EXPLORING AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO

SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN TELEVISION NARRATIVES

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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I dedicate this work to my wife, who was patient when I needed it

and impatient when I needed it more.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, Tamara, and the rest of my family. I appreciate your encouragement and patience. I am constantly amazed at how my life has turned out, and I would not be here without you. I am still enjoying the journey and I am glad you are all a part of it.

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ABSTRACT

Self-reflexivity refers to "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii). This paper expands Olson's (1987) framework for discussing self-reflexive (Olson calls self-reflexivity "meta-television") statements based on the referent. This study proposes a framework also based on referent, but divides such references into four main categories of self-reflexivity (referring to the show itself, to other shows/genres, to the medium of television, and to the corporeal world) and then into sub-categories based on a textual analysis of the television show, *Boston Legal*. It also looks at the way TV audiences, and specifically audiences of *Boston Legal* read and respond to self-reflexive statements within the show. There has been much conjecture about audiences, but little qualitative research dealing with this topic.

This project 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.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Alan Shore, one of the main characters on ABC's television show *Boston Legal*,

played by James Spader, is sitting at his desk. Denny Crane, the other main character

walks into the office, and Alan says, "Ah, there you are. I've hardly seen you this

episode" (from episode 2.09 of *Boston Legal*, titled "Gone"). As a devoted member of the

audience, I chuckle at this remark because I had been thinking the exact same thing.

William Shatner's character, Denny Crane, had hardly appeared in the entire 42 minutes

of the show that night, and I wondered why I had not seen him up until that point. Alan

Shore simply verbalized what I was thinking. But in a way, he also revealed something

about the nature of television production to me. The statement "I've hardly seen you this

episode" tells the audience that the producers realize the character Denny Crane usually

plays a more prominent role in the episodes and soothes their concern over not seeing

him on the screen for a greater amount of time.

In another episode (3.13: "Dumping Bella"), Denny is dressed as Dick Cheney

and Alan is dressed as another character on *Boston Legal*, Shirley Schmidt, played by

Candice Bergen. They are dancing on the balcony after the costume party the law firm

held and Denny asks what people would think if they saw the two dancing on the

balcony. Alan replies, "Well, if they're regular viewers, they know by now [that]

anything goes." Although slightly different, this statement also acknowledges to the

viewers that *Boston Legal* is indeed a fictional television show, well aware of its

audience's viewing behaviors. *Boston Legal* is one of many shows that incorporate self-

reflexivity into the narrative, giving its viewers a unique experience as they negotiate

meaning in the television text. Television shows that exhibit self-reflexivity, such as *Boston Legal*, let viewers in on the television writing and production process and give them a unique understanding of production techniques, narrative structure, and even television industry practices.

Self-reflexivity refers to "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii). The above examples from *Boston Legal* are self-reflexive when they highlight the reception ("regular viewers know anything goes") and the conventions of the show genre (that as a main character, audiences expect to see Denny Crane play a prominent role in the episode). This dissertation fills a gap in knowledge about self-reflexivity in television shows. Most of the existing knowledge comes from textual analyses of self-reflexivity and self-reflexive statements. These studies have each developed in different areas; some scholars are studying self-reflexivity in literature, many study film, a few look at television texts, and some even study self-reflexive comics. They have each developed a different framework for looking at self-reflexivity, rarely expanding upon each other's work, with the exception of debating whether self-reflexivity is a modern or post-modern phenomenon. This study compiles the previous research into one existing framework, and then uses that framework to do a textual analysis of *Boston Legal* and expand upon the existing literature and framework. It also takes research on self-reflexivity into the realm of audience research instead of merely suggesting how audiences may respond to self-reflexivity and self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*.

The first time I watched *Boston Legal,* I thoroughly enjoyed the self-reflexivity and the subtle ways that it acknowledged its viewers. Many of the self-reflexive statements are not obvious, and viewers may gloss over them. For instance, in episode 3.13: "Dumping Bella", Shirley Schmidt (played by Candice Bergen) tells someone that she has not yet received her movie screener for "March of the Penguins" from the Academy. As a lawyer, she is not eligible for such a screener. Only as the real-life Candice Bergen, a member of the Academy, is she able to screen movie candidates. A viewer who does not understand how the Academy works or who is not paying attention to the show would most likely not pick up on this self-reflexive statement, referring to the difference between a television character and the real-life actress who plays that character. As I watch the show and pick up on more of these self-reflexive statements, I wonder if everyone "gets" them. Talking to friends who are also fans of the show, I understand that viewers have very different reactions to such statements. One friend who is a regular viewer and likes the show describes the self-reflexivity as "too contrived" and detracting from his viewing experience. Another friend had similar reactions to me, thoroughly enjoying being treated as an intellectual viewer who is able to understand the self-reflexivity in the show. Based on the range of reactions my friends seemed to have, I began to wonder how other people view self-reflexivity in television, and how it affects their understanding of, and relationship to, the text. This dissertation looks at the different kinds of self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* and how audiences negotiate the meaning of these self-reflexive statements within the text. By looking at, and creating a framework for, the different types of self-reflexivity within *Boston Legal*, we can discuss the various types of self-reflexive devices used within television texts, and by doing qualitative

interviews we can also look at audiences of these self-reflexive texts and the ways that they negotiate meaning.

Boston Legal

For the purposes of this study, the word "text" refers to the television show *Boston Legal*. The texts used for discussion and for the qualitative focus groups consist only of the television show and not the commercials or the ability for viewers to change what they are watching (effectively including an infinite number of possible combinations of texts that could make up the viewing experience). While television scholars (see for example, Lewis, 1991) often argue that the only way to replicate the television experience is to allow viewers to see commercials and/or have the ability to jump from one channel to another, this study used the *Boston Legal* DVD collections for both the discussion of self-reflexivity and for the focus groups. Because this study seeks to look at specific examples within the text, it is necessary for both the fans and non-viewers (Jonathan Gray, 2003 uses a similar term, non-fans, to describe people who watch the show, but do not consider themselves to be fans) to be paying attention to the storylines and narrative, and commercials and "channel-hopping" would introduce the possibility for distraction. Also, one group this study looks at is comprised of fans of *Boston Legal* and their viewing experiences. Many fans, especially the type of fans this study used in focus groups have most likely bought the DVDs of *Boston Legal*, so using only the episode (minus commercials) on the DVD actually does replicate their typical viewing behavior.

Boston Legal began as a spin-off of the hit television show *The Practice* in ABC's fall lineup on October 3, 2004. Recently finishing its fifth and final season on December

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8, 2008, *Boston Legal* originally survived a move from Sunday evenings to Tuesday

evenings and was nominated for and has earned numerous awards. Despite early

skepticism (see for example, Martin, 2004), *Boston Legal* maintained a steady audience

of around ten million viewers over its five year run, losing only about two million

viewers in the time slot change (www.boston-legal.org). In 2004, *Boston Legal* attracted

an average 12.1 million viewers, "a 15% increase over *The Practice*'s audience last fall

[2003], and a 21% improvement in adults 18-49" (Romano, 2004, p. 5). Although only

ranked in the mid 40's the third and fourth seasons (www.boston-legal.org), *Boston Legal*

completed its fifth season on ABC on December 8, 2008. Since 2004, it has been

nominated for fifteen Emmy awards, three Golden Globes, six Screen Actor's Guild

awards, and six Satellite awards. It has won a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting

Actor (William Shatner) and Emmy's for Outstanding Lead Actor (James Spader has

won twice), Outstanding Guest Actor, Outstanding Supporting Actor, and Outstanding

Single Camera Sound Mixing on a Series. And so, despite some criticism (ABC's fan

forum for *Boston Legal*, now removed from their website, had audience members

regularly posting messages saying that the show had become "too political" for them to

continue watching) and some lack of enthusiasm from the network (Owen, 2008), *Boston

Legal* maintained a consistent audience for five seasons. As Pannick, (n.d.) wrote about

the show,

> This is a well written and expertly acted award-winning
> drama. It does not take itself too seriously. At one point Alan
> Shore tells Denny Crane: "I've hardly seen you this episode."
> When Alan Shore is attracted by another lawyer, his secretary
> warns him: "Don't fall for her: she's just a guest star." There are
> many (perhaps too many) "Beam me up!" references to Shatner's
> former television life as Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*.

> But behind the laughter, the tears, and the chaos, *Boston Legal* is making a serious point: in an age of increasing conformity and subservience, individualism is under threat, and the basic rights of people to dissent often depend, in the last resort, on the lawyers who represent them.

Indeed, *Boston Legal* gained some critical claim as well for its bold take on social issues and its willingness to confront some of the hottest political topics during its five year run. For those who are not familiar with the show, it does this by setting up opposing viewpoints, most often between the two main characters, Alan Shore and Denny Crane. Denny is a buffoon, much in the way Archie Bunker was. He is arrogant, extremely conservative, and ignorant about the facts and research behind the issues. He regularly wins cases, but often through shear passion for his side of the issue, and not any logical argument. Alan Shore, on the other hand, cites facts and research constantly to back up his arguments, both in court and out of it. He almost always has an opposing viewpoint to Denny's, but the two remain the closest of friends through all of their arguments. In short, Denny represents passionate ignorance, and Alan represents rational socialism.

The show has a fan-run website (www.boston-legal.org) with six thousand members who actively post in discussion forums, compile statistics about the show, write transcripts for the show, and capture screen shots. The fact that *Boston Legal* has maintained a fairly consistent audience (Owen, 2008) may also speak to the self-reflexivity of the show, as it rewards regular viewers with clever references to previous episodes, other shows, and the narrative structure of the storylines. Viewers could even be more likely to return so that they do not miss any such references.

It is important to note that *Boston Legal* is not entirely self-reflexive. Self-reflexivity includes shows that highlight their own production; therefore other shows,

such as *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (NBC, 2006-2007) and *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006-present) are almost entirely self-reflexive, as both are television shows about producing television shows. While these shows do contain self-reflexive statements, because the premise of the show is self-reflexive, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* and *30 Rock* are not as interesting cases as *Boston Legal* because of the subtlety with which *Legal* presents its reflexivity (*Boston Legal* never breaks the fourth wall; it never shows the means of production of the show itself, or talks directly to the audience. All instances of self-reflexivity are woven into the dialogue in a way that makes it seem like regular conversation). As Campbell (1979) suggests, "a film [or TV show] that simply tells a story about the making of a motion picture may be reflexive in a quite straightforward fashion, but it is not clear that the critic need treat such a film differently from the conventional narrative work" (p. 71). There are many episodes of *Legal* without any reflexive references at all, though there is a definite trend as the show became more comfortable with its audience. The number of reflexive references increases from season one to season five. Viewers are much more likely to miss reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* if they are not paying close attention, or to have different understandings of the text as a whole because the plot lines are not reflexive and the premise of the show itself is not reflexive. There are other shows that even use self-reflexivity in the same subtle ways as *Boston Legal*, such as *The Simpsons*, *Stargate SG-1*, *The Office*, and *Scrubs*, but none that reach the same sophisticated and educated audience that *Boston Legal* aims for.

<div align="center">Purpose and Design</div>

In a way, the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* is post-modern in its multiple layered meanings. Indeed, even Olson (1987) describes self-reflexivity as "post-modern"

in the title of his article, but self-reflexivity is, in fact, a modernist tendency against the hyper-reality of the post-modern television that Fiske (1986) describes. Self-reflexivity is the modernist push for revealing the form of the message in television, and exposes the mechanisms of communication within the "mediated situation" (Jones, 2005, p. 6). While self-reflexivity in television may in fact indicate an acknowledgement of a more socialized audience and "artistic maturity", it also may indicate a different sort of relationship between the audience and the text. When a show like *Boston Legal* foregrounds "their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii), viewers become participants in the narrative itself instead of simply serving as audience members, passively and voyeuristically looking at the action.

This dissertation is a study of self-reflexive statements within a television show, how the audience negotiates the meanings of those statements, and how those understandings affect their relationship to the text. Chapter one gives an introduction to the topic, with a brief discussion of self-reflexivity as a research topic, and my personal desire to study the topic. Chapter two begins with a review of the way audiences interact with a text and negotiate meanings with those texts. It continues with a more specific definition of self-reflexivity, a history of research into the subject, and finally a compilation of the different practices of self-reflexivity seen on television according to previous research. Chapter two also outlines the specific questions of this study, and how the existing literature leads to this inquiry. Chapter three discusses the methods and means of collecting information needed to answer those specific questions and how this study fits into the larger body of literature on self-reflexivity. Chapter four expands on

the framework developed in chapter two to describe the self-reflexive statements in

Boston Legal and discuss the possible implications of these statements for audiences.

Chapter five presents a qualitative analysis of focus group discussions with actual

audiences, and chapter six describes the meanings of these discussions and the

implications of those findings on the study of self-reflexivity and television as a medium.

Justification

Self-reflexivity is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but as the artistic form of

television becomes increasingly developed, self-reflexivity becomes more complex. Self-

reflexivity is also "a growing trend in television" (Aden, 1991, p. 401). From the

beginning, self-reflexivity has been seen in various films, such as Dziga Vertov's *Man*

With a Movie Camera (1929). Vertov's documentary follows a cameraman around as he

films different scenes and puts them together for the audience (presumably the audience

sitting in the theater watching Vertov's film). Self-reflexivity is currently seen in very

subtle ways in shows such as *Boston Legal*, such as when Alan Shore says they "sue

people and make it fun and interesting to watch" to another character as if it is normal

dialogue (Episode 4.9:No Brains Left Behind). Historically, self-reflexive statements

would call attention to themselves so that the viewer could be sure to understand the

references made. Often there was a laugh track to highlight the intertextual reference, or

characters would actually take the time to explain the reference. The current trend in self-

reflexivity, seen in shows like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *30 Rock*, and others, glosses

over the references because they are peripheral to the audience's understanding of the

main story lines.

Withalm (2004) describes a decline in self-reflexivity in the 1970's and its reemergence in the 1990's: "this time, the practices are not confined to general cultural intertextuality, or merely quoting the score of famous films, alluding to genre conventions, or using the actor-role relation when well-known actors/actresses, or at least their look-alikes, appear as spokespersons for a certain brand" (p. 340). Because producers are currently using self-reflexivity in different ways, audiences negotiate self-reflexive statements in new and different ways. Inglis (1990) describes the way that audiences react when artistic forms undergo a transformation (as in the current case with self-reflexivity):

> Presumably when new forms of thought and expression appear in a society there is a general jolt among its audience, and then the audience variously responds, with a strong generational bias, by rejection or acceptance. As it does so, it alters the reach and the vocabulary of the conversation of the culture. That conversation either accepts the newcomer, changing it to suit itself, or sees it off at the door, in which case subsequent generations rarely hear of it. If the culture accepts it, it seeks also to tame it (p. 136).

As Inglis points out, when new forms enter the artistic realm, audiences respond to it in different ways. Once a new form, such as the new ways self-reflexivity is used in television, enters the culture, new vocabularies of understanding must be created. Audiences work to understand the form, talk to others about their understandings, and in the case of self-reflexivity, focus group members in a pilot study to this one indicated that they even seek outside knowledge of the reference in order to understand it (e.g. using the Internet to look up an obscure reference to *Mayberry, RFD* (1968) made on *Boston Legal*).

Self-reflexivity is more than just a change in the artistic form, or a punch line to a joke. Loshitzsky (1991) looks at self-reflexivity as a mode of reinforcing journalistic

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authority in news programs. By exposing the mechanisms of television production, and reflecting on the gathering, writing, and reporting of news, self-reflexivity actually gives more credibility to news sources, as it highlights the rigorous journalistic process. On *Boston Legal*, the self-reflexive statements serve a variety of functions. Sometimes, the references are made simply to lighten the mood. Other statements are made immediately after a strong political stance is taken, perhaps to remind the viewer that they are watching a television show, and not to be offended by the political statements made, such as when Denny Crane says "no sex for the writer" during the 2007-2008 Writer's Guild of America strike as he works on a case with Shirley Schmidt involving lack of medical coverage for PTSD stricken war veterans. And sometimes, the self-reflexive statements serve to make viewers focus on a more serious topic than what they expect from their television (e.g. when a character on *Boston Legal* who highlights problems with the legal system itself). Previous research has touched on some ways that self-reflexivity is used and on some possible readings of such statements by audiences. There are several studies that contain partial lists of self-reflexive devices. There are also many studies that look at different types of texts, from literature to film and television. There are even many studies that predict the ways audiences might respond to self-reflexive statements, but none that actually look at audience reception of self-reflexivity. This dissertation compiles previous lists of self-reflexive devices and adds to it so that there is one comprehensive framework that can be used to discuss self-reflexivity. It also looks at the way audiences actually read self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* in order to understand the ways that audiences negotiate the meaning of self-reflexive statements.

Previous Research

Previous research on self-reflexivity has fallen short of actually looking at specific ways television texts can be self-reflexive and how the viewer reads each of those specific ways. If, as Lewis (1991) writes, "television has, in this sense, taught its audience a new set of aesthetic rules, a visual grammar shared by producers and consumers" (p. 63), then the viewers themselves must be looked at as well as the texts. Ultimately, the way that television viewers understand meaning in the text comes at the point of intersection between the text, the social and cultural context, and the actual act of viewing. In order to understand the ways that audiences negotiate meaning and their relationship to a text, we must first understand the text, audience, and contextual information the audience brings to its reading of the text.

One main goal of this study is to understand how self-reflexivity in television affects its audience. This study creates a framework for the types of self-reflexive statements made in *Boston Legal*, and then uses that framework to understand the different types of self-reflexive statements and how audiences might read them. Once the text itself is understood then we can understand the ways the audience reads self-reflexivity and how those readings affect their relationship to the text. If self-reflexivity is a sign of "artistic maturity" (Olson, 1987, p.284), then it is also a sign that the form of television continues to evolve. Newcomb (2005) writes of television research, "I am concerned that we ask questions that help explain to others why television continues to be so important. That is what I look for when I read new work. That is just about all I care about, and if I do not find those critical questions, I stop reading" (p. 111). This dissertation is one such exploration. Self-reflexivity represents an acknowledgement by

the producers of television that the medium is prominent in today's culture: "Television creates in its viewers' minds an increasingly hermetic, self encompassing world (White, 1986, p. 52) based on an imaginary diegetic continuity which constructs homology between the world *on* TV and the world *of* TV" (Loshitzky, 1991, p. 558). Self-reflexivity allows viewers to negotiate the places where the world of television overlaps the corporeal world, i.e. the "real world". This study seeks to understand this negotiation of meanings and whether these negotiations lead to a new relationship with the text, the show, or even the medium of television.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Self-reflexivity

In *Understanding Media* (1995), McLuhan writes media are "make happen agents, not make aware agents" (p. 48). By writing that media are "make happen agents" McLuhan refers to the influence media exert over people without them being aware of the means, institutions, and aesthetics of the source, effectively overemphasizing the text and medium. For instance, commercial advertising flow within children's television shows can influence consumer behavior (McAllister & Giglio, 2005), attitudes towards political candidates can change through media exposure (Benoit et al., 2007), and the media can even influence our perceptions of societal standards for things such as body image (Holmstrom, 2004), most of the time without the awareness of the media consumer. In an almost cyclical way, television influences society even as society dictates what is seen on television (Williams, 1974). Indeed, many scholars have studied television texts as some sort of reflection of our society, or transparency into our reality (Fiske, 1987, p. 21).

The second part of McLuhan's statement, that media are not "make aware agents", means that media sources operate with a transparency, or a one-way mirror of sorts. The audience can see the action of the television show, and yet the program's characters and narrative do not show any awareness of the audience. Corporations desire to influence peoples' behaviors without making them aware of these manipulations. Indeed, if media consumers became aware of the way they are being manipulated, they would make more informed decisions, thereby lessening the subtle influence of advertising. So what happens when a media text shatters this transparency and

acknowledges that it is indeed a text, to be used by the consumer or viewer as a fictional narrative and nothing more? This part of the literature review looks at research relevant to the study of self-reflexive media, including the definition of "self-reflexive media", different kinds of self-reflexive techniques, possible reasons producers use self-reflexive techniques, possible effects on the audience, and previous research on *Boston Legal*, the television show that this study uses as an example of self-reflexive devices.

