before in little things... like I don't like anyone serving me. My brother, who is a year older and a commissioned officer in the army, he likes my mother to serve him. But I have always had a problem with that. You know.. I can do it on my own. So that way atleast I am very self reliant.. I mean, it's the little things. I don't want some one to serve me... I don't want people to do things for me if I can do it for myself. And I think that should be OK with everyone.

M: Who is tougher at home? Your mother or father?

R: Definitely mother. Father is not tough to handle. He is mature and not so bad. He is an intelligent man and he is a compassionate man. Mother is difficult. As is she is temperamental. Golden hearted yes but also can be difficult. I have mixed genes... so its quite difficult. I am calm and don't panic but there's a certain madness which is hers. Which is good fun... and lovable and all but the sanity is also there. And the madness and the temper and the overaffection is also there. But he is the constant... I mean my mother is also constant. But he's calm and she is hyper.

M: OK... Now suppose I wanted you to think about your life as a TV show... like any of the shows that come on TV. Suppose there was such a show about your life... you are the main character... you are the protagonist and there is this whole show about your life. It started from when you were very young and is still going on. Now I am a friend of yours and I have never seen this show... So now tell me what that would be like...Yeah... what is the story till now

R: OK

M: So what is the show all about?

R: Nothing (laughs). Umm... stupid household conflicts. There is never a dull moment in my house. There is always some shouting, some screaming, something happening... Its never quiet. If we are not screaming and at each other's throats then we are laughing at something idiotic. Yeah, I think my mother has a sharper sense of humor than my father. He is a witty man but she's funny.

M: OK

R: OK.. now whats been happening is... OK... first a re-cap...

M: Yeah.. whats happening till now... who are the main characters...

R: OK... Lets forget the TV...let me just tell you

M: No, I want you to tell me like it's a TV show..

R: OK... there was me... really cute, pretty, fat kid... Umm.. happy kid.. short floppy hair. Lovable, eccentric family... dogs all around... living in a hill station... umm... we grow up... themes pick up at the same pace... still lovable, still eccentric. We move into a bigger place. The dog dies, the hair grows longer. The father is no longer in the army. The brother leaves the house. We both have boarding school stints. Anyway, its all quite uneventful except that we come to Delhi... school has given way to college but nothing much happens. Brother joins the army. I finish college. Start working. Few kicks seeing frontpage bylines. A swimming pool is always constant. Umm... Khan market is very constant. Fab India becomes a way of life. Sometimes out of town visits. Umm..sometimes family conflics.. othertimes good fun. Umm.. mother daughter conflicts become a bad scene. Not communicating and all that.

M: OK... happened now?

R: Yeah.. it picked up once we moved to Delhi.. earlier wasn't so much... Because I had a very sharp tongue as a child so yeah... Delhi would mean a lot of conflicts with mother. That would be something major. Umm...

M: When did you come to Delhi? How old were you?

R: 11th standard... 16-17 years

M: OK...

R: Yeah... all that... the teenage shit. I mean, I know its not totally unheard of but that doesn't make it any less annoying or unbearable.

M: OK... and who are the main characters.. who are the people who we expect to see around through-out.. who are always there.. coming in.. coming out?

R: My family.. umm.. grandparents probably... Friends from Wellington and all.. from whom have survived has been one only... Otherwise a few now.. the ones who are close... Otherwise have been those coming in and going out. But constant would be about four maybe... Yeah... and out of those four maybe 2 because you have held them close and two whom you cant let go...Uhh... yeah those would be the main characters

M: OK... and what would be among the best episode shows... like the ones with the highest ratings when people are just dying to know what happens next?

R: Umm... Work would have to be one..HT would be one. I felt very kicked about that

M: OK

R: My brother fell very sick last year...so that would have been one of the higher trauma points because relationship with my parents wasn't too good and they were worried sick because my brother is in ICU so not the best...yeah... I haven't been the most supportive daughter in bits. Yeah.. he was in the hospital for a really long time. He was paralysed from the neck downwards and yeah...I was not supportive. I mean... I cried and I cared and I did go to the hospital... but it wasn't the same because I was still fighting with them. I mean, the gap was so much that then it just didn't happen...and with everything else happening, it became really draining to try and close that... the divide.. so that would be one point... the couple of months when my brother was in the ICU. So, that would be there... and work.. yeah otherwise not much.. like I have told you... I have had a very uneventful life.

M: No... but that's ok. So where is this story right now... where is the current plotline.. where is life today?

R: Current is.. at this point is one of the crossroad type moments. Because we have been in this house in Delhi for the last 6-7 years but its been a while... Parents are now moving out... They are going to Gurgaon and I am not going to Gurgaon

M: Oh

R: Yeah.. and I am moving out to be closer to work. But considering I hate work, I am not sure exatly where I am moving out. But I am. Some months back, I was thinking about moving to Mumbai so I did go there and look around. So there is a shift just around the corner. In a month... month and a half.. by October for sure... Like Diwali I don't know where it is

M: So, what is driving this change? Why not move to Gurgaon with your parents?

