

Public Abstract

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Title:Exploring Viewer Responses to Self-reflexivity in Television Narratives

Self-reflexivity occurs when a television show makes a statement that acknowledges its nature as a television show. This is commonly called "breaking the fourth wall", but this paper argues that self-reflexivity is much more than that. This project develops a framework for classifying self-reflexive statements based on referent.

This project also found that self-reflexivity has the potential to increase the viewers'™ enjoyment of a show, but it also has the potential to turn viewers away from the show. Fans of Boston Legal indicated that self-reflexivity enhances their viewing experience, making it more enjoyable and more interactive. They also feel that self-reflexivity enhances their relationships with the show, its creators, and its characters. Alternatively, non-viewers of Boston Legal (people who had never seen the show before this study) indicated feeling alienated and "turned off" by the self-reflexive references in the show. They indicated a lack of understanding and an adverse reaction to self-reflexivity. Thus, producers wanting to incorporate self-reflexive references must strike a balance between enhancing existing viewers'™ experiences and alienating first-time viewers with references they do not understand.