Self-reflexivity as Human Nature

Human beings are remarkable animals when you consider their ability to communicate subtly and with nuance. Humans are aware of their own existence, and are able to ponder their position in the universe. It is this ability to think abstractly that sets us apart from other animals. Part of this abstract thinking is the ability to think about what we think about. Humans have the ability to reflect on their own thinking patterns and how they form their opinions. In this respect, humans have the ability to practice self-reflexivity. As Maas (2003) defines it,

> self-reflexiveness, the human ability to pay attention to what we pay attention to by moving to a higher order of abstracting, our power to develop a detached almost third-person perspective about a first-person perspective, I consider one of the most fascinating formulations of general semantics. The capacity to step back and observe an intense emotional upheaval, in some cases even studying it in slow motion and thoroughly mapping its subtle changes, distinguishes the human being from the animal (p. 313).

Self-reflexive thinking allows people to analyze human behavior and understand how and why we respond to certain stimuli. Not only do we have the ability to understand reactions, we have a language to describe the process of knowing how and what we know. Self-reflexive language allows us to talk about our process of abstract thinking. Johnson (1979) writes that:

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> Man not only knows about his environment, he knows that he knows; he is aware of his awareness; he reacts not only to his environment but to his own reactions. His language is similarly self-reflexive; he can make statements about statements about statements, etc. And because abstraction can always be further abstracted, we speak of the process of abstracting as "self-reflexive" (p. 95).

Self-reflexive language gives human beings a way to analyze how and why they feel certain ways, and why they do certain things the way they do them. Self-reflexivity gives humans a way to reconsider why they believe what they believe. Self-reflexive thinking and language also allow us to analyze the language with which we communicate, including audiovisual communication such as television.

This language about language is called metalanguage. DeVito (1974) explains: "all natural languages have a metalanguage. All natural language possesses the design feature of self-reflectiveness; they can all be used to talk about language. All natural languages are, inherently, tools of language analysis" (p. 196-197). Metalanguage gives us the tools needed to discuss communication techniques, including the self-reflexive devices used in television texts to explain the world of television.

In particular for this study, metalanguage also facilitates the discussion about self-reflexive media. Metacommunication allows us to talk about media sources and look at how the messages are constructed and conveyed to the audience. And self-reflexive television is itself a form of metacommunication. Olson (1987) calls self-reflexive television "meta-television". This study will use the more descriptive term, "self-reflexive" because it focuses on specific instances within the text. The term "meta-television" makes the phenomenon seem inclusive of the entire text, or the medium itself. Olson is, however, one of the few authors that focus on self-reflexive television, and not

self-reflexivity in general (in literature, film, etc.). Esser and D'Angelo (2006) look at metacoverage, or news sources that discuss their own coverage of an event, but they couch metacoverage within a political agenda, with very little discussion of the audience. While this study is focused entirely on meta-television, or more accurately, focused entirely on self-reflexivity within the medium of television, much of the literature, definitions, and practices discussed in this literature review are from other media sources as well, since much of the research done on self-reflexivity has only been applied to literature, film, and other media.

So, the self-reflexivity is operating on two different levels. The first level of analysis is the media source that contains self-reflexive elements. For example, when a television show's main character turns and addresses the camera, this direct address allows the viewers to understand their position as an audience. The audience is positioned as the receivers of the communication instead of unseen observers. On this level, the transparency of the medium is shattered. The audience is thrown into the spotlight and becomes a part of the communication.

The second level of self-reflexivity occurs when the self-reflexive communication is analyzed. It is at this level that this study operates. Self-reflexive media should have a different impact on their audience because of the inclusion of the audience in the communicative act. Because of their inclusion as receivers of the message instead of observers, reflexive media, and specifically self-reflexive television shows convey messages in a different way than traditional narrative. When the audience is included in the communication act, they become participants in and analysts of the television show. This is the attraction to this form of narrative because it draws viewers into the show, but

it can also make them more aware of the television show itself: its political statements, its social hegemony, and the message it is communicating. Self-reflexive media use a different kind of narrative structure, and are therefore likely to create a different relationship between the text and its audience.

Defining Self-Reflexive Media

There are several different conceptions of self-reflexivity we could use when discussing these types of texts. There are wonderful examples going back to shows like *The Honeymooners* when the main characters would occasionally wink at the camera and acknowledge the presence of the viewing audience. There are also historic examples in literature, such as Jane Austin's *Northanger Abbey: And Persuasion* (1890), where she writes "And what are you reading, Miss-…Oh! It is only a novel" (p. 27). In this literary example, the character is mocking novels, such as the one the passage is contained in. The reader is shaken from the world of fantasy and made aware that what they are holding in their hand is merely one fictional story among many. This is different from meta-narrative, or stories that are entirely about the composition of stories. Self-reflexive statements in narrative fiction, whether it is in literature, on television, or made through any other medium, serve to shatter the transparency, or fourth wall of the text abruptly, breaking the consumer out of the story and back into the corporeal world.

When I say "self-reflexive" statements, I do not refer to those texts that are entirely self-reflexive, or as Olson (1987) calls it, meta-television. Some media sources do not attempt to remain transparent. For example, there are television shows whose entire premise is that the characters are media producers (shows like *30 Rock* and *Studio 60*). There are also "Reality Shows" where the camera adopts a "cinema vérité" role. In

the Documentary film tradition, cinema vérité attempted to show reality with the acknowledgement that reality is affected by the camera's presence. *Lonely Boy*, the Documentary film about the life of Paul Anka (produced by the National Film Board of Canada) is an example of this tradition of vérité, as is the television show, *COPS*. Both *Lonely Boy* and *COPS* make little effort to hide the camera from the participants shown on camera. While these are all excellent illustrations of self-reflexive media texts, they also take it to the extreme, and the self-reflexivity becomes a part of the narrative (Campbell, 1979). Viewers are drawn into these texts because they are watching "actual" events and not necessarily a fictional show. Because media users are always aware of the self-reflexivity, there is no "shattering" of the one-way transparency of the camera; instead, the presence of the camera is always felt. Campbell (1979) suggests that these texts are viewed differently. Because viewers are constantly aware of the reflexivity, even though these meta-televisual texts acknowledge their role as media, this study is more concerned with texts that are entirely fictional, yet on occasion choose to break the one way transparency and show the viewer that they are indeed a fictional story, being presented through the lens of the camera and the flicker of the television screen.

As mentioned before, Stam (1992) defines self-reflexivity in this way: "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (p. xiii). By combining Stam's definition with Olson's (1987) definition of metafiction as "fiction that investigates its own nature" (p. 284), we can arrive at a working definition of "self-reflexive statement" for the purpose of this study. The terms "self-reflexive statement" and "self-reflexive device" are used to discuss those instances in the text where *Boston*

Legal "investigates its own existence" and meaning as a television show by "foregrounding its own production, authorship, intertextual influences, reception, or enunciation" (Olson, 1987, p. 284, Stam, 1985, p. xiii). And so for this study, the type of "self-reflexive" media discussed are those media texts that create an entirely fictional world, drawing the viewer in to the narrative, but then through some narrative, visual, or aural statement, acknowledges that the text is a fictional story, and that the viewer is merely that, a consumer of the text.

These self-reflexive statements can be visual images that acknowledge the nature of the show (for example, someone backs up from the set so far that they "bump into" a camera). They can also be sentences or statements where a character or narrator refers in some way to the show itself as a show. A good example of this occurred on the television show *Stargate SG-1*. The series, which is a long running science fiction program in its 10th season, is a story about traveling to other planets, and interacting with alien beings by means of a "stargate". The show has spent 10 years drawing viewers in to a complex narrative with multiple fictional storylines. Occasionally the show vaguely refers to situations that could be seen as similar, politically, to situations occurring in real life, although even this is not common. For example, the evil that currently plagues the galaxy are called the "Ori", and are a race of enlightened beings who are forcing their religion upon humans and other races. While it is not too much of a stretch to say that the "Ori" could represent the religious conservative movement in America, the show does an excellent job of presenting this as a fictional story, with very loose connections to anything in real life. In 10 years, *Stargate SG-1* rarely makes any self-reflexive statements to thrust the viewer back into that real world, but in episode 0814 ("Full

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Alert"), when the former vice president comes to visit the hero, Colonial Jack O'Neill, and tells Jack that he is now the head of a sinister organization known as "The Trust", O'Neill says "Hang on. I must have missed an episode". Indeed, regular viewers of the show would know that O'Neill did not appear in the previous episode, and therefore did essentially "miss an episode". Although the statement does not literally say the words "this is just a television show", it does serve as a subtle and humorous reminder to the viewers that *Stargate SG-1* is, in fact, only a fictional television show. The statement "I must have missed an episode" could actually be something that someone would say in real life, meaning, "I must have missed something". Because this statement could be something (however unlikely) that could be said between people in reality, it merely serves as a subtle reminder that the show is a fictional story that viewers are allowed to see voyeuristically. It does not necessarily snap the viewer back to reality, but causes an astute consumer to chuckle at the inside joke.

These inside jokes are seen throughout the television show *Boston Legal*, and the way that the audience reads and negotiates these statements are what this study seeks to look at. The very subtle statements in television narrative where the viewer is included in the story could be read in very different ways. A viewer who is unfamiliar with the series or the reference being made may simply ignore it, whereas a regular viewer may understand all the references and find humor in them.

Self-reflexivity is not the most popular term for what I am describing, but I would argue that it is the most appropriate term. The term "meta-television" (Olson, 1987) and the colloquial term "breaking the fourth wall" (I prefer to use Olson's term, direct address), where actor turn and "talk to the audience" by talking directly to the camera

have been used in popular culture to describe the phenomenon. The reason that "meta-television" is not an appropriate term to use to describe all self-reflexive devices is that it is a holistic term, implying that if there is one self-reflexive statement, that the entire text is self-reflexive. This is not the case in many television shows, such as *Boston Legal*. "Breaking the fourth wall" is a very common term that people use to describe self-reflexive statements. In the cases where an actor directly addresses the audience, or if the cameras used to produce the show are actually presented to the audience, literally "breaking" the convention of the unseen fourth wall, I would agree that the term is appropriate. But there are many self-reflexive devices used in narrative fiction where neither of those things happens, and yet astute audiences are reminded that they are watching a television show. For example, when *Boston Legal* was moved to Wednesday nights during their final season in 2008, the characters are shown talking in the coffee room of their fictional law firm, Crane, Poole, and Schmidt. Someone comes in to the room and says, "We're on." This prompts another character to say "What? What night is it?" While this statement is not made directly to the audience, it is made for the audience. The characters do not break the fourth wall, and yet the statement is very self-reflexive, highlighting the reception of the text.

Distinctions Between Different Traditions of Reflexivity

Siska (1979) distinguishes between two different traditions of self-reflexivity, orthodox and modernist: "Orthodox reflexivity affirms the role of narrative structure as a transparency; modernist reflexivity seeks to reverse this role" (p. 285). According to Siska, orthodox reflexivity maintains the one-way transparency of television proclaimed by Fiske (1987). An example of this type of reflexivity may include when the camera

does a swish pan between two actors in dialogue, or the fast-paced intro of a show that is returning from a commercial break, where several scenes of the city where the show takes place are shown. Indeed, *Boston Legal* does this during every commercial break, and yet it does not feel "self-reflexive" because it flows as part of the narrative; in this case, these scenes are used to set the location for the audience. Alternatively, modernist reflexivity would be what most other authors consider to be self-reflexivity, when the transparency of the narrative is shattered and the audience becomes participants. Modernist reflexivity would include anytime the camera itself is shown, actors address the audience directly, or any other instance where the audience is no longer a voyeur.

The problem with Siska's traditions is that they do not go into enough detail about the actual practices of self-reflexivity or the way audiences negotiate these texts. Many self-reflexive statements that occur in cinema and television are subtle enough to be missed by less astute viewers. The actual implementation of the two traditions has never been studied, and neither has the actual effect of self-reflexive statements on the audience themselves.

For example, Siska (1979) does not discuss the audience in his discussion of the two different objects of self-reflexivity. Reflexivity, which, according to Siska, means "conscious turning back on itself," "appears in aesthetic media in two ways: 1) in the artist reflecting upon his medium of expression; and 2) in the artist as creator reflecting upon himself" (p. 285). This is, however, an interesting distinction because most of the research done since Siska has failed to acknowledge the reflexivity of the artist. This is different from intertextuality, or the reference to other texts within the current text. When the artist reflects upon himself, this opens up a new level of familiarity with the author

and their work. For example, only someone familiar with George Lucas and his love of the comic *Flash Gordon* would know that the Tauntaun animal in *The Empire Strikes Back* was based on an animal from the original comic. This level of familiarity with the author would only be known to certain audience members, and therefore self-reflexivity of the author themselves would go unnoticed by most viewers. Surprisingly, researchers after 1979 did not touch on this practice of reflexivity. This study includes this type of self-reflexivity in its analysis by looking at differences between fans of *Boston Legal* and non-viewers. As mentioned before, fans of the series are typically more knowledgeable about the writers and producers. Fans are more likely to understand the references to the author that Siska (1979) describes.

Withalm (2004) outlines a model of self-reflexive media based on their production, distribution, reception, and product (she analyzes commercial advertisements, so "product" refers to the product being sold, not the television text itself). Certainly if one of the reasons producers include self-reflexive narrative in their television shows is commercial, then any study of self-reflexivity should also look at the distribution and reception of the show, and not just the production techniques and the product itself. It certainly makes a difference if a film is shot for distribution only on television or on DVD, and not in a movie theater. Movies shot specifically for television have a different structure due to the commercial requirements, usually having a two to three minute break at least every ten to fifteen minutes. The narrative must take this into account so that viewers do not change the channel during the break, effectively breaking the narrative structure into ten-minute arcs, with a cliffhanger before every break. Movies shot for the theater do not necessarily need to follow this structure, nor does the overall length of a

theatrical film need to end in increments of thirty as the television text does in order to fill a programming time slot. An astute viewer would recognize the thirty-minute commercial pattern, and understand that the television movie ends at a specific time, therefore the narrative will conclude by that time. These are all self-reflexive: the medium requirements become obvious to the viewer, making them more aware of the structural elements of what they are watching.

When discussing self-reflexivity, the production techniques themselves, the author or producer, and the distribution must all be taken into account. This is because a television show does not take place as an isolated story. It is constructed within the context of the culture, and created for audiences with a wide array of knowledge that they bring to their viewing. Self-reflexivity can affect the audience in many different ways because of this. As Withalm (2004) points out, a model for analyzing the phenomenon has to take account of film both as a complex sign system and as a complex socio-cultural system, because both aspects are the basis of self-referential and self-reflexive discourses and stories (p. 337). This means that if we are studying self-reflexivity, we must not only look at the film or television show itself, but also the cultural factors within which the story is created and exists. This includes the context of the distribution and reception, as Withalm points out, but also the context for the specific production techniques, the climate of Hollywood or television production at the time of creation, and many other aspects of production and planning. An overview of specific self-reflexive techniques demonstrates the context surrounding certain production decisions.

Self-Reflexive Production Techniques

Producers have a variety of ways that they weave self-reflexive statements into the narrative and visuals of a television show. While there have been some attempts to identify these techniques, or devices, none of the lists are comprehensive or complete. Loshitzky (1991) makes an interesting distinction in separating self-reflexivity into three different devices: 1. Performer, 2. Audience, and 3. Story/Stage. These devices are fairly self-descriptive, but do not encompass all practices of self-reflexivity. The performer can be self-reflexive when they do something to make themselves known as an actor or actress, such as when they refer to another role that they may have had in a film or another television series. The audience becomes self-reflexive when the performer addresses the viewer directly, or when audience members become a part of the show (for example, Stargate SG-1 had a promotional contest where the viewer could enter a drawing to appear in an episode of the show). This can have a profound impact on the audience's relationship to the series if they become participants in the narrative. As Jones (2005) puts it, "there are many ways that the spectator/reader can be made aware of his/her status as spectator/reader. The technique in film and television that is sometimes referred to as 'breaking the fourth fall'—wherein a character breaks the flow of the diegesis to acknowledge the presence of the spectator—is a powerful tool for calling attention to the text as a construct" (p. 17). Finally, the story itself can be self-reflexive. This means any part of the narrative that alludes to the fact that it is indeed just a television show. Jones (2005) calls this an "authorial awareness" (p. 8), meaning the locations in the text that the author is inserted. An example of this occurs when the television show reflects upon other shows that the author has also written or produced.

While Loshitzky (1991) outlines several categories of self-reflexive devices, the three distinctions are broad and do not include all self-reflexive techniques. Olson (1987) creates a more detailed list of specific practices. According to Olson, television shows that are self-reflexive can be so in three ways: they can reference the medium of television (audience awareness and intertextuality); they can reference particular shows or particular genres of television (metagenericism); and they can reference their own textuality (autodeconstruction and ilinx) (1987, pp. 285-286).

These sections of the literature review outlines Olson's original list of practices and expand upon them based on other literature as well. Appendix A represents the information detailed below in the form of an outline. This outline shows the categories of self-reflexive fiction based on the existing literature. According to the existing literature, statements made in television shows can be self-reflexive in six different ways: by referencing the medium of television (Olson, 1987), by referencing other shows or genres (Olson, 1987, and Palmer, 1986), by referencing the show itself (Olson, 1987), by authorial awareness (Olson, 1987, and Siska, 1979), by highlighting the modes of distribution (Withalm, 2004), and through intermedia textuality (Spzczepanik, 2002).

References to the Medium of Television

Medium awareness describes viewers' perception of the television show itself. The "transparency" that Fiske (1987) describes refers to the medium of television: a medium that strives to lull its audience into passive viewing, drawing them into a fictional narrative as voyeurs. When a television show alludes to the fact that it is just a television show, that transparency is shattered, causing a medium awareness on the part of the viewer. There are two principal ways Olson (1987) claims the makers of television

convey an awareness of the medium itself: through recognition of the audience or through allusion to the literature of television (p. 286).

Audience awareness. The first technique outlined by Olson (1987) is a recognition of the audience. Sometimes this is done when a character in the television show talks to the audience, not only in a talk show format, where there is a live studio audience, but also when the audience is a construction of the show itself (as in Iser's concept of the "implied reader", 1978). For example, in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) when Ferris looks at the camera and begins to talk to the audience to fill them in on the narrative, he is exhibiting recognition of the audience. After the credits are finished rolling, Ferris is shown again and says, "You're still here? Its over!" (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091042/quotes, accessed 8/27/07). When a performer speaks directly to the camera, especially in a fictional narrative, it shatters the transparency convention of the television medium. Other ways that the audience is included in the text can occur, such as in the literal example alluded to earlier in this dissertation where *Stargate SG-1* had a contest in which the winner would appear in an actual show, and when Internet polls or quizzes are advertised during the show. A recent example of audience awareness can be seen during Saturday morning cartoons. During the cartoon, audience members can email or text their responses, both to the show and to other viewers, and the messages appear along the bottom of the screen during the show almost immediately. While this list of actual practices is growing with technological developments, medium awareness remains a constant and common device for self-reflexivity.

Intertextuality. Another device that encourages medium awareness is intertextual reference. Olson (1987) describes intertextuality as "a different level of medium-awareness… when the diegetic worlds between television shows are linked as though they represented a continuity" (p. 287). White (1986) calls this "diegetic mixing" (p. 53). An example of this would be the entirety of the Star Trek series and movies. There are 10 Star Trek movies and 5 Star Trek series. In each of the movies and series, the historical narrative remains continuous, and some of the characters even appear in multiple series as the same character. For example, Dwight Schultz's character, Reginald Barclay, also called "Reg" by other characters, appears in many of the episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and in several episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* as the same character who has aged accordingly and advanced in his career as an engineer (www.startrek.com, accessed 8/27/07). When the fictional world presented in one television show appears in another different show, or remains continuous between such shows, the viewer is more aware of the fact that that world is a fictional construct. This level of medium awareness can even occur between episodes of the same show, when characters in the current episode reference events or characters from a previous episode.