R: Um.. even if work was in Gurgaon, I still need to move out. Like now I can tell people, that its so far and there's nothing to explain. But its like a strive for independence. And

sooner ... I mean, I don't want to have to move out just before I get married. I mean that's ridiculous. So I think I need it. I need a jolt. I am a spoilt brat and I need a couple of shocks. I mean this thing of doing everything... washing my clothes.. It cant go on forever. So, life lessons will make a big deal.

M: OK. So what do your parents feel about this?

R: Umm.. they are OK with it. I mean they would rather that I don't move out next week and wait for them to move to Gurgaon but they acknowledge it. They do understand why I need to make a move.

M: What are your biggest fears about moving out? What are you most excited about and what are you most worried about?

R: Everything that I am most excited about is what I am most worried about. Uhh.. that there would be money problems and that I would have to think that what am I going to eat today. And its not scary... I don't get scared that easily but it is a headache and whatever is a headache is going to be challenge but I am going to learn something from it so its going to be good.

M: And in this TV show... suppose... what is like the underlying theme... the story... because everything has like a reason or meaning

R: I think it would be a family drama... how do people live together and manage things... would be more of that... umm.. yeah I think it would be more about people and relationships... how they evolve and what they become... that's what it would be about. It would be dealing with people... what you were and how it changed .. situations.. mostly small things... nothing major... I mean, nobody is winning a lottery... reactions to situations... things like that

M: Tell me... in your daily life, from morning to evening... what are the kind of things that will change once you move out... I am not talking about the things like deciding what to eat etc. but what are the broader changes that will happen when you move out?

R: That I wont take my parents for granted... I wont be able to.. and that's a good thing. I need to learn that. What else will change? Routine would change... not seeing my parents everyday... I guess I will grow up a little. I mean, I don't think I am terribly immature but I am stubborn and all... so that will change. It will do me good... I will change and for the better so I think that's good. I might learn a little humility. You take things for granted so when you learn that it has a price, then you respect it a little.

M: OK... So lets talk about a different topic... So tell me about TV... What are the kind of things that you like to watch... the things that you see regularly

R: Umm... I am a complete TV addict.. Seinfeld always... Friends definitely... I mean who hasn't seen that... Umm.. I love Gray's anatomy. I have seen everything on TV (laughs). I have seen Small Wonder, I have seen Home Improvement. I mean Star World has been everything...So I will watch anything... I used to love the Practice... I love all dramas... especially Legal Dramas... Sitcoms stopped being funny except for like Seinfeld which is always funny. Friends because you are so used to it. Apart from that I will watch anything... like even Bold and the Beautiful...(laughs) At time of pre-boards and all... I will watch all of it

M: So is this all English? What about Hindi?

R: No... not Hindi... none of those shows...Not at all. I like watching Hindi movies and all but not the TV shows... I cant watch those. Music videos and hindi songs are fine but I cant watch hindi shows. Not even the laughter channels with the canned laughter

M: OK...so tell me in the kind of shows you watch... what would typically make you watch a show... why would you see it?

R: (silence) Well, obviously if its funny... if it strikes a chord then I want to watch it...I love watching Fraiser... I mean... I love watching anything... Prison Break... I am addicted to it (laughs).

M: So how does all this become a part of your life? How do you relate to it?

R: Yeah.. I thought as much but then I thought I am watching Prison Break so whom am I kidding (laughs) I think...human emotions that's what makes you relate to it... But I can really watch anything

M: Tell me.. what do you think you watch most of? Like you watch a lot of stuff but what is the most?

R: The drama ones... I think the comedies and the dramas...

M: Tell me among all the shows you see... which are the characters that you relate to... Like you think that's someone who is similar to you

R: One situation like my life... umm...I guess it's a lot of stuff.. you think that's me but then something else is also me...I don't know... Maybe Chandler...

M: Why?

R: (silence) I guess because nothing really flusters me.. But I do have a little bit of the Monica thing... the cleanliness and the hyper-ness at times...Its there and its not like there isn't any of Phoebe.. I mean, come on... everyone has a little bit of Phoebe in them... well... not everybody but I guess a lot of people

M: Fair enough

R: But not Joey or Rachel

M: Any characters? Does this happen that you see a character and you think they reflect your life

R: Does it happen? Umm... I guess if you make the effort to think of it that way then I guess it happens... but I may also get interested without finding it close to my life. I guess as long as I see it and I think that its possible then I guess I would be able to relate to it.

M: OK

R: Like I cant relate to fantasy... I mean I watch Roswell but not because of the fantasy but I guess because of the characters...I guess if its believable then I would be able to relate to it. That's why I cant watch the Hindi shows... I mean, its totally different... the characters and situations are just so weird...

M: But tell me.. when you are watching shows like Grey's anatomy or Practice etc., a lot of them are based in another country, different scenario... so how does that work?

R: Umm... I guess the way that I would react to situations since its in a different context...I don't know... I think reaction could cross geographic boundaries...just because it happens somewhere else doesn't mean it cant here...That's why the drama thing... Its human drama... People will reach to things in a similar way across... it doesn't change with state boundaries

M: So that doesn't matter?