Intertextuality can occur on a larger scale than just within a certain series or set of series. Many prime-time television shows indicate medium awareness through allusion to the television universe. This technique, the integration of one text into another, is also "intertextuality (Feuer, 1984) or what Raval (1981) calls allusion" (also in Olson, 1987, p. 287). This form of intertextuality can even happen between different television shows, or even as an allusion to the writing of television shows. For example, when a character on a sit-com references another television show, often from another genre. If Raymond

(on *Everybody Loves Raymond*) were to mention watching *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, that would be an intertextual reference that transcends genre. Indeed, any time a text references another separate text, intertextuality occurs. Stam (1992) defines intertextuality as 'the simultaneous presence, within a literary work, of two or more intersecting texts which mutually relativize one another" (p. 20). By referencing another text, self-reflexive statements such as this position themselves in relationship to the other texts, thus creating one large fictional world of television as a medium.

Metagenericism

There are other techniques that reference the conventions of other shows or genres besides intertextuality, which makes reference to a specific event or events on other shows. One such category in Olson's (1987) previous list is that of references to other genres, or when the conventions associated with a specific genre are appropriated for different purposes than originally intended. For example, when *Saturday Night Live* shows the Weekend Report, they are appropriating the setting of a news show. The desk, graphics, and structure are all iconography of television news. Palmer (1986 and to some extent Olson, 1987, p. 288) identifies several ways that genre conventions can be borrowed to make a self-reflexive message: if a program uses the generic structure of another program by conspicuously borrowing its iconography, archetypes, and setting, it "reflects on and deconstructs the native genres of television. This process of self-consciously reassembling a genre is "'metagenericism' (Palmer, 1986)" (Olson, 1987). Settings are perhaps the most hijacked convention from other shows and genres, but archetypes (character types and stereotypes) and icons (famous guest stars appearing as themselves) can also be used. For example, on *Boston Legal*, the Denny Crane character

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regularly acts like the stereotypical rich Republican, doing things like shooting a homeless person with a paintball gun for begging. The series often uses this as a humorous device to expose certain political issues. Icons can also be hijacked. On a recent episode of *Eli Stone* (NBC, 2008), George Michael appeared as himself, hiring Eli Stone to represent a girl who had been expelled from school for singing his song "I Want Your Sex".

There are other conventions from television shows or genres that can be hijacked that Palmer (1986) and Olson (1987) do not talk about. Although he does not specifically discuss self-reflexivity, Silverblatt (2007) helps expand this list of techniques. In *Genre Studies in Mass Media: A Handbook*, he lists and discusses the elements of various genres that one has to look at when doing genre analysis. His discussion can be expanded to inform how genre manipulation can be self-reflexive as well. According to Silverblatt (2007), genres contain formulas of plot, structure, and premise, as well as conventions that are ideological. These conventions are created by industry constraints or can be due to certain production elements.

Genres have specific plot structures and formulas. Some plot premises are fairly common within a genre. For example, many sit-coms have some sort of moral in every episode, where the main character "learns their lesson" after they have a plot or scheme backfire on them. Another formula can be seen in regards to the structure of specific genres. In a police drama, the crime is shown at the beginning of the episode, the hero finds clues and is led in a certain direction, but is never sure who committed the crime, and then the crime is solved when there are only ten minutes left in the show. The last ten minutes then show the capturing, punishment, and remorse of the criminal. Other genres

have similar formulas that include some form of conflict and then the resolution at the end of the time slot. This can also be an element of a plot formula. An example of a plot conflict that is formulaic in science fiction is that of technological dependence versus human autonomy (Silverblatt, 2007, p. 42). Generic formulas can be mimicked within another genre to provide humor, satire, authority, or any number of emotional connections for a viewer. But it also serves as a self-reflexive statement because the viewer is aware of the convention's origins within a different genre. Indeed, the effectiveness of borrowing these conventions relies upon such connections.

Other generic conventions that could be added are ideological conventions, production elements, and industry standards (Silverblatt, 2007). Ideological conventions include the worldview and point of view of certain genres. Most shows that feature some sort of hero rarely allow that hero to "lose". Many religious values are also transferred through certain genres, such as the triumph of "good" over "evil". Production elements can also be unique to certain genres. For example, news programs have a "flat lighting" scheme to reinforce their objectivity, versus dramas where the lighting is very intense and heightens the emotional reaction of the audience. Different genres even have different industry standards when it comes to their funding and distribution. Documentary films are rarely funded at the same level as feature films. Non-fiction films are also not as widely distributed. This restricts the documentaries to certain limitations when it comes to hiring talent and the amount of equipment available to them, but it also allows certain creative freedoms due to the nature of their audiences. All of these genre conventions are things that define those genres, and when they are borrowed, the self-reflexive statements

shatter the one-way transparency of the show because of the connections that the viewer makes.

References to the Show's Own Textuality

Perhaps the most obvious form of self-reflexivity occurs when a show references its own textuality. In a post-modern sense, the text itself can be self-reflexive, giving the viewer access to the television show and the industry that made it. This can occur through autodeconstruction or ilinx. Ilinx refers to the use of "narrative for narrative's sake" (Olson, 1987, p. 295), and autodeconstruction happens when the show deconstructs itself, or comments on its own voice or the messages it is sending to the audience. Autodeconstruction can be divided into the five divisions of narrative storytelling (duration, order, frequency, voice, and mood), and each division has its own way of deconstructing the text (Olson, 1987) and self-reflexive presentation.

Duration. Duration can be self-reflexive when these conventions of time passage are consciously and conspicuously exaggerated to call attention to the artifice of the conventions. Such self-reflexivity suggests that the time did not actually pass in the way implied, that what is experienced is a conventional construct (Olson, 1987, p. 290). While the audience is rarely aware that time is passing at a different rate in the television show due to our conditioning and constant viewing, when we are made aware of the passage of time, it shatters the illusion of voyeurism. For example, in a comedy when something is shown in extreme slow motion, it typically draws attention to the passage of time in a humorous way. By slowing down the passage of time in such a way, the audience is reminded that they are watching a fictional story.

Order. Order of events can become self-reflexive when the order allows the viewer to see how the narrative is constructed. A narrative has two temporal elements: its story, the chronological sequence of events, and its discourse, the sequence in which the events are told. Order can be self-reflexive when the order of events is obviously and intentionally impossible (Olson, 1987, p. 290). Order can also be self-reflexive when characters are able to read the order of future events (Olson, 1987, p. 291). An example of this occurs in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) when Ferris calls Cameran. Cameran hangs up and says, "I'm dying" to himself. Ferris calls back and says "You're not dying, you just can't think of anything better to do" (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091042/quotes, accessed 8/27/07). When events are shown out of order, or when characters are shown events that are not known to other characters, it highlights the narrative element of order, and that the presentation of order is a construct of media production.

Frequency. Frequency becomes self-reflexive in movies and television when it allows a certain event to be repeated, even though it was known to happen only once. Thus the narration calls attention to itself as an arbitrary arrangement of narrative elements. When frequency is self-reflexive, two things can happen: either certain segments are repeated in jarring or illogical contexts, or segments repeated are inconsistent from repetition to repetition (Olson, 1987, p. 292). For example, in the German film, *Run, Lola, Run* (1999), the day is replayed over and over, allowing the main character, Lola, to adjust the outcome of certain events and get her desired result.

Voice. Narrative voice can also be self-reflexive. One instance of self-reflexive voice in television occurs when there are apparently two narrators, one homodiegetic

(part of the narrative) and one heterodiegetic (absent from the story), with the homodiegetic narrator aware that someone else is actually narrating their story (Olson, 1987, p. 293). While this is not as common, it is incredibly self-reflexive, as it appears an audience member (the narrator) from a different audience than the one watching is indeed interacting with the actors and actresses. In *The Big Lebowski* (1998), the story is narrated by "The Stranger" who, at the end of the film sits down on a park bench next to the main character ("The Dude") and says,

> The Stranger: There's just one thing, Dude.
> The Dude: And what's that?
> The Stranger: Do you have to use so many cuss words?
> The Dude: What the fuck you talking about?
> The Stranger: Okay, Dude. Have it your way.
> (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118715/quotes, accessed on
> 8/28/07)

In this example, The Dude is aware of the narrator and even the story itself as its being narrated. Narrative voice also can be deconstructed through the use of a narrative within the narrative (Olson, 1987, p. 294). For example, *The Princess Bride* (1987) is narrated by a grandfather reading a story to his sick grandson, and occasionally the story comes back to the dialogue between those two instead of the main story of the film. By exposing the nature of the narrators, or by narrators interacting with characters in the show, voice can become self-reflexive.

> *Mood.* Mood refers to the psychological presentation of the narrative. "When the difference between showing and telling is placed in the foreground, and the audience becomes conspicuously aware that the narrative is confusing the two, television has adopted a self-reflexive mood. Self-reflexive mood is often characterized by the ability of the characters to read the narrative of which they are a part" (Olson, 1987, p. 294). Olson

uses an example from *Green Acres* (1965-1971) where one of the characters, Lisa, can read the credits as they float over her head on the screen.

Ilinx. Ilinx [the Greek word for whirlpool] is not one of the five divisions of narrative storytelling. It is the "use of narrative for narrative's sake, the introduction of non-sequiturs that serve no narrative function except that they call attention to themselves" (Olson, 1987, p. 295). The television show *Scrubs* regularly uses ilinx as a self-reflexive strategy. Often during an episode, the main character J.D. will daydream. The audience sees how these daydreams play out in his head, and then they are snapped back to the actual narrative, usually with a swooshing sound effect. These instances of ilinx are self-reflexive because they remove the viewer from the fictional narrative being presented and into a separate narrative, thus showing the viewer elements that are not necessarily a part of the original story.

Autodeconstruction and ilinx are both playful ways that producers rearrange the narrative or break the viewer free from the linear flow of the plotlines. Anytime the narrative calls attention to itself, or deconstructs its own elements, it becomes self-reflexive, giving the audience members cues that what they are watching is a fictional construct, that they are not voyeurs looking in on "real" events. Instead, viewers are reminded that they are receivers of a specific message, constructed not only for their eyes, but for many others as well.

References to the Author

Television shows can also refer to the corporeal world when the writers or producer are referenced. According to Siska (1979), reflexivity "appears in aesthetic media in two ways: 1) in the artist reflecting upon his medium of expression; and 2) in

the artist as creator reflecting upon himself" (p. 285). Although this is not done a lot in fictional TV shows like *Boston Legal*, it does happen on other television shows occasionally. During the Spring 2008 writers' strike, *The Daily Show* made such references. During the show, John Stewart talked about how he was operating without writers to create the script for him. He made several references to how he was "winging it" since the writers were on strike. This would be a self-reflexive reference to a current event, but it is also a reference to the actual authors of the show, as Siska (1979) discusses. In this case, Stewart was referring to the regular writers of the show, making the audience realize that he does not usually make up the dialogue as the show progresses.

Unmasking the Mechanisms of Production

Siska (1979), Withalm (2004), and Jones (2005) touch on another category of self-reflexive devices that pertain to the production of television shows. Siska is talking specifically about cinema when he says that reflexive techniques include the "showing of the process and machinery of film production" (p. 286). He uses the term "unmasking" to describe the effect of self-reflexivity on the audience, but the term more appropriately describes this specific self-reflexive device, where the mechanisms of production are shown to the audience. Siska (1979) argues that modernist cinema uses self-reflexivity to unmask the fictional illusion that traditional Hollywood works so hard to create. In the case of unmasking the mechanisms of production, when audiences are shown the cameras, film projectors, crew, and other necessary production items, media are "foregrounding their own production" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii), thus exploring their own fictional existence.

Withalm (2004) describes self-reflexivity as a commercial endeavor, analyzing devices used in advertising. While she does not go into detail about the ways that the mechanisms of production can be unmasked, she does create a "schema of filmic self-referentiality and self-reflexivity" that "starts from the production of a film". Within the schema, Withalm (2004) indicates that a film can be reflexive by exposing the production of films in general, and by exposing the production of the film itself. When referencing film production in general, a film can show "the institutions of production, the people, pre-production, shooting, or post-production" (p. 339, figure 1). When referencing the film itself, a film can show "a work in progress: changes, the camera, or in the studio on the set" (p. 339, figure 1). Withalm (2004) uses this schema to discuss self-reflexive devices in advertisements, but does not say much else about the unmasking of the production process, except that it has been done in cinema from the beginning.

Jones (2005) uses the term "demystification" to describe "the act of revealing the mechanisms of production responsible for creating the particular text" (p. 13) within comics. When authors draw a pencil or pen into a comic strip, or draw someone drawing a comic strip, Jones calls this "demystification". For this study, the most appropriate term to describe when a television show reveals its own mechanisms of production is Siska's "unmasking". The fictional world that television creates is not a "mystery". It is a mask, carefully crafted by its producers to draw the audience in and give them the illusion of reality. When this illusion is broken by the inclusion of the production itself, then the mask is lifted so that the audiences can see the way that the illusion was created.

An example of this technique can be seen in *Wayne's World* (1992), when Wayne and Garth are making their cable access show in their basement. You can see the cameras

and crew within the frame, and the floor director counting down and cuing Wayne. Perhaps the most famous example of this "demystification" or technological unveiling is Dziga Vertov's documentary, *Man With a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom* in Russian, 1929). In Vertov's film, a lone cameraman is followed as he captures images of the city, the train station, and the people walking the streets on their way to work. Vertov's Kino-eye theory proposes that the camera in documentary should be apparent to the viewer, so that the viewer can understand the factual nature of the film. By showing the viewer that the camera is present, Kino-eye films shatter the one-way transparency of the medium, including the audience in the film's production. Technological unveiling creates a medium awareness in the viewer, and the audience members become participants instead of observers.

References to the Modes of Distribution

A TV show can also reference the corporeal world is by discussing the modes of distribution (Withalm, 2004). This can mean references to the distributing institutions, such as 20th Century Fox, Columbia, Critereon, Dreamworks, Lion's Gate, MGM, Miramax, Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros., and a host of others. Referencing the modes of distribution can also include referencing documents needed for distribution, such as contracts and release forms. According to Withalm (2004), references to the modes of distribution can also include anytime the narrative discusses assessment institutions. When a film makes reference to the movie critics, they are engaging in a self-reflexive technique. This could also include discussing the awards that a film or television show has won within the text.

Intermedia Reflexivity

Spzczepanik (2002) uses the term "'intermedia reflexivity' to describe the reflection of material, structural and pragmatic features of one medium merging into another" (p. 29). In other words, one medium of communication is being depicted through the use of another. Jones (2005) expands on Spzczepanik to say that intermedia reflexivity is done to highlight the "particular features of each medium" (p. 22). This makes the medium of presentation transparent to the viewer. This can happen, for example, when a TV show references other media sources. The show, *Frasier* (1993-2004), was reflexive in this way. Frasier Crane was a radio personality on the series. His character was regularly seen in the radio studio taking on-air calls and producing his psychological advice radio program. Viewers of the show saw the "behind the scenes" production of a different medium. The radio medium depicted in the television show often helped the narrative to develop, and yet those plot developments happened through the use of a medium within the medium of television. Intermedia reflexivity can occur anytime a character uses another medium during the course of their own television show or film. In *American Pie* (1999), the characters use the Internet to view a webcam they have set up in the room of another character. The Internet serves as the reflexive medium in this case.

As new media technologies develop, intermedia reflexivity will become more prevalent as well. Even now, each popular television show has their own Internet website, with quizzes, cast information, and sometimes even additional short episodes. *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) produced a series of 10 "webisodes" that could only be seen on www.scifi.com. The narrative in the webisodes takes place in between seasons 2 and 3 of

the show and was not essential to the overall plot, but did give the viewers more background information about the state of things as season 3 began. A resistance movement was created in the webisode narrative, new characters were introduced and some were even killed off in that time. The blending of the two media allows viewers to experience the narrative across multiple platforms, each with their own unique characteristics of consumption.

Reasons Producers Use Self-Reflexivity

It is important to look at the reasons producers might use self-reflexivity, and the ways that they encode self-reflexivity in their texts in order to get a better idea of how self-reflexivity might help audiences negotiate a different kind of relationship to the text. Many scholars have commented on the one-way transparency of the media (see, for example, Fiske, 1987, McCluhan, 1995, & Siska, 1979). Canby (1987) alludes to this transparency when describing the fourth wall convention (the term was originally coined by Jean Jullien in 1889's "Art et Critique"). Canby describes the fourth wall as "that invisible screen that forever separates the audience from the stage" (p. A17). Although the audience never sees the fourth wall because in reality that wall is where the cameras and backstage area exist, the viewer's mind fills in the missing information by closing in the set with an actual wall, as if they are looking in on something real. In television, much like theater or the cinema, audiences are voyeurs, watching a narrative unfold without their input or inclusion. In fact, this is the goal of traditional media, to be transparent: "In the orthodoxy of the traditional cinema, of which we can consider the Hollywood genre film representative, the goal of form is to be overlooked. Orthodox storytelling demands that narrative structure function as a transparency" where the viewers see the story, but

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not the means of production (Siska, 1979, p. 285). When a television show becomes self-reflexive, they break that fourth wall, and instead of a wall, the viewer is aware that they are looking in on a television show. Producers have many reasons for breaking this illusion, including connecting with the audience, distancing the audience, monetary gain, and catering to a more media-literate audience.

Humor

The first reason that a producer might use self-reflexivity in their television show is that it pokes fun at the process of media making. It becomes an "inside joke" that the audience understands, when perhaps even the characters themselves do not. As Withalm (2004) writes of the reasons for self-reflexivity:

> The aims to be achieved by, and the reasons for, including self-referential/self-reflexive plot elements or discourses differ extremely: from emancipatory and distancing strategies (in the Brechtian sense of the *Verfremdungsefekt* or alienation effect), mere fascination with cinematographic possibilities or just mere fun, to a strengthening of the emotional bonds of the audience to movies and movie stars, or even the last chance to keep a media-glutted audience watching, and buying as it is the case with the self-referential and self-reflexive commercials of the 1990's (p. 340).

Withalm alludes to many different functions of self-reflexivity, such as strengthening the bond with the audience by having fun with the production of the show or distancing the audience by alienating them from the fictional narrative by showing them that the experience is just a television show, and that they should not think anything more of it. Withalm also hints at the fact that in a media savvy environment, self-reflexivity may be a profitable practice, playing on the knowledge of the viewer of the actual production techniques.

Appeal to Intelligent Viewers

In today's media environment, many television viewers know at least some of the steps that go into making the television show they are watching. Media consumers regularly see television shows about how a television show is made, and most DVD's offer "The making of the movie" in their supplemental menus. Anyone who wants to know how a particular scene was shot has only to go online or watch the DVD extras. The television and film industries are very aware of the interest in production, and are able to cash in on it. "Films like [The] Truman [Show] are created by entertainment companies as a means to exploit, and at the same time dissipate, our desire to engage in genuine media criticism…. In the spirit of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, these films and television programs co-opt our enchantment (and disenchantment) with the media and sell it back to us" (Bishop, 2000, p. 6). Bishop points out that self-reflexivity may even be a way to create contentment with the audience who may otherwise question some production practices. By showing them some of the ways special effects are made, or how certain stunts are created, viewers may be less likely to question why the story was told from a certain point of view, or why a show takes a certain political stance. Overall, viewers fail to question the motive for the show in the first place. By showing the audience how the show was made, producers duck the media-savvy question of why the show was made. For the most part, producers keep their motive of profit hidden from the audience.

Financial Motivation

The main reason television exists is to bring the viewers (consumers) to the corporations that advertise on television shows. It only follows that the reason for

creating self-reflexive television would be that it sells. As Bishop (2000) concludes, "Do they poke fun at themselves because they have concluded that as a nation we are incredibly media savvy?...Why are the media suddenly so self-reflexive? The obvious answer is that self-reflexiveness sells" (p. 16). While self-reflexivity is becoming more apparent in the media, perhaps it is because it attracts consumers, and is not an acknowledgement of a more media literate public. Or perhaps the two go hand in hand. A greater exploration of the types of self-reflexivity, and the actual practices implemented in television production will give more insight.

<center>*Possible Responses to Self-Reflexivity*</center>

According to all of the previous research outlined above, self-reflexivity can have a range of effects on the viewers. Effects of self-reflexivity range from a means of educating the viewers about the television industry to something that is done merely because viewers enjoy it, thus, it sells. As Loshitzky (1991) writes, self-reflexivity can be used for economic gain to bolster viewership and attract audiences from similar shows or shows that references others. Self-reflexive devices help inform audiences about the nature of the programming, as well as its structures, genres, and production techniques. They do this by shattering the fourth wall convention and letting the viewers see the production process, exposing the technologies used to create the stories, and by admitting to a certain amount of subjectivity.

Self-reflexivity shatters the transparency of the medium or channel. Siska (1979) writes of this process that, "in their work, reflexive techniques cause the films to lose their transparency and become themselves the object of the spectator's attention" (p. 286). The story often becomes secondary to the way the media program is actually

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produced. Viewers are left with the understanding that what they see is a fictional construction, made by a producer, who is most often doing it to make money. The audience member's position as observer or voyeuristic onlooker changes to that of participant. Not necessarily an interactive participant, but a participant nonetheless. They become part of the production process instead of witness to it, thus changing their relationship with the text.

Self-reflexive media also allow the viewer to understand the technologies behind the production. "On the level of reception, self-reflexive media lose their one-way transparency of the represented fictional world. As a result, the viewer's attention turns to the structural components of specific technologies of seeing as such" (Szczepanik, 2002, p. 29). When a person becomes aware of the camera and its operations, as in *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), the viewers' attention is no longer on the story itself, but instead turns to the way the story is told and how it is being transferred. *Man With a Movie Camera* is a documentary about a man documenting everyday life. Not only is it a film about making a film, it is a documentary documenting documentary production. The viewer is immediately aware that the producers of the film they are viewing are doing the exact same things as the producers they see in the images they are shown. In 1929, this is very important because very few people had access to or knowledge of filmmaking technologies. The process of making movies was almost something magical at the time. The self-reflexivity of Vertov's Kino-eye style of filmmaking allowed viewers to understand the technologies involved in what they were seeing. And such things become obvious with new technologies as well. As one media form takes over and transforms the structural components of another, the hidden or automatic structural components of both

media become defamiliarized. "Thus, a new hybrid form emerges that reflects the structural features of each colliding media" (Szczepanik, 2002, p. 29). When these new media become self-reflexive, their features become obvious to the audience.

Finally, self-reflexive media show the audience the subjectivity of their producers. By shattering the transparency of the narrative, self-reflexive statements serve to show that its writers and producers are driving the narrative in a specific direction, or at the very least, with specific messages encoded.

> Reflexive techniques in the modernist narrative…mount an attack on our empathy by undercutting the 'reality' of the characters and actions within the film. Formal reflexivity in the modernist film serves as a method of 'unmasking' the Hollywood illusion that allows us to identify with fictional characters as if their fate were bound to our own. It denies the right of our private affair with what happens on the screen and forces us to confront the subjectivity of the filmmaker (Siska, 1979, p. 286).

When viewers see self-reflexive statements, they are reminded that they are only watching a story. When they understand that it is just a story, it is inherent that there is a storyteller: someone with a specific point of view and agenda for telling the story the way it is told. As viewers reach this level of understanding, they become much more literate in media techniques, and self-reflexive media facilitates that understanding.

Aden (1991) is the only author to mention the fact that viewers have become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about the way TV shows are produced. Self-reflexive television is an acknowledgement that viewers are intelligent, capable people, who understand the humor in the way shows are produced. Self-reflexivity is a way for the producers to say to the audience, "We know you're smart enough to understand that this is just a television show", just as intertextual references create a puzzle for the viewers to put together. Viewers use their knowledge of television and resources at their disposal to

understand self-reflexive references. In that way, reflexive television also makes the viewer more aware of production techniques, narrative structures, and genre conventions. At the same time, self-reflexive television admits to the viewers that they are intelligent enough to be shown behind the curtain, it also increases viewer sophistication (Aden, 1991).

Loshitzky (1991) sees meta-television and self-reflexivity as artistic maturity for television. Television has reached its mature phase, and self-reflexivity is one outcome of that phase. This also means that the television audience is reaching its mature phase, and is able to comprehend self-reflexivity. Metafiction and self-reflexive devices undermine the illusion of television, because they draw attention to the very devices used to create that illusion, making the viewer more aware of the artifices of fiction while watching. Metafiction breaks the "vivid and continuous dream" (Gardner, 1985, p. 87), putting readers in a powerful position and saluting them for their sophistication (Olson, 1987). Aden (1991) even goes so far as to speculate that self-reflexive television can increase viewer sophistication, although he does not outline a way to observe the increase, leaving that question for future research. Instead, this study looks at the various self-reflexive devices used in *Boston Legal* and how the audience understands them. This study first develops a more complete list of self-reflexive devices, expanded by a close-textual analysis of *Boston Legal*, in order to understand the phenomenon and then it looks at the audience of *Boston Legal* and discusses self-reflexivity with them in order to gain an understanding of the actual responses to self-reflexivity.

Audience Analysis

The history of audience analysis research is vast. McQuail (2000), Lewis (1991), and others describe the history of media effects research as developing from a text-centric approach to an audience-centered approach, and finally to an approach that takes into account the social, historical, and cultural contexts that surround the moment the audience member reads a text and tries to make sense of it. In the beginning, the focus on the media text itself misrepresented the amount of power media producers had over their audiences. Later research, such as Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz's (1974) Uses and Gratifications framework, presented the viewer as the controller of media sources like television. Current theories lie somewhere in the middle (Lewis, 1991), accepting that viewers have agency to negotiate the meanings conveyed by the text. In order to understand the ways that viewers make meaning out of a text, researchers must take into account not only the text and audience themselves, but also any contextual information surrounding the reading. Lembo (2007) writes that "unless critical analysts generate categories of reception, of use, that can document the social function of television, the emphasis on textual reading among audience members remains incomplete and perhaps misses what is arguably most important about television use" (p. 455). This means that a study about the way audiences interpret a text or create meaning of a text must not only look at the text, but the audience and any social context as well. This review of literature about audience analysis begins with the text as it relates to the audience, then it discusses the audience itself as active consumers, then it covers any contextual information that must be accounted for, and finally it synthesizes how all of these pieces ultimately fit into the puzzle of how viewers construct meaning from a text.

Text

A television text can be thought of as the compilation of the narrative and aural and visual elements. These codes give viewers certain cues to aid their interpretation of the meaning of the text. As it relates to self-reflexivity and meaning, the text is where the producer encodes clues that refer to the text itself. As Jones (2005) writes,

> reflexivity [is] a process by which the author of the text and/or the audience of the text functions to call attention to the text as an artificial construct. The key distinction here is that this definition places agency in the hands of individuals (author and audience) rather than in the hands of a neutral artifact (the text). As we will come to understand, reflexivity is not something that is located in the text itself, rather it is something that the author engages in while creating and the audience engages in while consuming (p. 6).

Although many researchers, like Jones, are quick to discard the text and claim that meaning lies solely in the hands of the audience, it should be noted that reflexive texts do contain certain elements, as Jones himself points out, that cause viewers to focus on one specific element. Because texts direct their audiences in this way, there are preferred readings encoded into them by producers (Hall, 1980), and as such, cannot be wholly thrown aside when considering how an audience negotiates the meaning of a specific text.

At the same time, viewers negotiate meaning as they read the encoded textual elements. The aesthetic elements encoded by a producer do not have meaning until viewers negotiate their understanding as they decode them. As Fiske (1987) describes this interaction, "texts are the product of their readers. So a program becomes a text at the moment of reading, that is, when its interaction with one of its many audiences activates some of the meanings/pleasures that it is capable of provoking" (p. 14). This is especially interesting when discussing the meanings provoked by the self-reflexive text. Self-

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reflexivity in television texts, as will be discussed later in this literature review, can refer

to elements of the text itself, to other texts, to the medium of television, or even to the

corporeal world. It is important to understand the self-reflexive elements of the text,

including how the viewer negotiates the meaning of such elements. In order to understand

the negotiation of meaning, however, one must first understand the text itself.

When researchers study a text in isolation of its audience, they usually focus on

who they think the intended audience is, and how that audience might read the text and

make meaning of it. Iser (1978) delineates the two audiences involved in textual analysis:

> Generally, two categories emerge, in accordance with whether the
> critic is concerned with the history of responses or the potential
> effect of the literary text. In the first instance, we have the 'real'
> reader, known to us by his documented reactions; in the second,
> we have the 'hypothetical' reader, upon whom all possible
> actualizations of the text may be projected (p. 27).

Later in his writing, Iser defines the "implied reader" (p. 27). The "implied reader" is the

construct that the producer has in their mind of their own audience. As a writer types

words on the paper, they have an idea of who will read the text. Likewise, as television

producers create a show of any kind, they have an idea of who their audience is, and who

watches based on market research they have done for the show. Zettl (2007b) calls this

the "target audience". In order for a network to air a show on television, it is essential that

the producers have a clear idea of who their audience is and how their show targets that

audience. If nothing else, this is essential for the selling of advertising spots during the

show. As Iser (1978) points out, though, this conceptual audience determines many of the

narrative and aesthetic elements of the text: "thus the concept of the implied reader

designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the

text" (p. 34). The "implied audience" is always in the front of the producer's mind as they

write and shoot the text. Even decisions about camera angles and lighting are most often based on how the viewer will likely read those elements. In this way, even during the encoding of a television text, the audience plays a role in the way meanings are created. However, because these cues are encoded with an audience in mind, it is easier for the target audience to decode the messages in the ways the producer intends. This leads to a more preferred reading (Hall, 1980)—preferred by the producer.

In the case of self-reflexive texts, the producer intends for the audience to have to bring outside knowledge and apply it to the text. For example, many people who are not fans of *Boston Legal* will still understand references on the show to *Star Trek* because they are aware that William Shatner starred on both shows. Self-reflexivity does require some work, both on the part of the producers (to research the other textual elements their shows refer to) and on the part of the audience. For example, some audience reactions posted on boston-legal.org even discuss how fans are buying the entire *Murphy Brown* series because Candice Bergen stars on both shows, and there may be plot-line references between the two shows. By doing this extra work, the audience is better able to understand the subtle self-reflexivity in the show, and therefore develop a different relationship to the text.

Thus, meaning lies not only in the text itself, but also in the audience and their reading of the text. Iser (1978) sums up the relationship between the text and the reader by describing their positions in relation to each other:

> Central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction
> between its structure and its recipient. This is why the
> phenomenological theory of art has emphatically drawn attention
> to the fact that the study of a literary work should concern not only
> the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved
> in responding to that text. The text itself simply offers

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'schematized aspects' through which the subject matter of the
work can be produced while the actual production takes place
through an act of concentration. From this we may conclude that
the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic
and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the
aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader (p. 20-21).

Iser's description of the relationship between the text and the audience distinguishes

between the artistic encoding of the text, and the reading of the aesthetics as the audience

comes to their understanding of the text. While it is important to remember that the text

carries certain codes and aesthetic elements to direct the audience, Iser astutely points out

that the audience and the way that they read and respond to the text should be studied

with equal vigor. For this study of *Boston Legal*, the texts (and specifically the instances

of self-reflexivity in the texts) were looked at and the aesthetic codes discussed, and

several different audiences of *Boston Legal* and their aesthetic realization of the text are

examined.

Viewers (and Fans)

The audience of a particular show is an ambiguous mass of individual viewers.

Inglis (1990) describes the way audiences should be broken down into an understanding

of the individual viewers: "above all, audiences and the effects they register are not

formal units in a formal theory, but practical subjects making active use of the cultural

expressions they find to hand" (p. 139). As Fiske (1987) defines television viewers, "a

'viewer' is someone watching television, making meanings and pleasures from it, in a

social situation" (p. 17). For Fiske, viewers negotiate not only the meanings they take out

of a text, but also the pleasures they find in their reading of the text. Fiske, Inglis, Iser,

Lewis, and many others urge researchers to study the audience when determining the

meaning of the text, and not limit their inquiry to just the text. Of course, as an

ambiguous mass of individual viewers, each bringing different backgrounds and context to their viewing, the concept of audience is difficult to define. "The dispersed, elusive nature of the experience of being an audience makes the study of media reception a complex endeavour" (Casey et al., 2002, p. 18). The individual viewers that make up an "audience" may come from different backgrounds, have different income levels, lifestyles, and even live in different countries. Indeed, the only thing that absolutely unites them is that they share the experience of watching one specific text. And so it is very difficult for researchers to study the audience and the way they negotiate meaning with the text. But as Fiske (1987) emphasizes, it is absolutely necessary to look at audience reception when studying the meaning of texts.

One way to study audiences as a collective is to look at fan groups. Often, fans of a show discuss their common interests in the show, and make sense of the text within that social context. Although this study is not specifically looking at the fan culture of *Boston Legal*, studying a group of fans may help to understand the social context of the audience and how people use social networks to make sense of a text. "Within the fan group this can produce a shared set of understandings about the aesthetics of the text and how it should be received and understood. Fan groups often set up an unofficial 'canon' or hierarchy of taste around their chosen text, in which they try to establish a 'cultural authority' over it" (Casey, et. al., 2002, p. 94).

For this study of self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, it is also important to note that fans of a show will typically bring more outside information and context to their viewing as well. This is evidenced by the previous example of the fan site posting by a woman who bought and watched all ten seasons of *Murphy Brown* in order to see if there were

any references to the show in *Boston Legal*. A casual viewer of *Boston Legal* (or any

other show) would most likely not go to so much trouble just to understand another layer

of the text. And so, studying fans of *Boston Legal* added another level of meaning,

especially when looking at the ways viewers develop a relationship to the text. "Fandom

can bring members of the audience together to celebrate their interest in some media star

or product; in this way, fandom relates to a peer group" (Grossberg, Wartella, &

Whitney, 2006, p. 285). Fans bring an entirely new level of context to the reading of a

text. Because they have seen all (or most) of the episodes of a television show, they bring

a knowledge base that first-time viewers do not have to their reading. However, even

with similar background knowledge within fan groups, fans may still read texts

differently due to many other factors, including demographics, education and personality.

Another factor that may affect the viewers' reading of texts is the cognitive ability

and mental effort they devote to the text. No matter what background knowledge they

bring to a text, if a viewer is engaging in other activities, or otherwise not dedicating their

cognitive abilities to the text, they do not read it the same way as if they were giving it

their full attention. It may be easy to separate viewers into "active" or "passive" viewers

depending on how much they are applying their cognitive abilities as they read the text,

but as Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney (2006) point out, it is more accurate to describe

this process as a continuum: "there is evidence that different people extend different

amounts of mental effort to make sense of different programs. Nonetheless, this act of

watching television can be said to be an active process because minds are engaged" (p.

257). No matter how engaged TV viewers are, they are actively creating meanings as

they watch a show. Some viewers may pay more attention to the dialogue as they watch a

show, or they may pay more attention to the visuals, but every viewer negotiates some sort of meaning, even if the television is simply background noise as they do other tasks.

Having said that every viewer negotiates some meaning as they read the text, it seems intuitive that self-reflexivity may require a more attentive audience. While someone watching a highly reflexive text for background noise may still negotiate some meaning for the text, intertextual references and self-reflexive dialogue are lost on a viewer who is not listening intently to every word. Davies, et. al. (2004) say that "reflexive awareness…requires multiple layers of attention" (p. 380). Indeed, self-reflexivity may be just as lost on a viewer who is not paying attention to the text as someone who does not have the background knowledge to understand the references. Much of the more subtle self-reflexivity seen in *Boston Legal* requires an attentive viewer, which is another reason fans of a certain show may be more likely to understand the intertextual references in that show. As Fish (1970) writes of informed readers:

> The informed reader is someone who 1.) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up. 2.) is in full possession of 'semantic knowledge that a mature…listener brings to this task of comprehension.' This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc. 3.) has literary competence…. The reader, of whose responses I speak, then, is this informed reader, neither an abstraction, nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid—a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed (p. 145).

Fans of a show most likely fall under the definition of "informed viewer" that Fish describes. Fans understand the aesthetic language of a show because of their repeated viewing, and bring knowledge of the production, direction, and writing of the text.

It is interesting that Fish (1970) writes informed readers have experience as both "producer and comprehender" of texts. On the *Boston Legal* fan site (boston-legal.org), there is an entire thread where users have posted ideas for storylines and dialogue for the show. The fans understand the production of the show so well that they are able to write possible scenarios for the show and carry the realm of *Boston Legal* into their own world. As Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney (2006) write of this process, "research on audiences and what they do with the media they consume clearly demonstrates that people are very creative—they have their own interpretations of media products, and they will often do very surprising and unpredictable things with them" (p. 258). Viewers have the agency to negotiate meaning in many different ways depending on the text itself, the cognitive abilities and attention they use to read the text, the background knowledge they bring to their reading, and even the context of their viewing. This context is the third contributing factor to the meaning of a text.

Context (and Agency)

If the text has certain meanings encoded into it for the audience to negotiate, the context is the framework within which the audience negotiates those meanings. Every viewer brings different contextual information and experiences to their reading, and every element affects the way they negotiate the text. These contextual elements range from the physical act of viewing all the way to cultural norms and values. Viewers consume television in a variety of settings. The television may be sixty inches wide, or it may be seventeen. The arrangement of the furniture around the television set may change the meaning of the text for the viewer. They may constantly have the television on as background noise, or they may be very focused on what they are watching. Fiske (1987)

describes the way physical location and social context may affect the viewing experience: "'viewing,' then, is an active process that brings to television the social relations of the viewer (his/her point of view) and the material situation: viewing television news will be quite different for the woman who is cooking the family meal than for the man slumped in an armchair in front of the set" (Fiske, 1987, p. 17). The experience of viewing television and the meanings that are negotiated are influenced by the physical act of viewing and the activities viewers are concurrently engaged in. Even the decision to watch a show alone or with others influences the way meanings are negotiated. However, whether viewers watch it alone at home, in groups, or in the homes of others, the act of watching television is a very social thing.

Social Aspects of Viewing

Even if a viewer watches a show alone, they likely talk about the show with their friends and co-workers. By discussing the plotlines, characters, story points, and even advertisements during or after the viewing of a show, audiences make sense of the show. In order to study television audiences, one must also study the social elements of watching television. As Lewis (1991) puts it, "these cultural practices are interwoven into the whole fabric of economic and social life. The study of culture means untangling these strands, examining how they touch and mingle" (p. 37-38). This statement is based on British cultural studies research under Stuart Hall in the 1970's. Cultural practices like watching television do not happen in a vacuum, and creating meaning from what one watches depends a lot on these social aspects of humanity. Lewis describes the construction of meaning as a "social process. We [audiences] do not make up ideological positions, understandings and beliefs on our own—they are the cultural products that

bind societies and social groups" (1991, p. 88). Often as we watch television, we are with

our social groups, getting together with friends to watch the Superbowl, or a show that

everyone enjoys watching. While this type of viewing creates a more obvious social

experience, even when viewers watch by themselves, they often talk to friends and

coworkers afterwards about the storylines or ideological arguments made by the text. As

Lembo (2007) describes the act of social viewing, shared meanings emerge when viewers

watch a show and interact with each other, discussing the storylines, and the ideological

references to "real-world" happenings (p. 464). Of course, these discussions do not

always occur at the time of viewing. Often, such conversations take place a day or more

later, as people discuss what they saw previously in the show. These discussions also

shape the meaning of the show for its viewers, but are not necessarily limited to watching

television as a group. In this way, even viewing alone is a social activity.

Often, meaning can be found in the point that a certain storyline is obviously or

not so obviously trying to make, and the ideological discussions they evoke. *Boston

Legal* is full of such ideological statements that often come up in conversation later. For

example, in episode 2.09 (titled "Gone"), one of the plot lines follows Denny after he

shoots a homeless man with a paintball gun. Alan gives a long speech to Denny at the end

where he spouts out statistics about homelessness in America and how homeless people

just want to be seen. This strong political and ideological statement is something that

could be taken out of the context of the show and discussed amongst friends. In fact, a

good friend and I had such a discussion after watching the episode together—the

conversation was not about whether or not it was okay to shoot homeless people with a

paintball gun, which is ludicrous, but a very serious conversation about the responsibility

of government and citizens when it comes to the homeless in America. As we talk with our friends about television texts, we use our cultural context to help us create meanings and negotiate the larger ideological arguments presented by television.