R: I don't think so.. The fact that it happens in New York or London doesn't matter because what is it about? It's a friend and another friend and someone in a house, someone in a

courtroom. The situation remains more universal so its not a restriction that you wont watch it because its set in a stage that is familiar with you

M: So is there anything that seems unfamiliar or doesn't fit

R: Yeah.. there are many things that don't necessarily equate... I mean sometimes its too much... like look at Baywatch and Temptation Island and all (laughs) I might identify with some things and not all. I guess that's the fascination with reality TV... its really kind of perverse. I mean you want to see things because you are just curious. Then again its like a real situation and if anything then these are genuine emotions. I mean editing and all is ok but its real

M: Like if you are watching a show, say Friends, and you get it... you get the situation, the characters and all... but is there anything that doesn't fit in?

R: There is stuff that wont happen here... they are a lot more casual about sex and you cant expect that here... so that would be different... but then you know that its not here... its New York so some things are different

M: What about shows like Sex and the City that are more out there and direct about things like sex?

R: Somehow I have never really seen Sex and the City... I mean I have seen bits and pieces but not followed it as much. I guess the timing... 11.30 on Sunday nights.. that wont happen.. that's mummy and papa's TV time (laughs)... so then they will change the channel... you cant watch something on sex and the city!

M: So do you watch TV with your parents?

R: No no... hardly... just the news maybe and shows like Kaun Banega Crorepati...If my mother is sitting next to me, then its just music channels (laughs) Actually now I have become a little more indifferent... I might just turn the volume down. No actually I will change the channel. I mean I know its silly. I am 23 but when watching with my parents, I will change the channel. I feel a little angry... why should I but I will do it. My father is still OK but my mother is a bit of a prude.

M: When you are watching these shows... whats the mood like?

R: Surfing mostly... when I am watching a show then that's ok but otherwise I keep looking around. Actually I know whats going to come when so its ok. So I know if I reach home by 7.30, then I can catch Seinfeld. But its mostly quite casual... just chill and watch whatever is on

M: And do you every discuss shows with friends.. like this happened or that I saw this show and all?

R: There are people who you know watch specific shows so then you would watch it with them. Like Greys Anatomy... I know some people who watch it so with them its like discussions and all. Not everybody but some people are there.

M: So what kinds of discussions happen?

R: Umm... We don't discuss the issues and all... but more like specific characters and how cute they are (laughs) No actually its about the characters like I feel so bad for this and I feel so bad for that ... or that did you see whats happening on that show. So if you have friends who watch a show then you discuss it with them. Ohh... I have a good example... a friend's friend and I got really close just because we both watched the Practice and so we would keep discussing that. One more common link... so that's ok

M: How many hours of TV would you watch a day... on an average?

R: How many ever people generally watch... just add 5 to that (laughs). No...now its much lesser because of work... but I have my fixed routine.... And I will switch TV off by about 10.30 at night... Its not like you keep watching just because you are seeing something. Over the last few months, its been Internet also because both my computer and TV are in the same room, so sometimes I see TV and sometimes I surf the net.

M: Do you watch TV on the net?

R: Youtube and all... no not really

M: OK... whats the one show that you like really or are close to... even old shows

R: Ohh.. there are so many... You know I hadn't seen the season finale of Friends.. the final season...and I saw it a few weeks ago... and I felt aww... its all over now... you feel so close to them... and its not like a witty show or anything but you just feel all warm and cosy thinking about it

M: OK... lets just talk about Friends some more. Do you remember any specific stories or plots

R: The we were on a break (laughs). I mean you can twist it a little but you can relate to it. Like you have a fight with your boyfriend but you see someone else... that's so true. That's going on I think (laughs) so current context.

M: laughs

R: But there have to be more... Like friend moving out.. friend leaving... that sort of thing. But that's maybe pushing it a little. But actually you can let your imagination work a little and it happens... you can relate to it.

M: How do you think watching Friends changes your ideas about what you know?

R: Umm... tough question (laughs)... I think because you see so much more... Like I know about the US and UK and all... but now you see how things are... like how they deal with stuff... like their parents or something... I mean they are so indifferent so I guess that's something new.... But its also good... Like living alone.. I know its going to be tough but then you see people on the show... its one big party!... None of my friends stay away but if I find some more people living alone like me... then I know I will have fun.... Like you see Monica and Rachel... they are fighting about cleaning the place and cooking and all.. but then its also nice to have someone to come home to and take care of you

M: What about things like dating and all?

R: (laughs) That is never never happening here!!! No chance... Like even if I have a boyfriend I am not living with him or going on blind dates. Like if you have someone, then that's great but its not like Friends... that's just too much

M: OK... I think we are done for today... Thanks so much for your time... It was really nice talking to you and I hope to see you at the group discussion

Electronic MSc Dissertation Series

Media@lse Electronic MSc Dissertations will:

- Present high quality MSc Dissertations which received a mark of Distinction (70% and above).
- Selected dissertations will be published electronically as pdf files, subject to review and approval by the Editors.

Authors retain copyright, and publication here does not preclude the subsequent development of the paper for publication elsewhere.