Culture

No discussion of television audiences would be complete without some mention of the way that culture influences both the way viewers read a text and the way that they respond to the text. Culture can mean anything from the physical act of reading television (viewers usually watch TV during certain times of the day) to norms and ideological beliefs (television reinforces stereotypes) to the knowledge and understanding of culture and how it influences the meaning of television texts (viewers vaguely understand that the stereotypes portrayed on television are bad based on research that has made its way into popular press) (Fiske, 1987).

Viewers are so immersed in culture that they are often unaware of the way cultural practices influence even the physical act of watching television. As Lewis (1991) writes, "how we watch television is therefore part of the cultural context in which programs, commercials and other televisual paraphernalia are placed" (p. 49). In order to study the ways people negotiate textual meanings, we must not only look at the text, but also the physical act of viewing. As mentioned above, creating meaning is often a social activity, with viewers watching and discussing storylines with other viewers. Even when viewers engage with television watching by themselves, there are cultural factors that influence the way they create meaning. Solo viewing behavior ranges from inattentive viewing, using television as background noise, all the way to viewing attentively to the point that "depictions seem real to them, leading them to feel as if they are there, in the

situations and a part of what is happening" (Lembo, 2007, p. 463). As viewers engage actively with the text, even if they are alone, they are influenced by the cultural context within which they are creating meaning, including that cultures norms and values.

Norms and values influence every viewer's reading of a television text. As Stuart Hall (1980) outlines the negotiated and oppositional readings of a text, our cultural values and experiences either resonate with the meanings proposed by a text, or those cultural experiences cause us to accept some meanings and reject others, allowing us to negotiate a meaning that is consistent with our own cultural values and norms. "Now whatever judgments may have been passed on the work will also reflect various attitudes and norms of that public, so that literature can be said to mirror the cultural code which conditions these judgments" (Iser, 1978, p. 28). An example of this occurred on *Boston Legal* (episode 4.4, "Do Tell") when a friend of Denny's sues the U.S. military for its "Don't ask, don't tell" policy towards gays. *Boston Legal* presents the touchy subject of gays in the military as a political issue that needs to be changed (sending a message to the military that its current policy is not acceptable). Ideologically, many politically conservative viewers have values that are inconsistent with this message, and that keeps them from reading the text in the same way as others (and the same way that the producers may have intended audiences to read it). The combination of values and experiences of each individual means that whether they view television alone or in a social setting, cultural background and context create an infinite number of meanings they may receive from any one television text.

Often, though, exposure to television and social settings can slowly change a person's values and ideological positions (Gerbner, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1986).

Viewing television shows that tackle something like the issue of gays in the military may

expose a person to different points of view that they had not previously considered, and

may cause them to re-evaluate their stance on the issue. In this way, not only does culture

influence the way we view television texts, but television texts can also change the way

we view the world (Williams, 1974). Lembo (2007) discusses the problems this causes

when studying the interaction between television and cultural norms:

> This world of behavior and behavioral change does not lend itself
> easily to documentation because it is sometimes too personal, too
> close, too much about who people are becoming for them to reveal
> it to the analyst. Furthermore, the television-driven world of
> behavior can easily shade into fantasy, where the lived reality of
> things becomes more imaginary and sometimes that which
> separates the two realms is not so easily identified is the
> conversation that people have with others, when they are no longer
> watching, about what they have seen on television. Conversation
> may sometimes lead people to reinterpret what they have seen or
> heard. Over time this talk may change the very way that they
> watch television—not only what they watch, but, more
> importantly, what they find believable or worthy of criticism" (p.
> 465).

A text like *Boston Legal* may affect viewers in many different ways due to the highly

charged political topics the show takes on. Some fans have even posted concerns on the

website (www.boston-legal.org) that the show alienated the audience when it pushed a

political viewpoint too aggressively. At the very least, the political topics the show

regularly addresses causes a wide range of reactions in first-time viewers of the show.

Fans are most likely accustomed to the way the show takes on current issues, but non-

viewers may react differently. In a pilot study of *Boston Legal* I conducted in preparation

for this study, non-viewers of the show read many things into the text, including racism

and elitism that fans of the show passed off as typical behavior for characters that they

find otherwise endearing. Fans almost ignored the unacceptable behavior of Denny Crane

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because they understood that this behavior was written into the script as a negative example. At the same time Denny voices some of his views, it is obvious that other characters patronize him—they still love him even though he is completely close-minded and his political views are based almost entirely on emotion. Non-viewers may, however, share the political stances of fans and even the writers of the show and still negotiate different meanings because they are not accustomed to the subtle humor and references.

Television texts are written in a way that encourages many different readings. Polysemy (Hebdige, 1979) in texts allows them to connect to a larger audience and therefore a broader customer base for advertisers. Polysemy means that texts can have an unlimited number of meanings for the audience. "Both polysemy and closure are therefore dependent upon the 'cultural competence' of the viewer, reader, or listener" (Casey, et. al., 2002, p. 168). Casey et. al. describe this "cultural competence" as the way a Shakespearean critic who has studied a range of interpretations of Hamlet can appreciate the many meanings of the text. Someone who has not studied critical interpretations of Hamlet may have their own meanings of the text, and may even have several different meanings, but it is unlikely that they would understand the wide range of meanings offered by such a rich and polysemic text. Self-reflexive texts are very polysemic and require "cultural competence" because of their intertextual references, references to events in the corporeal world, references to television production, and references to the audience itself. "The theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it" (Fiske, 1987, p. 108). And so, there are many cultural factors that play into the way a viewer negotiates meaning from a self-reflexive television text.

They may have political and ideological values that direct their reading in a certain way (either to agree or disagree with the views presented in the text), or they may have (or not have) the knowledge it takes to understand a reference made within the text to an event outside of the text. By studying both fans and non-viewers of *Boston Legal*, we should be able to see if regular viewers of the show negotiate the intertextuality more easily, and if that ability changes their relationship to the text and the meanings they get from the show.

<div align="center">*Meaning*</div>

The meaning of any television program is encoded into the text, consumed by an audience, and understood within the social, cultural, and physical context of that experience. As such, searching for the meaning of a text is a difficult endeavor. Texts are polysemic, audiences watch television in a number of different ways, and there are far too many cultural and social forces to consider when researching the ways that viewers negotiate meaning. And so meaning must be studied as it is encoded in the text, as well as the way it relates to the audience. Meaning occurs at the intersection of the text, the audience, and the context of the viewing itself.

Textual Cues

Many scholars in television criticism only examine the text in their research. This is acceptable when the findings are limited solely to the readings and arguments of the researcher, and do not make claims about the audience. Research of this style typically argues for one possible reading of the text, and allows room for others (and often this research is done simply because this reading is not the obvious one). For example, Herman Gray's (1995) study on *The Cosby Show* and other similar texts leads him to read

the text as a construction of "blackness" as a cultural symbol. There are certain textual

cues that research like this focuses on and analyzes. Aesthetic principles, such as lighting,

sound, timing, motion, and use of screen space are all textual cues as to the meaning

encoded into the text. Each one of these principles requires a conscious decision on the

part of the producer, and therefore contributes to the intended meaning of the text (Zettl,

2007a). The aesthetics work together to create the narrative and story, which are also

levels of encoded meaning. According to Lewis (1991):

> Meaning, in this sense (of the TV industry ratings system) is not
> the result of complex negotiations between the viewer and the TV
> screen, but something inscribed by the program makers into the
> very fabric of the message. If we do not interpret or understand the
> messages as we were intended to, well, that's our own fault for not
> paying proper attention (p. 22).

While this sort of textual analysis can definitely give insight into possible meanings of

the text, as Lewis points out, researchers must also take the audience and context into

account.

In the case of self-reflexive devices, this process is evident: the text has cues that

are written in, such as a reference to another show. The audience must be able to

recognize this reference, which takes attentive viewing on their part and a knowledge of

what the statement refers to in order to understand the meaning of the reference. Because

of this necessary background knowledge and attention to details, fans have an easier time

picking up on self-reflexive textual cues. For example, in *Boston Legal* episode 2.11,

"The Cancer Man Can", as Denny (played by William Shatner, who also played James T.

Kirk in *Star Trek*) opens his cell phone, it makes the exact same sound that the

communicators on *Star Trek* made. If a viewer were not familiar with *Star Trek*, or the

fact that William Shatner played a role in the show, they would not understand this

reference. Of course, the story lines in *Boston Legal* do not depend on these references,

so if viewers do not understand, they can still follow the major threads of the show.

Contextual Information

Iser (1978) describes the process of meaning making in terms of how viewers fill

the gaps in their understandings of the text:

> The whole process of comprehension is set in motion by the need
> to familiarize the *unfamiliar* (and literature would be barren indeed
> if it led only to a recognition of the already familiar). In short, the
> reader will only begin to search for (and so actualize) the meaning
> if he does not *know* it, and so it is the unknown factors in the text
> that set him off on his quest (p. 43).

Background knowledge and the contextual information a viewer brings to their reading of

the text greatly influences their understanding of that text. Textual cues get filtered

through the contextual information a viewer brings to the reading. "A literary text

contains intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production, but the meaning

produced may then lead to a whole variety of different experiences and hence subjective

judgments" (Iser, 1978, p. 25). Iser is also describing the way that the contextual filters

lead to multiple meanings read by the viewers. Not only is the text itself polysemic, but

multiple meanings can be created by the viewer due to the context of their viewing. As

mentioned before, this context can be the physical act of watching television or the social

context in which the viewer discusses the show with others in order to make meaning, or

it can be the cultural background and practices that lead a viewer toward certain

meanings.

Lewis (1991) writes of context, "if we are concerned with the meaning and

significance of popular culture *in contemporary society* [emphasis by Lewis], with how

cultural forms work ideologically or politically, then we need to understand cultural

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products (or "texts") as they are understood by audiences" (p. 47). Lewis appropriately

points out that texts are created within a cultural framework as well. At times, this is the

same cultural framework that audiences bring to their viewing, although at times it is not.

This is the "Cultural Model: the cultural model of communication sees communication as

the construction of a shared space or map of meaning within which people coexist"

(Grossberg, et. al., 1998, p. 18, based on Williams, 1974). This shared cultural context

helps the audience to understand the meanings encoded in the text by the producer. But

television texts are so much more than a shared set of symbols. Meaning is created by the

intersection of the text and the viewer, and culture is a filter as audiences work to

understand the text.

Relationship Between Text and Audience

It is difficult to study the way that audiences understand the meanings of

television texts. As discussed above, there are many factors that affect how audiences

read a text. It is one thing to identify as many of these factors as possible (textual cues,

cultural/social context, and audience reception), and an entirely different thing to

understand the ways that these factors influence a viewer's understanding of the text. As

Lewis (1991) writes, "we now know that the power to produce meanings lies neither

within the TV message nor within the viewer, but in the active engagement between the

two" (Lewis, 1991, p. 58). Where Hall (1980) gives three general options for the

understanding of texts (dominant, oppositional, and negotiated readings), Fiske (1987)

writes that, "in practice, there are very few perfectly dominant or purely oppositional

readings, and consequently viewing television is typically a process of negotiation

between the text and its variously socially situated readers" (p. 64). Viewers are

constantly negotiating meaning as it filters through all of the factors that play into their

viewing. When texts are self-reflexive, even more social cues are needed in order to

understand the references that the text is making. Viewers may or may not understand

these references, and it may or may not influence their meaning creation.

Intertextuality

Self-reflexivity does require viewers to operate on a second level of meaning,

forcing them to "connect the dots" between references to the corporeal world, references

to other texts, references to the medium of television, and references within the text itself.

Although Kristeva (1980) first coined the term "intertextuality", Fiske's (1987) definition

can be more readily applied to this study. He says that "the theory of intertextuality

proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of

textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it" (p. 108). Television texts cannot help but

operate on this level: "The meaning of a message depends on the ways these codes are

linked or articulated to other codes in and through texts. Hence meanings are always

intertextual" (Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 2006, p. 154). As viewers negotiate the

meanings in the text, they not only bring their corporeal experiences to their reading, but

they also bring their previous experiences with the world of television: the production,

the narratives, and the medium itself. Fiske and Hartley (2003) suggest the following:

> Since the code used is derived from the viewer's general social
> experience as well as from their response to the particular message,
> we find that the second-order meanings of the television message
> engage at the moment of decoding with the various meaning
> systems of the audience members. It is at this moment that the final
> meaning of any television message is negotiated (p. 81).

All texts are intertextual. Viewers negotiate meaning by understanding the text as it refers to other texts, events, or even to its own narrative. This negotiation of meaning is a very complex process, and one that is not easily documented.

Audience Reception Studies

Audiences negotiate meaning through their active engagement with the text. The question is how can researchers study that active engagement in order to make sense of the ways that meaning is created? Some researchers study the point of encoding through textual analysis, some study the cultural context through rhetorical and cultural methods, and some study the audience through qualitative types of inquiry (Lewis, 1991). But if the creation of meaning lies in the interaction between these three factors, a comprehensive study of the way that viewers create meaning in a self-reflexive text such as *Boston Legal* should include all three means of analysis. The show itself should be studied in order to understand the ways that self-reflexivity is encoded within the text. Fans of the show should be studied in order to understand the sorts of contextual information that they bring to their viewing of the text. And finally, their understanding of the self-reflexive instances within the text should be studied in order to study the ways that they negotiate the meanings of the text. In this sense, this dissertation is a case study looking at the ways viewers of *Boston Legal* negotiate the self-reflexivity within the text. Similar to the way Fiske (1987) writes, this study traces "differences amongst viewers, modes of viewing, and the meanings or pleasures produced" (p. 63). In the pilot study, audiences reacted to most of the self-reflexive instances in the text with laughter. Self-reflexivity certainly seems to produce pleasure in the viewer. Although most of the participants in the pilot could not articulate later why they laughed at the self-reflexivity,

there is something in the way they negotiated the meaning in those instances that caused them to do so.

In the larger scope of this study, the meanings that viewers negotiate when watching television, over time, also affect the ways that they negotiate their worldviews and values. Certainly, as audiences watch television programs like the nightly news, they are influenced by the messages and the culmination of messages (see for example the body of literature on cultivation effects). While it is important to understand the ways that things like self-reflexivity might work to change the worldview of the audience (for example, when *Boston Legal* refers to an actual news event in one of their storylines, they typically present one stance on the issue), cultivation studies are narrowly focused and give too much power to the text and medium (Lewis, 1991). Instead, this study looks at the way the audiences interact with the texts and carry those meanings into their daily interactions. "Researchers are beginning to look at the ways in which the media provide the resources with which audiences construct their sense of their own identity. This surely is a media effect, but it is one that requires the active involvement and investment of the audience in the process" (Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 2006, p. 261). This dissertation is more focused on the way viewers negotiate the meanings of self-reflexivity, but this focus would be uninteresting and not very informative if there were not broader implications. Indeed, self-reflexivity is not only negotiated within a cultural context, but it also contributes to that culture. Aden (1991) discusses how self-reflexive texts might actually create a more media literate audience. Self-reflexive texts expose the mechanisms of production, making the audience more aware of the industry that creates the texts. Many authors have discussed self-reflexivity. Some have studied it in its

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cognitive form, some in its literary form, and a few have even studied self-reflexivity in television texts. This will be the first study that looks at how viewers read and react to self-reflexivity in television.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This study, like most audience reception research, takes a qualitative approach to understand the ways that viewers negotiate the meanings in the text. While qualitative research does not test hypotheses, it does seek out answers to questions by looking at the participants' own experiences. "Fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of the social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18). In order to "preserve and analyze" the experience of viewing self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, this dissertation uses qualitative methods to address the following research questions:

1. How are the self-reflexive statements encoded into *Boston Legal*? What do the statements refer to (referent in the corporeal world, the medium, the genre/show, or the individual episode text)?

2. How do viewers read the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*? Are there differences in the readings of fans and non-viewers?

3. How do the self-reflexive statements affect the way viewers negotiate meaning? Do fans negotiate meanings in different ways than non-viewers? Is there any other contextual information either in the viewers' own experiences or within the text that affects the way meanings are negotiated?

4. How do the self-reflexive statements affect viewers' relationship with the text? Do fans or non-viewers feel more connected to *Boston Legal* and its actors, writers, and producers?

Chapter 3: Methods

The larger question of the way an audience reads a text, or even specific elements of a text, is not one that can be answered by using one method. While insight may be gained by looking at the audiences alone, it would omit the much larger context of the text and the viewing act itself. And so, to approach this issue of how audiences read and understand self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, multiple methods were employed to address the full scope of the question. As Webster (1998) writes, "what is needed is a kind of enlightened empiricism—one that makes room for a number of methods, each compensating for the limitations of the other—one that compels analysts to go into the real world, recognizing that audiences are never completely knowable" (p. 200). Instead of merely relying entirely on textual analysis, as many of the previous studies of self-reflexivity have done, this dissertation goes "into the real world" of the audience, using focus groups to read the texts and comment on their viewing experience. Fiske (1987) also writes that any "textual study of television, then, involves three foci: the formal qualities of television programs and their flow; the intertextual relations of television within itself, with other media, and with conversation; and the study of socially situated readers and the process of reading" (p. 16). Both Webster and Fiske acknowledge that when doing audience reception research, one cannot discount the power of the text or the power of the audience to negotiate the meaning. And so, in order to answer the questions posed by this study, it looks not only at the self-reflexive instances within the episodes *Boston Legal*, but also at the way the audience negotiates the meaning of the self-reflexivity within the show.

This study begins with a textual analysis of all *Boston Legal* episodes through the end of the fourth season, and concludes with focus groups of both fans and non-viewers in order to explore their understandings of the self-reflexive statements in the show through qualitative group interviews. Throughout the textual analysis and the analysis of focus groups transcripts, the *Boston Legal* fan forum (www.boston-legal.org/forums) was referenced for contextual information and to confirm the themes emerging from the discussions. The avid fan postings in the forum often discuss self-reflexivity within the show as well as a range of other topics.

Textual Analysis

In order to answer research question 1 and understand the ways that audiences read and respond to self-reflexivity, this study must begin by understanding the text itself. In what ways is *Boston Legal* self-reflexive? What techniques do the episodes employ to remind the viewer that *Legal* is simply a fictional television show? To answer these questions, each episode was viewed in its entirety and notes were taken detailing instances of self-reflexivity within the text. The collection of this information was completed before the fifth and final season, which ended in December of 2008, therefore only the first four seasons were included in the textual analysis. Any time in the first four seasons that *Boston Legal* made self-reflexive references to the corporeal world, references to the medium of television, references to specific shows or genres, or references to its own narrative or aesthetic elements were catalogued in order to look at the different ways self-reflexivity was encoded into the text.

While it may seem daunting to watch and analyze four entire seasons of a television show, I must admit my own fandom. I enjoy watching this show, and the self-

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reflexivity exhibited in *Boston Legal* is one of the things that draws me to it. Using the

DVDs of the first three seasons, and the recordings I made during season four, I watched

all 88 episodes and took notes on every instance of self-reflexivity. The episode guide I

developed for all five seasons, including the night each episode aired and how many

weeks it had been bumped for another show or special is seen in Appendix B (*Boston

Legal* was moved around and pushed for TV specials regularly). While watching each

episode, I noted each self-reflexive statement, what the statement was, and then what type

of reflexivity it was according to the referent framework developed from the existing

literature. These notes appear as Appendix C. This list was then compared to the posting

for each episode on the *Boston Legal* fan forum, www.boston-legal.org to see if fans

pointed out any self-reflexive statements in the episode that I had not noticed or not

understood. After all, I am limited by my own experiences and contextual information the

same as any other viewer. Checking the website forums and the "breaking the fourth

wall" section of the www.wikipedia.org entry for *Boston Legal* helped me to double

check my notes. As Jenkins (2006) writes, "Online fan communities might well be some

of the most fully realized versions of Levy's cosmopedia, expansive self-organizing

groups focused around the collective production, debate, and circulation of meanings,

interpretations, and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular

culture" (p. 137). If there was something the fans noticed but I missed, I went back to the

DVD of the *Boston Legal* episode in question and watch the section again. In this way,

the textual analysis did not rely entirely upon my reading of the text. In most cases, the

fans that posted in the discussion forums were very astute and pointed out instances of

self-reflexivity others, including myself, had missed, either due to inattention or lack of

contextual knowledge.

Once the instances of self-reflexivity were recorded, each statement was classified

according to the referent (based on Appendix A). "The interpreter's task should be to

elucidate the potential meanings of a text, and not to restrict himself to just one" (Iser,

1978, p. 22). The benefit of using textual analysis as a method is its ability to anticipate

possible meanings that audience members might negotiate. Based on textual clues,

researchers can extrapolate potential readings. Inglis (1990) points out that textual

analysis can also explore how much the producers of the text "push about" the audience

in the balance between "manipulation and expression"; in other words, how much

freedom the audience is given to negotiate their own meanings (p. 154). And so, textual

analysis of self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* helps gain insight into how much freedom

audiences have to negotiate their own understandings, and what some potential meanings

are. As Iser (1978) writes, the textual analysis of self-reflexive instances in *Boston Legal*

shows what has "been unleashed by the text" (p. 50). Chapter four details the instances of

self-reflexivity in the first four seasons of *Boston Legal* and discusses the possible

readings and implications of those statements.

While textual analysis answers research question 1, which asks about the

encoding of self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, this analysis cannot answer the larger

questions of how audiences react to self-reflexive statements, how audiences negotiate

meaning, and ultimately how self-reflexivity affects audiences' relationship to the text. In

order to answer those questions, this study went to the source: the audience itself. After

the textual analysis was completed, qualitative focus groups were conducted.

Pilot Study

Prior to the focus groups used to collect data for this dissertation, a pilot study was completed in order to develop the methods of data collection. While very little of the pilot discussion was about self-reflexivity since the pilot group had very little background knowledge about *Boston Legal*, the discussions about the appropriateness of the episode, viewer fatigue, interview questions, atmosphere, and other methodological questions proved insightful when designing the final study. The pilot study consisted of six graduate students at a large Midwestern research university. There was one male participant and five female participants, all of who study communication, but only one who specializes in television, and only one who considered herself a fan of *Boston Legal*. They were recruited and told only that they were a pilot group for an audience reception study on *Boston Legal*.

Pilot Viewing

The pilot group first watched an episode of *Boston Legal*, episode 2.09, titled "Gone", in which two main storylines play out. The first storyline involves Denny Crane shooting a homeless man with a paintball gun, with Alan Shore deciding to represent the man in a lawsuit against Denny. The second storyline has to do with a girl who is kidnapped as Denise Bower (played by Julie Bowen) and her friend are discussing who will pay for lunch. In this second storyline, a rogue FBI agent gives Denise and Brad Chase (played by Mark Valley) information that the FBI cannot act on, in the hopes that Denise and Brad will. Predictably, Denny's friendship with Alan is tested and finally Alan pays the homeless man, telling him that they settled the case rather than jeopardize their relationship. Brad and Denise find the abducted girl after a humorous scene where

Brad accidentally chops off the finger of a priest who is harboring the child molester responsible for the kidnapping. This episode was chosen because of the many self-reflexive statements it contained.

In episode 2.09, there are four self-reflexive statements, the most of any episode in the first four seasons. There is a sequence of shots that mocks the Western genre, as Denny and the homeless man stare each other down and some music plays. In another part of the show, Alan is telling Denny that he might be expelled from the law firm. Denny replies, "they can't get rid of me. I'm the star of the show." Later in the episode, Denny says, "I've won an Emmy", referring to the award he won as supporting actor in *Boston Legal*. Alan replies, "just the same", referring to the two Emmys he has won for the show. Finally, at the end of the episode, Denny is scheduled for an appearance on *Larry King Live*. Larry is unavailable for the interview, so a farcical character named Gracie Jane, a play on the TV personality, Nancy Grace, instead interviews Denny. During this interview, video cameras and station crew are also seen in the shots, giving the viewer a glimpse into the mechanisms of television production. These instances where the episode references other genres, other shows, and even the corporeal world, where the characters refer to themselves as actors, are very good examples of self-reflexivity.

Pilot Response

While watching episode 2.09 of *Boston Legal*, the pilot group filled out thought listings. The show was paused approximately every five minutes, a total of six times during the episode. During these breaks and at the show's completion, the pilot group completed "thought lists" where they wrote down the thoughts that immediately entered

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their head. They were asked to specifically write about the stories, characters, narratives, and dialogue of the show at these pre-determined stopping points. While all of the thought listing points were scene breaks, or natural places to stop during the show, three of the points occurred immediately after something self-reflexive, and three of them did not. The group also listed their thoughts after the episode was over, and there was a self-reflexive statement at the end of the show.

The thought listings from the pilot group did not indicate much of a reaction to the self-reflexivity seen in the episode. Two of the participants noted the reference to Nancy Grace, and one commented on the connection to Larry King. Otherwise, two of the thought listings commented on the fast-paced camera shots and other production qualities of the show. This lack of ability to notice the self-reflexive statements was expected from a group where only one person had seen the show, and even then indicated that she had only seen 4-5 episodes. The pilot group did, however, indicate that the thought listing breaks were not distracting, and should be kept as a part of the final study.

Pilot Discussion

The pilot group also participated in a qualitative focus group session where they answered questions about their reactions to the self-reflexive statements, and how those statements affected their relationship to the text. Because the pilot group was mostly non-viewers, it was expected that they would not have much of a reaction to the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* and that the reflexive statements would not affect their relationship to the show. Indeed, while the pilot group did indicate some knowledge of the actors and producers and discussed other shows and films they had been involved with, alluding to the intertextuality of *Boston Legal*, they indicated that they did not pick

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up on the self-reflexive statements within the show, and the statements did not make them want to watch the show again. Instead, they passed off the statement "I'm the star of the show" as typical dialogue one might hear in everyday conversation. One participant did say she was perplexed at the statement "I've won an Emmy", and even wondered why a lawyer would have won an Emmy award, but did not make the connection that the show was referring to the actor and not the character. Interestingly, though, the pilot group did agree that fans of the show would most likely pick up on these statements and that the self-reflexivity would probably increase their enjoyment of the show. Based on the pilot group discussion, several changes were made to the focus group portion of this study.

Episode

The discussion with the pilot group began with a very heated discussion about the stereotypes reflected in episode 2.09. Keeping in mind that the participants were all graduate level students who study communication, it was not surprising that the discussion went in this direction. The first few questions posed to the group were vague (e.g. "Do you like the way the stories are told?" and "What do you think about the characters?"). It was originally felt that easing into the discussion of self-reflexivity might give them the chance to point it out on their own, but instead it became obvious that each participant's own background guided their reading of the text and their reactions to it. Because they seemed to focus on the stereotypes portrayed in episode 2.09, it was decided that a different episode should be used; an episode was chosen that did not have a homeless black man as the central issue being portrayed. While Episode 2.23 does portray a kidnapper as a Latino male, it does not show much of the man until

the end of the episode, and the focus is not on the person, but on the issue of kidnapping and the FBI regulations that prevent some kidnappers from being pursued.

Thought Listings

The thought listing forms were also changed based on the pilot study. The original forms did not have questions about the media background of the participant. New questions were added that asked about any courses they have taken in media studies or television production. The new form also asked how many hours of television they watch per week, and how many episodes of *Boston Legal* they have seen. Since the pilot group indicated that if they had been more familiar with the writing and the characters of the show, they might have understood and appreciated the self-reflexive statements, the form needed a way to gauge how familiar future participants were with the show. It had already been decided that the focus groups for this study should be separated into fans and non-viewers of the show, but since participants were allowed to self-select which group they fell into, a measure of familiarity with the show was needed. The finalized information form is Appendix G, and the thought listing form is seen as Appendix H.

The pilot group did say that the thought listings were a good way to find out what they were thinking at that exact moment during their viewing of the show. They thought that stopping the show every five minutes was excessive, so for the final study, it was only stopped three times total, or approximately every fifteen minutes (a close approximation to commercial breaks during live television). The pilot group also indicated that their attention to the show wavered throughout the 42-minute episode, so a scale for level of investment in the show was added to the final thought listing forms.

Because the pilot group did not react to the instances of self-reflexivity, an open-ended questionnaire was added to the forms for the final study as well. *Questions*

The focus group format worked extremely well, allowing for a deeper discussion than individual interviews would have created. Participants expanded on each other's thoughts and asked questions about other shows that the actors and producers had been involved with. When discussing self-reflexivity, they also talked about other shows that use self-reflexive devices and what those devices were. The pilot group did, however, exhibit a lack of direction, especially at the beginning of the discussion. They spent time discussing the stereotypes perpetuated by the show, including the white lawyer stereotypes seen in Denny and Alan. For the final study, the questions were changed so that they were not so vague, and so that they asked more about self-reflexivity and intertextuality up front. It was also felt that the open-ended survey administered after they viewed the episode would help center the discussion on self-reflexivity.

The pilot group also agreed that watching an entire episode was refreshing, and that it gave them a chance to become more involved with the characters and the plot. They indicated that at first, they felt the pressure of being in a focus group study, which caused them to watch intently and wonder what questions would be asked, but by the end of the show, they were relaxed and felt "at home". They enjoyed the pizza and sodas provided, and said that the food added to their comfort during the viewing. There was even some typical viewing discussion amongst the group during the show and especially during the thought listing breaks. During the breaks, participants asked each other what other shows certain characters had been in. They also asked each other to clarify some of the plot points, or repeated some of the humorous lines from the show. The group was

asked if showing self-reflexive clips from *Boston Legal* would help center the discussion or prevent participant fatigue, but they indicated that it was more beneficial for them to understand the characters and the context of the show by watching an entire episode. They also said that fatigue was not a problem, even though the episode was 42 minutes long and the discussion kept them for a total of 2 hours.

Watching *Boston Legal*

As mentioned above, in order to see the ways that audiences react to self-reflexivity, it was beneficial for them to first watch an episode of *Boston Legal* before participating in focus groups. Although fans of the show might be able to give insight into their reactions to the self-reflexivity in the show without seeing it during the study, viewing the same episode as non-viewers prior to the discussion not only refreshed their memories, but it also helped to focus the discussions of both sets of participants to specific instances of self-reflexivity. According to Dahlgren (1988), a number of methods can be used in audience reception studies such as this one, but "virtually all of them are based on recording in-depth individual or small group interviews before, during, and/or after programme transmissions" (p. 290). Because an episode of the show was screened before the focus group discussions, participants discussed extraneous information less as well. They had episode 2.23 fresh in their memory and were better able to discuss specific examples from the episode.

Episode 2.23: "Race Ipsa"

The focus groups in the final study were shown episode 2.23 of *Boston Legal*, titled "Race Ipsa". This episode contained 2 major storylines. In one storyline, Denny Crane (played by William Shatner) pulls out a gun during his therapy session as a joke.

The therapist, Dr. Sydney Field (played by Peter MacNicol), uses the situation to tell Denny how tired he is of having to treat him. Dr. Field tells Denny that he wants to commit suicide, but that his life insurance has a no-suicide clause. Denny ends up shooting and wounding Dr. Field after the threat to shoot him if he did not. Dr. Field ends up testifying in court against Denny, who has a history of shooting people (in episode 2.09 he shot a homeless man with a paintball gun). The firm, Crane, Poole, and Schmidt, is threatening to expel Denny if he is convicted. During the first scene where Alan is in court representing Denny, he runs into an old co-worker named Chelina (played by Kerry Washington). In a very self-reflexive moment, Chelina says "Alan, the last time I saw you…" and Alan follows "…it was a Sunday, then we were taken off the air, moved to Tuesdays, and now here we are, with old footage", referring to the fact that *Grey's Anatomy* bumped *Boston Legal* from its original time slot on Sunday nights, and how they eventually found a spot on Tuesday evenings and the fact that this episode contained footage shot before the move was made. Later in this storyline a current co-worker of Alan's named Melissa (played by Marisa Coughlan) makes another self-reflexive statement, telling Alan not to fall for Chelina because "she's only a guest star". This statement refers to the fact that Chelina is no longer a regular character on the show, and therefore the audience should not assume that Alan and Chelina will develop a meaningful and lasting relationship. This storyline ends with Denny's therapist sneaking a gun into the courtroom during the trial and threatening the judge. Denny pulls out his own gun and shoots the therapist again, again wounding him slightly. While presented humorously, this storyline makes the viewer think about gun control in a very serious way and question whether or not people should be allowed to carry concealed weapons.

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The second storyline concerns Brad Chase (played by Mark Valley) and Denise Bauer (played by Julie Bowen). Brad's girlfriend dumped him and told him he is terrible at kissing. After an argument, Denise tells Brad that in the beginning of a relationship, kissing is very important. Later in the episode, Denise gives Brad kissing lessons that lead to the two characters having sex. This storyline ends with the viewers wondering about the nature of Brad and Denise's relationship. Although this storyline did not include any self-reflexive devices, the humor from this storyline serves to soften the political questions about gun control raised by the first storyline. It also sets the stage for Brad and Denise's relationship in later episodes.

Viewing Behavior

Focus groups are an ideal format for understanding the nature of audience reactions to certain textual elements. Often, people consume television texts in groups or at the very least with one or two other people (Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 2006, p. 280). And even when viewers watch a show alone, they often discuss the show with others as part of the normal routine. "Since the very early years of TV audience studies, researchers have acknowledged that the meaning of a television program is not permanently fixed through the act of watching, but developed through a viewer's social history" (Lewis, 1991, p. 87). In other words, people make sense of what they watch by talking about it with others. Making sense of television, whether viewed alone or with others, is inherently a social activity. Even if viewers do not discuss a specific episode or storyline, their understanding of the text is shaped by social influences. Focus groups help to expose these social influences, as participants are able to discuss the meanings of the episode with others who have also just seen it. As Inglis (1990) writes,

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the point is to try to recover the purposes and intentions of others, including, if we can, those of which they were not themselves conscious. As I have regularly underlined in these pages, the big structures of society play through our beings all the time, and our only chance of freeing ourselves from them is to catch them at work (p. 144).

Because participants will be encouraged to help each other formulate their understandings of the text, the big structures of society, and the informal social influences will come to light through the use of focus groups.

It was also important that while participants watched the episode of *Boston Legal*, they were comfortable and that it simulated typical viewing behaviors. For this reason, they watched the entire episode instead of individual clips of self-reflexive statements. When someone has an interest in a show, they typically view the entire episode. Viewing the entire episode also helped participants immerse themselves in the text. Participants in the pilot study reported feeling more relaxed and less aware that they were part of a research project as time progressed and as they became more invested in the episode of *Boston Legal* they were watching. Because "the effects of the media depend on or are *mediated* by where, why, and how people use or consume them" (Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 2006, p. 255), participants were offered food and drink (pizza and soda), allowed to sit on couches and other comfortable chairs, and encouraged to talk to each other while they watched the episode of *Boston Legal*. Although they were in a research lab because of the necessary equipment this study required, every effort was made to make their viewing experience during the study simulate their typical viewing behavior, with two exceptions: they were video recorded, and the show was paused three times so they could complete thought listing forms (Appendix H). Videotaping was necessary so

that the discussion could be transcribed later, with comments being attributed to the proper participant.

<div align="center">*Thought Listings*</div>

The episode of *Boston Legal* was paused at stopping points approximately every fifteen minutes during the show to let the participants fill out the thought listing form, including a scale of how interested they were in the show at that point. The show was paused at natural times, such as scene changes, to ensure a natural viewing experience. These pauses were brief (1-2 minutes), allowing enough time to record the first five thoughts about the show's elements, but still simulating the position in the show and duration of commercial breaks. The first time, the show was paused immediately after the first self-reflexive statement, when Alan and Chelina were discussing the show's change in time slot. The second break was immediately following the second self-reflexive statement, where Melissa tells Alan not to fall for Chelina. The third stopping point was after Denise gives Brad kissing lessons. There was not a self-reflexive statement made before this stopping point, and there was not a self-reflexive statement made at the end of the show before the participants wrote down their thoughts for the last time. In the pilot study, many of the items on these thought lists did not have to do with self-reflexivity, but a few did, and even a few of these uninhibited reaction to the self-reflexive statements gives valuable insight into the ways viewers react to self-reflexivity. As Lewis (1991) points out, even though viewers are more used to talking about television than writing about it, they often feel less inhibited and less judged by other participants when they are allowed to write their responses (p. 81). Thought listings not only exposed participants' immediate reactions to self-reflexive statements (as opposed to the discussion that

occurred after their viewing of the entire episode), it did so without the peer pressure present in focus groups.

Participants

Both fans and non-viewers of *Boston Legal* were recruited for this study in order to understand the connection between their relationship with the show and their readings of the self-reflexive statements in it. Results from fan and non-viewer focus groups will give insight into fans and non-viewers of shows that use self-reflexivity in similar ways. "While it cannot claim to be statistically representative, it is possible to include enough people in an interview based qualitative survey to be suggestive about patterns of determination" (Lewis, 1991, p. 82). Three focus groups of fans and three groups of non-viewers were recruited altogether.

Viewers develop certain relationships to the texts that they consume. Some even develop parasocial relationships with characters in the text (Ruben & McHugh, 1987). Fans of a show develop a certain loyalty to and affinity for that show. As Jenkins (2006) says, fans are not "passive consumers" of the television shows they enjoy (p.37). There are 1600 registered users on the *Boston Legal* fan forums that have made 45,000 posts since its inception on July 2, 2004 (site accessed for this info on 3/24/08). In March of 2006 alone, the site registered 240,000 hits. Fans of *Boston Legal* certainly seem to have developed a good relationship to the text. Non-viewers will have a different relationship to the text. It is important when discerning the ways that self-reflexivity affects viewers' relationships to *Boston Legal* that the differences between fans and non-viewers are examined. Presumably, self-reflexivity and the ability of fans to understand the self-reflexive statements and their referents will encourage a closer relationship to the text.

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Fish (1970) indicates that fans might view TV shows like *Boston Legal* differently than non-viewers of the series because fans are more informed viewers than non-viewers. This means that they have more of the background knowledge needed to understand the self-reflexive references, at least references to the show itself and often even references to the medium of television. They are also likely to devote more attention to the text than non-viewers and to do the work necessary to understand all of the references within the text. Likewise, if a viewer has the information they need to understand a self-reflexive statement, that statement is much more likely to make sense, and the viewer may develop a different relationship to that text. By looking at both fans and non-viewers, the focus group discussions will help us understand the ways that self-reflexivity influences the viewers' relationship with the text.

Non-viewers

The non-viewers were recruited from a group of undergraduate students at a large Midwestern University because of the convenience of this sample. This group is fairly representative of average viewers with little experience in media production or other education that might make them more aware of the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. Although representation of a larger population is not a concern in qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), using this group was recruited to answer the question of how most non-viewers read and react to self-reflexivity. The volunteer students were screened for whether or not they had seen any episodes of *Boston Legal*. In the non-viewer groups, no participants had seen an episode of *Boston Legal*. There were a total of three non-viewer groups. Non-viewer group 1 contained four female and four male undergraduate students. Non-viewer group 2 contained three female and three male undergraduate

students, and non-viewer group 3 had only one male and six female students. While recruiting the student groups, a few participants indicated that they were fans of *Boston Legal*. Since they might have been more aware of references to other storylines that could be in the episode used in this study, these fans were consolidated into their own focus group of fans.

<center>*Fans*</center>

Fans of the show were grouped based on their self-described interest in the show. Regardless of how many episodes they indicated watching prior to the study, if a participant indicated that they are a fan of the show, they were put into focus groups consisting entirely of other fans. They were asked how many episodes of the show they have seen as contextual information for the analysis. All of the fans did indicate that they had seen at least 12-24 episodes of the show. While the fan forum on www.boston-legal.org was a natural place to recruit fan groups, the geographic separation and economic hardships of the forum users prevented a group of fans from the forum to meet for this study. Instead, recruitment was conducted through social networks, both online and in person.

Fan group 1 consisted of three undergraduate students at a large Midwestern research University. This first group of fans indicated that they enjoyed the show primarily because they watched it at home with their parents and they found *Boston Legal* to be humorous. There were two males and one female in this group. These fans were recruited the same way as the groups of non-viewers, and since they come from the same group of undergraduate students (all of the students recruited were recruited from the same class at the University), the first fan group will allow for comparisons to be made

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between their discussion of the show and the non-viewer groups' discussions. After the group of student fans was found, other fans of the show were also recruited in the way Lewis (1991) suggests, based on their established social network in order to "make discussion easier to promote" (p. 91).

Fan group 2 consisted of a group of lawyers from a law firm in Kansas. Because the series is about lawyers, many of its fans are also lawyers. While the group had varying degrees of experience in the field (one was in their first year out of law school and one was a partner in the firm), all of them indicated that they were fans of *Boston Legal*, and most of them indicated that they had seen every episode. This group was primarily younger professionals, ranging in age from 26 to 45. Indeed, this group of one female and four male lawyers proved to be the most avid fans interviewed for this project, and displayed knowledge of *Boston Legal* that would rival any of the fans from the website forum. This was also the only focus group conducted outside of the University research lab, although every care was made to replicate the conditions of the lab. Pizza and sodas were provided, and the show was viewed on a television in the law firm's conference room. The discussion was videotaped using a broadcast-quality camera, but the participants seemed to feel comfortable in their conference room. They took off their suit jackets and ties, and put their feet up on the conference table throughout the viewing. This was also the liveliest group, cracking jokes with each other and making comments throughout the show.

Fan group 3 consisted of one male and two female participants. This group was not made up of lawyers, but did consider themselves to be fans of *Boston Legal*. This group was older on average (ages 29 to 60) and was the only group with any participants

that had children. The group consisted of one male and two female participants. This group's attraction to *Boston Legal* was based on their original enjoyment of *Star Trek* and the fact that William Shatner is in both series.

As described above, each group of fans indicated that they enjoyed the show for different reasons. This was done so that each group of fans could bring a different background to their reading and discussion of the text. By interviewing a number of fans with different viewing backgrounds and relationships to *Boston Legal*, it increased the likelihood that their experiences are similar to other fans of the show, and indeed that fan behavior towards self-reflexivity will even be similar to that of the fans of other shows that exhibit self-reflexivity.

Focus groups were conducted with fans of the show until a "critical threshold of interpretive competence has been reached" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 129), and the groups began to repeat some of the same information.

<center>Analyzing Thought Listings</center>

Wood (2006) looked at audiences' discourses with the text as they view it. She separated their comments during viewing into Primary (comments about the story or to the characters themselves), Secondary (comments about the structure, meanings, etc.), and Tertiary (comments about their own lived experiences). She uses their interaction with the text as an example of how audiences react to the text and negotiate their relationship with it. The comments made in this study on the thought listing forms and to other participants during the viewing of *Boston Legal* give insight into the reactions the participants have to the self-reflexive statements in the text. In the pilot study, participants were fairly quiet during the viewing, but the group was almost entirely made

up of non-viewers of *Boston Legal*. In the fan groups, participants were more vocal

during their viewing, especially since they have already seen many episodes of the show,

and this was a repeat viewing for many of them. Any comments made during their

viewing, and any comments in the thought listing exercise were looked at using Wood's

(2006) framework to help understand the reaction to the self-reflexive statements in

Boston Legal. This analysis, along with the open-ended questionnaire provided the

answers to research question 2, which asks, "how do viewers react to the self-reflexive

statements in *Boston Legal*?" and if there are differences in the reactions of fans versus

non-viewers.

Questionnaire

After participants watched episode 2.23 of *Boston Legal*, they filled out an open-

ended questionnaire (Appendix I). This questionnaire served two main purposes: it

allowed participants to record their initial, uninfluenced reactions to and interpretations of

the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*, and it helped direct the focus group

discussion on self-reflexivity instead of other textual elements. During the pilot study,

interview questions were broad and did not lead the discussion to self-reflexivity quick

enough. In the final study, the questionnaire gave participants a definition of self-

reflexivity, examples of self-reflexive devices, and then asked if they noticed any self-

reflexive statements in the episode they had just seen. In this way, even if they did not

write about the self-reflexivity during their thought listing, they could still comment on it.

The questionnaire also gave the two examples from episode 2.23 and asked participants

to comment on their reaction to these statements and to discuss their interpretation of the

self-reflexive statements. By writing these comments down prior to focus group

discussions, participants were sure to give honest answers not tainted by any need for peer approval. In other words, if they did not understand the reference, they are more likely to admit that on paper than to say it in front of the rest of the group. Participants' answers to the questionnaire give contextual information used to answer research questions 2 and 3, about how viewers react to self-reflexive statements and negotiate their meanings.

<center>Focus Group Discussions</center>

Once participants were finished with the open-ended questionnaire, the focus group interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted in the same research lab as the rest of the study, but participants were asked to sit at the conference table in the center of the room instead of being allowed to stay on the couches and chairs intended to make them comfortable during the viewing. Although replicating their typical viewing experience was not necessary during the interview portion of the study, they were allowed to put their feet up, continue eating pizza, and anything else they wanted to do for their own comfort. The main reason they needed to be seated at the table was so that the microphone could pick up what was being said during the discussions, and so that they appeared in the frame of one of the two video cameras that were recording the process.

Murphy (1999) encourages researchers to immerse themselves in the process of audience reception, and by conducting focus group discussions, this study of self-reflexivity will be more guided and complete. The focus group format allowed participants to share their readings of the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* and to describe how the self-reflexivity affects their relationship to the show. An advantage of

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using qualitative interviews is "the freedom it allows the respondent to set the agenda, and the scope it allows the interviewer to probe into potentially interesting areas" (Lewis, 1991, p. 83). Participants in the study were free to discuss the aspects of self-reflexivity and *Boston Legal* that they noticed during their viewing of the show, and as the researcher I had the freedom to explore different avenues of understanding as they arise. The focus group format also allowed the discussion to build. Participants regularly elaborated on what others said. While there was an interview guide (Appendix J) for this discussion, it was a very interactive process, with participants able to pose questions and elaborate on the things being said.

Questions

The qualitative discussion began with simple questions about the participants' understanding of the episode. "It is often helpful to ask respondents to reconstruct, at an early stage in the interview, the program they have just watched" (Lewis, 1991, p. 85). Participants were asked what they noticed about the plot lines, the characters, and other elements of the show. In some groups, participants discussed the self-reflexive instances in the episode after these opening questions, but for the most part, these questions got participants accustomed to the discussion format, and helped them feel more comfortable with the research atmosphere. In some cases, these initial questions also helped participants process the text and the self-reflexive statements that they had just written about in the open-ended questionnaire.

From there, the questions were increasingly focused on the specific instances of self-reflexivity in the text. The pilot study participants did not mention any specific instances of self-reflexivity without prodding (although the participants did laugh at

many of the references when they occurred in the show), so during the main study I was forced to narrow the focus and ask questions about specific instances. For example, I repeated the line Melissa says to Alan about Chelina being a guest star. At that point, participants were able to offer their reactions and insights specifically to the self-reflexivity in the show, including how the participants negotiated the meaning of those statements and how statements like those affected their relationship to the show and its actors, writers, and producers.

The qualitative focus group discussion also gave insight about the viewers' relationship to the text. Lembo (2007) believes that "analysts of the viewing culture must be cognizant of television's power, but they must then set aside power constructs in order to examine how particular kinds of viewers, whose lives are situated in particular ways, concretely construct their own meaningful relations with television" (p. 456). Participants were asked whether self-reflexive statements change the way they feel about certain characters and plot lines. Non-viewers were asked if self-reflexive statements might make them more likely to view another episode of *Boston Legal*. And most importantly, participants were asked about how self-reflexive statements make them feel. Do they feel smart when they understand a reference to a previous plotline or a reference to other shows that the actors starred in? The fan focus groups allowed the culture surrounding self-reflexive statements to be explored. "When this talk [with other similar viewers] is about television it works to activate and circulate meanings of the text that resonate with the cultural needs of that particular talk community" (Fiske, 1987, p. 78). The fact that the fan website has an entire forum thread dedicated to self-reflexivity within the show

indicates that those statements are important to the viewing of *Boston Legal*, and gives valuable context to the focus group discussions.

From there, the discussion expanded to other shows, and how self-reflexivity affected their relationship to those shows. By allowing non-viewers to talk about self-reflexivity in their favorite shows, even the non-viewer focus groups were able to give insight into the way that viewers negotiate their relationship to self-reflexivity in television as a medium. Indeed, while many of the non-viewers did not say much about the self-reflexivity in their viewing of *Boston Legal*, they had a lot to say about other shows that use self-reflexivity, and how it contributed to their relationships with those shows.

Analysis

Lembo (2007) suggests that audiences either watch a TV show alone, where the focus of analysis should be on their relationship to the symbolic forms presented to them, or as a social group, where the analysis should look at their mindful interactions with others (pp. 463-464). Usually the viewing falls somewhere in between these viewing patterns, meaning the researcher must look at the way viewers develop relationships to the "story telling conventions", "presentational symbolism", and "repetition of programming" (p. 463), as well as the conversations audiences have where "shared meanings" emerge (p. 464). The analyses of the questionnaire and the focus group discussions looked at the way each individual develops a relationship to the text and shed light on the shared meanings as they developed.

The discussions were transcribed and checked for accuracy, creating a total of 125 single-spaced pages of data. Lewis (1991) suggests viewing these transcripts as narrative.

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"Once we begin to see statements as fragments of narrative, we can begin to situate them within a wider discursive framework" (p. 93). These narratives were analyzed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) by "labeling and breaking down (or decontextualizing) raw data and reconstituting them into patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions" (p. 210). While there are no theories on self-reflexivity to guide this analysis, the framework developed in the literature review, and the textual analysis of *Boston Legal* provided a starting point for the understanding of the focus group discussions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and thematic analysis allowed concepts to emerge from the data and answer research questions 3 and 4.

As concepts about the participant's reaction to self-reflexivity, their meaning construction, and their relationship to the text emerged, they were coded, and the sub-categories were coded as well. Using non-viewers of *Boston Legal* also provided a check for these categories and sub-categories. Theoretically, non-viewers have a different relationship to the text, and therefore use a different narrative to describe their understandings of the episode they watch. Comparing and contrasting the differences between fans and non-viewers helped the analysis of the video and transcripts.

Verification

Verification (Creswell, 1997) of data ensures that the findings of this study can be transferred to other similar groups. In this case, verification suggests that most fans of *Boston Legal* will react in similar ways to the participants of this study when they see self-reflexivity in the show. Verification also allows this study to suggest that other shows that use self-reflexivity in similar ways will affect their audiences in ways similar to *Boston Legal*. Shows like *The Simpsons*, where the narrative is not entirely self-

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reflexive but where the show incorporates self-reflexive statements, might reach viewers in the same ways as *Boston Legal*.

In order to ensure transferability, this study used several forms of verification. The first way it verified the findings was through the use of triangulation of data (Creswell, 1997). The focus group interviews serve as one set of data, the textual analysis serves as another, and the fan-based website serves as contextual data. Looking at the fan-based website and the participants' postings about self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* showed that the focus groups' experience with the show is similar to other fans' experiences. The textual analysis also gave insight into whether or not viewers' reactions are anticipated, or if their responses are unwarranted by the text.

The second way data will be verified is by clarifying my own bias (Creswell, 1997). I am a fan of *Boston Legal*, and have seen all episodes of the show. I have also seen all episodes of *Star Trek*, and many episodes of other shows that *Boston Legal* makes references to. On the one hand, this gives me valuable insight and access to the fan culture surrounding *Boston Legal*, but on the other hand, I needed to be careful not to let my own experiences with the show influence my analysis of the data. For this reason, other fans of the show were consulted after the analysis was done to ensure that it is consistent with their experiences. This process is called "member checking" (Creswell, 1997). Lastly, my analysis contains detailed descriptions (Creswell, 1997, calls this "thick, rich description) of responses during the focus groups, so that readers can see how the responses address the issues and describe the phenomenon this study claims it does.

Chapter 4: Textual Analysis

This textual analysis examines the ways that self-reflexivity is used in *Boston Legal*, and the possible ways that audiences might interpret such statements. If meaning resides in the intersection between the text, context, and audience, a description of the text is necessary to begin. In this case, a description of the self-reflexive statements is necessary to gain an understanding of what it is this study is looking at. As mentioned in chapter one, the self-reflexivity on *Boston Legal* is not overt. Unless a viewer is paying close attention and knows the object or event that the statement refers to, they are likely to miss the meaning and the humor in the statement, and are likely to ignore that part of the text. *Boston Legal* incorporates self-reflexivity into the script in three primary ways: the show uses self-reflexive statements that (A) refer to the text itself, (B) refer to other shows or genres, and (C) refer to the medium of television. These categories were detailed in the initial review of the literature on self-reflexivity and compiled into a workable list of self-reflexive statements (Appendix A). One finding of this study is that the initial list was inadequate to describe all of the self-reflexive statements and categories of statements in *Boston Legal* encountered during the analysis, and therefore will be expanded upon in this chapter. The analysis found a number of self-reflexive statements, several of which fit into multiple categories. Many statements did not fit any category, but were self-reflexive in that they were statements where the texts referred to "their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii), or just generally referred to themselves as a television text, indicating the need to expand the initial framework.

This chapter provides a description of the ways that self-reflexivity is used in *Boston Legal*. Some of the categories are not mutually exclusive, so a few self-reflexive statements fall within more than one category listed in Appendix D. For example, in episode 2.09, "Gone", Denny appears on *Larry King Live*, where a fictional character named "Gracie Jane" is filling in for Larry. During this one reflexive part of the show, we see how *Boston Legal* hijacks (Price, 2005) an icon—the "Gracie Jane" character is an obvious facsimile of the real life Nancy Grace. The scene is also an example of intertextuality within the medium of television, as reference is made to the show, *Larry King Live*. And once Denny's interview begins, the audience sees cameras, teleprompters, floor directors, and other broadcast technologies that are revealed to the viewer. As they watch this fictional episode with "Gracie Jane", the audience learns how a live show would actually be taped. Although *Boston Legal* is not shot in this way (live, three camera studio shoot), the scene does reveal some production techniques and equipment to the viewer that are used on *Boston Legal* itself.

This chapter will describe these instances of self-reflexive statements and classify them into a new framework that can be used to classify such statements, both in *Boston Legal* and in other television shows. After looking at the initial framework and looking at the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, the original categories were compiled into four broad categories: (A) references to the show itself, (B) references to conventions of other shows and genres, (C) references to the medium of television, and (D) references to the corporeal (real) world. Within those four categories, the previous literature and the textual analysis informed several subcategories. Both the categories and subcategories are listed below and are found in Appendix D.

References to the Show Itself

In Olson's (1987) original description of meta-television, he identified three levels of self-reflexivity. The third level is where the "text-reflexive narrative deconstructs narrative style, creating a 'new-fashioned' form (p. 289). There were many references in *Boston Legal* where the show alluded to its own textuality. This category of self-reflexivity, when the show makes a reference to its own narrative, happens often in *Boston Legal* (a total of 16 times). These types of references can easily be written into the script in a way that the show can make a quick joke and move on with the rest of the narrative. While references to the narrative itself make sense to someone who actively watches the show, they can also be easily missed by someone who is not paying close attention or who does not have the background knowledge of the show's history or events that have happened in previous episodes. For instance, when Denny (played by William Shatner) says, "They can't get rid of me. I'm the star of the show", a viewer must read into the statement to realize that the character is not talking about being the star in the courtroom, or the star in the law firm. Indeed, Denny's character is one of the main characters, if not the main character of *Boston Legal*. The show probably would not have existed without William Shatner and his character, Denny Crane.

There are two main ways that a text can refer to its own narrative, with some subdivisions within one of those two subcategories. As Olson (1987) details, the first way a text can make a reference to its own narrative is to autodeconstruct itself. This means that these statements call "attention to the arbitrariness of their particular literary or televisual conventions" (p. 289). A text can also refer to its own narrative through what

Olson (1987) calls "ilinx". Ilinx statements serve no narrative purpose, but "non-sequiturs that serve no narrative function except that they call attention to themselves" (p. 295).

Autodeconstruction

Autodeconstruction (Olson, 1987) occurs when television show refers to its own narrative, characters, order of events, frequency of events, or its own duration. Autodeconstruction in *Boston Legal* usually occurs in the form of character dialogue, when the characters make a reference to the narrative structure or conventions of the show itself. There were also a few instances where the characters simply became aware of the television show's parameters, as seen when Jeffrey Coho (played by Craig Bierko) seemingly "sees" the graphics on the screen during the show's opening in episode 3.02. His head follows the letters as the move across the screen and he has a puzzled look on his face, but doesn't say anything. Once the credits are done rolling, the narrative moves on and Coho doesn't seem to remember the red graphic saying "Boston Legal". As with all of these self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*, autodeconstructive statements are made and quickly blend into the fictional narrative.

Duration. Surprisingly, there were not a lot of instances where the duration of a shot or scene was manipulated in *Boston Legal*. There was one scene in episode 2.09, "Gone", where a homeless man that Denny shot with a paintball gun walks into the law firm. Western music plays as if there will be a showdown, as the camera cuts back and forth between Denny and the man. As the man walks down the hall towards Denny, the shot is in slow motion. The slow motion of the shot emphasizes the way *Boston Legal* is hijacking the "showdown" convention seen often in Westerns. There were no instances in *Legal* where fast or slow motion was used simply to autodeconstruct the narrative.

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Order of events. The order of events was very linear in *Boston Legal*. Unlike films

like *Momento* and *Run Lola Run*, television shows are usually told in chronological order,

because viewers are more likely to get confused and changed the channel (whereas few

people will leave a theatre if a film leaves them in suspense). *Boston Legal* is no

different, with the narratives occurring with the typical gaps for commercials and time

constraints, but otherwise occurring in a very logical order. There was only one instance

where the characters made reference to the narrative order of events. This reference, even

though it was done through characters' dialogue, is still very self-reflexive. In *Boston*

Legal, the last ten minutes of the show usually feature Alan Shore and Denny Crane

sitting on the firm's balcony enjoying a drink and a cigar. The balcony is never even

shown any other time during the show, and Denny and Alan are never on it together

except at the end, with one exception. In episode 2.02, "Schadenfreude", Alan walks out

to the balcony where Denny is sitting and the show is only 20 minutes into the 60-minute

episode. Denny looks at Alan and says, "is the show over already?" As with all of the

references in *Boston Legal*, the viewer could read this as Denny asking if the court case

Alan was working on was finished, but the astute viewer or fan of the show would realize

that this scene is about 40 minutes early, and realize that Denny is talking about the

episode of *Boston Legal*, and not the court case.

Frequency/ repetition of events. As with duration and order, there were very few

instances when *Boston Legal* used frequency, or repetition of events in its

autodeconstruction. There was one instance that came later in the show's run: in episode

4.15, Denny has no pants on prior to going into a courtroom. This is a direct reference to

the show's opening episode, where Edwin Poole (played by Larry Miller) did a similar

thing. The characters treated Denny in a similar way to Edwin (who had documented mental problems). Denny knew immediately that they were questioning his mental capacity and said that he spilled something on his pants. This reference in season 4 to the initial episode is a self-reflexive "wink" to viewers who had been watching since the beginning. Although viewers not familiar with the reference could still laugh at Denny, they would not understand the writers' use of repetition/frequency completely.

Voice. Boston Legal used self-reflexivity referring to the voice of the show four times, all of which occur during the show opening or closing. As Olson (1987) describes a self-reflexive voice, he is referring only to the actual voice of the narrative, or the narrator. Although he separates self-reflexive voice into "homodiegetic" narration (where one of the characters is also the narrator) and "heterodiegetic" narration (where there is a third party narrating the story), such a distinction is blurry in the case of *Boston Legal*, as there is no narration at all. Instead, the self-reflexive voice that *Legal* uses is that of the theme music. Sometimes this would be heterodiegetic, as it is not coming from something on-screen, but sometimes the characters themselves are involved with the song, making those instances homodiegetic (yet the music is still heterodiegetic, coming from "off-screen"). This is seen when the singer (who is off-camera and not a part of the narrative) of the theme song coughs in the middle of their song as Alan and Denny smoke their cigars on the balcony at the end of episode 3.04, "Fine Young Cannibal", or in episode 3.11, "Angel of Death", when Denny plays the first few notes of the theme song on his kazoo before the recorded version of the song picks up. Another instance of self-reflexive voice happens when Jerry Espenson (played by Christian Clemenson) sings along with the theme song at the opening of episode 3.22, "Guantanamo by the Bay".

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The one time in all of the episodes that there is truly a homodiegetic, self-reflexive narration, is when Denny turns to the camera in episode 3.02, "New Kids on the Block", and says, "cue the music." This marks a break from the other instances of self-reflexive voice, and even most of the self-reflexive statements made in *Boston Legal* because it is the only time that a character directly addresses the audience. Perhaps it is not the actual audience, but the production crew Denny is talking to, but it is still one of the only classic examples of "direct address" or "breaking the fourth wall" as most people think of it to be seen in *Legal*.

For the most part, even viewers who are not familiar with the show can understand self-reflexive voice. When Denny says "cue the music", it does not take much background knowledge of the show to know that he is telling the show's producers that the theme song should be heard, and indeed, the show opening comes up immediately after Denny says those words. When the singer coughs because of the smoke, it does not take any experience with *Boston Legal* to understand that the writers and producers are acknowledging what the viewer is thinking-that there is a lot of smoke in the shot from the two cigars. Where experience helps the viewer is that someone who watches *Boston Legal* regularly knows how rare these types of reflexive statements are. When Denny says, "cue the music", it is one of the few times when a viewer thinks they are talking to him or her directly.

Mood. "Self-reflexive mood is often characterized by the ability of the characters to read the narrative of which they are a part" (Olson, 1987, p. 294). In *Boston Legal*, this seems to be the producers' autodeconstruction of choice, as there are 10 different instances where the characters seem to know that they are a part of a fictional narrative

on television. The example above, where Jeffrey Coho sees the opening graphics, or the example where Denny says "I'm the star of the show" are both examples of self-reflexive mood. In episode 3.01, "Can't We All Get A Lung?", Alan Shore says that he "feels like a character in a TV show", calling attention to the fact that he is indeed such a character, even if he is fairly oblivious to that fact most of the time. In another episode, 4.09-"No Brains Left Behind", Alan says to Shirley Schmidt that they sue people and make it fun to watch. This self-reflexive statement of course refers to the typical storylines of the show, where lawyers from the firm take on cases and sue people, and the fact that they have an audience watching these storylines. Alan isn't the only one with self-reflexive mood statements. In episode 2.23, "Race Ipsa", Melissa Hughes (played by Marisa Coughlan) tells Alan not to get involved with Chelina Hall (played by Kerry Washington) because "she's just a guest star." Ironically, Melissa is herself just a guest star, even though she wants a more intimate relationship with Alan.

In some of the examples of self-reflexive mood, such as Jeffrey Coho's ability to "see" the graphics on the screen, or Alan saying he feels "like a character on a TV show", the audience needs very little knowledge or background to understand the reference. They simply need to be paying attention. Statements referring to someone as "just a guest star", or when Alan asks Shirley if they "win so much [they] lose all suspense" (episode 3.04, "Fine Young Cannibal") need more background knowledge. The fact that they do indeed win some implausible cases might cause the dedicated viewer to feel less suspense over whether or not they will win the case. Viewers would only know someone really is "just a guest star" if they are regular viewers of the show. Indeed, as will be discussed in the audience analysis portion of this paper, participants who had never seen *Boston Legal*

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prior to their viewing of episode 2.23 assumed that Melissa would call someone a "guest

star" in normal conversation, even though they later acknowledged the absurdity of that

statement as colloquial speech.

Ilinx

Although ilinx is seen often in some narrative television shows, *Boston Legal* did

not use ilinx at all in its 101-episode run. This is, perhaps, because *Legal* is a drama,

where characters are to be taken seriously at times. The television show *Scrubs* uses ilinx

often when the main character and narrator, John Dorrian, regularly has "daydreams" that

actually play out on the screen. Even though none of the other characters see what he is

dreaming, he typically says something absurd when coming out of the dream and into the

narrative again. Most often, the characters haven't moved and hardly react to whatever

J.D. says. These moments of ilinx in *Scrubs* serve as a comedic joke because of their

absurdity and irrelevance to the narrative. Such comedy would probably not work in a

drama like *Boston Legal*. Although his character is a successful doctor, most viewers

probably do not take J.D. very seriously, and *Scrubs* doesn't typically tackle the broad

social problems (although it does have its moments) that *Boston Legal* does.

When a reference to the show's own textuality is made, either through

autodeconstruction or ilinx, viewers may or may not understand the reference. Sometimes

these statements require background knowledge, contextual knowledge, or prior

knowledge of the show's characters or previous storylines. Other times,

autodeconstruction and ilinx do not require any outside knowledge, allowing astute and

awake viewers to quickly understand that the show is highlighting the fact that it is a

fictional narrative. *Boston Legal* makes both kinds of statements. *Legal* certainly has

"inside jokes" that only dedicated fans "get". There are entire threads on the fan-based website, *boston-legal.org*, dedicated to these "winks" to the fans of the show. But the producers are smart enough to have similar jokes for the people who are just starting to watch the show. Very few viewers come back if they feel left out of the show's dialogue or narrative. And of course, self-reflexivity is not limited to references to the show itself. Statements can also be made that refer to other shows or genres, to the medium of television, or even to the corporeal world.

References to Conventions of Other Shows or Genres

The next main category of self-reflexive statements goes beyond the show itself, expanding to other shows and genres. While still making references to other shows, this type of self-reflexivity still does not go beyond the confines of a single show or a specific genre. This includes statements that "hijack" (Price, 2005) icons, archetypes, settings, plot structures, ideological conventions, distinct production elements, or industry standards of that show or genre. "Hijacking" conventions of other shows or genres means that the self-reflexive statement uses the convention, but usually in a way that highlights the use. For example, a cross dressing character named Clarence Bell (played by Gary Anthony Williams) dressed as Oprah Winfrey in episode 3.12, "Nuts", and acted like the talk show host, psychoanalyzing another character. As Olson (1987) points out, such references "distill archetypes, setting, and icons to epitomize a genre and parody the original". These references point out the distinction between the show the audience is watching and the show being parodied, thus highlighting the fact that the audience is watching a fictional narrative.

Icons

As with the Oprah example above, references to icons of other shows, and possibly genres, occur when a well-known character is parodied. *Boston Legal* typically referenced non-fictional characters, but there is still a distinction between doing this and making references to the actor themselves, which is generally tied to their entire body of work and not just one show. The Oprah example illustrates this kind of reference, as does the two parodies of Nancy Grace. In *Boston Legal*, the character is renamed "Gracie Jane", yet is obviously supposed to mimic Nancy Grace. Gracie Jane appears in episodes 2.09, "Gone", and 4.06, "The Object of my Affection". In both episodes, she is a hard-hitting talk show host that has no patience for Denny's machismo. In another episode (4.18, "Indecent Proposals"), a character named "Wolfgang Blitzkrieg" says that he is with the "best political news team in television" as he holds a microphone that says, "CCN". Yet another reference is made in episode 4.15, "Tabloid Nation", when a character named "Dr. Ray" is being sued for giving out psychological advice on his show that closely resembles the "Dr. Phil" show. These parodies of popular shows do require the audience to recognize the original (Olson, 1987), expanding the required background knowledge beyond the regular viewers of *Boston Legal*. In fact, all of the references to other shows or genres only require knowledge of the show or genre being hijacked, unlike the previous category of self-reflexivity where many references require the viewer to have background knowledge of previous episodes and of the show and its characters.

Archetypes

Archetypes are similar to icons, except that they are not specific to a character. Archetypes refer to the typical character types, but not the specific character. For

example, the bad guy in a western usually wears black, has a mustache, and doesn't follow the rules. If a show wanted to hijack an archetype, they would have a generic "bad guy" character (not a named character) and manipulate the reference in some way, perhaps having the bad guy do a good deed, or placing them in an unfamiliar context. While Olson (1987) doesn't give many specifics or examples to show what a self-reflexive archetype would look like or how the audience might read it, there was one instance in *Boston Legal* where this type of self-reflexivity might arguably have been employed. In episode 4.01, "Beauty and the Beast", John Larroquette plays a lawyer from New York. While he has a new name, "Carl Sack", it is a similar looking and sometimes acting character to Dan Fielding, the lawyer that John Larroquette played on *Night Court*. The fact that he is from New York leads one to believe that the producers were making hijacking the character type from *Night Court*, even though Carl Sack develops way beyond Dan Fielding in his two season run on *Legal*. Only someone with knowledge of *Night Court*, and a good memory, would understand this reference, but archetypal references are not always so obscure, and may not typically need much background knowledge on the part of the viewer, as archetypal references are more typically references to genres and not specific shows, since they usually refer to character conventions, and not specific characters (or it would be a reference to the icon, and not the archetype).

Settings

As with archetypes, settings can be hijacked, sometimes with specific references and sometimes with more generic ones; for example, when *Family Guy* or *The Simpson's* places their characters in a Science Fiction scene, complete with a spaceship and aliens.

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The references can be subtler, but again, Olson (1987) gives little direction about what

such references might look like, or what they might require of the audience. Much like

archetypes, references to settings could require obscure knowledge of what the bar from

Cheers looked like, or it could only require general knowledge about the genre, such as

the Sci Fi example above. Most likely because of the fact that it is a live drama with a

large crew and cast, *Boston Legal* did not hijack the setting from any other shows or

genres.

Plot Structure

Boston Legal only makes a reference to the plot structure of the genre (courtroom

dramedy) in one instance. In most courtroom dramas and dramedies, the case is heard

throughout the 30- or 60-minute episode, evidence is presented, witnesses are put on the

stand, partners are seen at the law firm for various secondary plot lines, and then in the

last 10-15 minutes of the episode, the jury deliberates and comes back with their verdict.

The last 5-10 minutes are occupied with the partners or main characters discussing the

ramifications of the decision and wrapping up or extending any other plot lines. In

episode 4.17, "The Court Supreme", *Boston Legal* makes light of this plot structure when

Justice Roberts tells Alan he might use the time he has left on the case as Alan begins to

get off-topic. Indeed, there are only 15 minutes left in the time slot for *Boston Legal*, and

the last 10 minutes of *Legal* always occur after the case is decided and Denny and Alan

are on the Balcony discussing the day's events.

In this case, a viewer familiar with *Boston Legal* would understand that there are

only a few minutes before the balcony scene, and that Alan indeed needed to wrap up his

argument. But a viewer who is only familiar with courtroom dramas would still get this

reference, as it pertains to the plot structure of the entire genre. Silverblatt (2007) calls these predictable plot structure "formulaic plot" (p. 40) and identifies some common plotlines in genres. Someone familiar with the genre being hijacked could easily understand a reference to a formulaic plot structure.

Ideological Conventions

Silverblatt (2007) defines ideology "as the system of beliefs or ideas that help determine the thinking and behavior of a culture" (p. 136). Ideology may be a set of political, religious, or cultural beliefs. For example, western culture teaches that "cheaters never win". This is an ideological ideal. In fact, sometimes cheaters do not get caught and things do work out better for them. When a television show twists an ideal around to make a social comment on it, thus hijacking it, it can be seen as a self-reflexive statement on the way television typically reinforces the cultural norms. The only example of this in *Boston Legal* occurs when Alan asks Shirley Schmidt "do you think we win so often that we lose all suspense?" (episode 3.04, "Fine Young Cannibal"). As Alan says these words, it highlights the fact that as viewers, we expect them to win every case because Alan is the "good guy" in the show. Even though he has his flaws, Alan is seen as someone who will always stick up for those who are under-represented, who brings cases against impossible foes, and who triumphs in un-winnable cases. Viewers might only understand this reference if they are familiar with previous episodes of the show where Alan wins similar cases, but there is a chance that even after watching only one episode, a viewer might find humor in the statement, as it comes immediately after Alan wins just such a case.

Production Elements

There are certain production elements that become the "style" of certain shows or genres. Silverblatt (2007) includes "editing, color, lighting, shape, movement, angle, and music" as production elements (p. 172). As he points out, the lighting in film noir is a very stylized and often hijacked production element. Television shows like *CSI* and *Battlestar Galactica* use the low-key lighting (Zettl, 2007a) typically associated with film noir in order to make the harsh realities they deal with seem more natural. In *Boston Legal*, there are two instances where the show hijacks a production element from another show or genre. The first occurs in episode 1.05, "An Eye for an Eye", when the show opening becomes cartoon-like (it is, in fact, rotoscoped in Adobe After Effects and Photoshop to create the effect). This effect was seen in the film *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) and in several Charles Schwab commercials around the same time. In fact, it is more likely the audience of the commercials that the producers of *Boston Legal* were reaching out to with the reference, as the young drug-seeking audience that *A Scanner Darkly* attracted is not the typical *Legal* viewer.

The second time *Boston Legal* hijacks a production element comes in episode 2.09, "Gone", when the western music plays as a homeless man comes in to talk to Denny. The cuts between close ups and the western music emphasize the feeling that this is a western "showdown" between the two characters. In both of these cases, viewers need to be familiar with the commercials or the western genre, but not *Boston Legal* itself, to understand the reference.

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Mocking Industry Standards

Silverblatt (2007) suggests taking an "industry perspective" when analyzing shows, including the phases of popularity for the show, the nature of spinoffs, and the way the industry works for each show or genre. For the purpose of this paper, "industry standards" also refers to those conventions shows have because that is the standard for the genre or the show itself. For example, in episode 3.08, "Lincoln", a mentally unstable character named Lincoln Meyer (played by David Dean Bottrell) has Shirley at gunpoint and says that if it were a movie, they "would hear an ominous chord". Immediately after he says this, a minor chord is struck across a stringed instrument on the soundtrack, not heard by either character, but the timing is very noticeable to the audience. This statement and chord highlight the way suspense is being drawn in the scene. While this could be seen as a production element, the fact that Lincoln points out that the ominous chord is a movie industry staple, especially in the horror and suspense genres, makes it more a comment on industry standards than a hijacking of production elements.

A more clear example of hijacking industry standards occurs in episode 3.12, "Nuts", when Clarence, dressed as Oprah, is told to "bump to a commercial break". Clarence stares at the character, who he is psychoanalyzing as Oprah, then the commercials begin. This reference highlights the fact that television shows have commercials, scheduled at strategic points in the narrative structure, such as after a key "cliffhanger" scene.. While viewers do not necessarily need to be familiar with *Boston Legal* or any other shows to understand these references, they must have some familiarity with conventions of the television industry, at least as it pertains to genres and show standards.

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References to specific shows or genres take many forms, each one requiring different background knowledge to understand. References to specific shows and their conventions require knowledge of those shows, where references to genre conventions are usually more general, and may only require a familiarity with the genre. References to industry standards only require cultural knowledge of standard TV conventions, similar to the knowledge required to understand references to the medium of television as a whole.

References to the Medium of Television

When self-reflexive statements do not refer to a specific show or genre, many times they still make reference to the properties that define television as a medium. Olson (1987) breaks down references to the medium of television into two categories: audience awareness and allusion. *Boston Legal* makes references that definitely fall within these two categories, but also shows the need to expand them beyond the way Olson defines them. *Legal* also uses medium reflexivity in ways that require a new subcategory: references to industry standards. Much like the industry standards that Silverblatt (2007) identifies, this category belongs here because those references can be made to specific shows, as discussed above, but they can also refer to the entire medium's industry standards. Thus, a new subcategory should be added to Olson's original framework.

References to the Audience

Olson (1987) says that, "audience awareness occurs when television characters address the audience directly" (p. 286). This is commonly known as "direct address", and Olson traces the practice back to its literary roots and *Don Quixote*. While direct address most definitely qualifies as a reference to the audience, the subcategory is in desperate

need of expansion. References can be made to the audience without turning to the camera and saying something meant only for them. An excellent example of this occurs in episode 3.13, "Dumping Bella", when Alan and Denny are slow dancing during the balcony scene. Alan is still dressed as Shirley Schmidt from the firm's costume party, and Denny is dressed as Dick Cheney. Denny has a not-so-secret love for Shirley and asks Alan to dance. As they dance, they begin to talk about the windows of all the buildings around them and they wonder if anyone is looking down at them. Denny wonders what people might think if they were watching, to which Alan replies, "if they're regular viewers, they know by now that anything goes." This is certainly a statement that can be taken at face value by someone unfamiliar with the show, but it is just as certainly a reference to the show's fans. Although the ratings for *Legal* slowly declined after its first two seasons, the show held a dedicated audience of fans through 101 episodes. This reference to the "regular viewers" is an acknowledgement that the producers and writers of *Boston Legal* value their fans. Indeed, by episode 4.12, "Roe vs. Wade the Musical", Alan says to Denny that "not enough" people have Alan in their lives, which can be read as a reference to the declining audience numbers *Boston Legal* had through its fourth and fifth seasons.

Intertextuality

Olson calls the second subcategory of medium references "allusion" (p. 287), but the word allusion simply means "the integration of one text into another", and does not adequately name the way television texts, characters, storylines, and the "diegetic join" (White, 1986) that can occur in self-reflexive statements of this kind. "Intertextuality" (Feuer, 1984) is a much better descriptor, as it encompasses the various ways that texts

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intermingle in today's television landscape. Indeed, *Boston Legal* itself was a spinoff of *The Practice*. As a spinoff, some characters remained consistent through the transition, other characters were lost entirely, and still others took on new dimensions in their role on the new show. Alan Shore was introduced as a guest star in the final season of *The Practice*, but his character does not really develop until he is a prominent role on *Boston Legal*. His friendship with Denny Crane was never explored in *The Practice*, as Denny did not exist until *Boston Legal*.

Boston Legal* also made references to other shows in the televisual world. The writers and producers made several references to the series that made William Shatner famous: *Star Trek*. In episode 2.03, "Finding Nimmo", Alan reads Denny a news article about marine life that latches onto boats. Alan calls them "cling ons", to which Denny (Shatner) replies, "Did you say 'Klingons'"? This is, of course, a reference to the Klingons, the villains in the original *Star Trek* series and films. In another episode (2.11, "The Cancer Man Can"), Denny opens his cell phone and it beeps with the same sounds that the communicators did in the original *Star Trek* series. Denny also asks a female companion if he moved to Hawaii how he would get to work- by "beaming [him]self to Boston?" (episode 2.17, "There's Fire"). In yet another reference to *Star Trek*, Denny is bragging to the press and listing off his lifetime accomplishments. At the end of the list, he says "I once captained my own spaceship" (episode 3.24, "Trial of the Century"). There is an entire thread on the fan website forum dedicated to *Star Trek* references, where fans have pointed out numerous other connections, including the list of stars and guest stars on the show who have connections to the *Star Trek* saga, including all the films and series. In season four, Scott Baccula, Captain Archer in the *Star Trek:*

Enterprise series even made a guest appearance as Shirley's ex-boyfriend. The producers of *Boston Legal* knew that fans of William Shatner would tune into his latest show, and they capitalized on that connection by regularly throwing intertextual references into the script.

The intertextual references were not limited to *Star Trek*, however. In episode 2.09, "Gone", Denny is scheduled to appear on *Larry King Live* as if he, Denny Crane, exists in the same non-fictional televisual world as Larry King. In another (episode 4.15, "Tabloid Nation"), Alan rants about reality shows taking over the television lineup. At the time, *Boston Legal* was in direct competition with *American Idol* on Tuesday nights, but the reference is much more absurd when you think about Alan Shore, himself a fictional television character, sitting down and watching television and discussing the shows he watches. Much like the reference Jerry Espenson makes to *Mayberry RFD* in episode 4.11 ("Mad About You"). *Mayberry RFD* was the spinoff of the *Andy Griffith Show*. Only fans of the obscure show would understand the reference, but because *Legal* draws an audience that is familiar with the expanse of the television landscape, the producers know that some viewers would understand the reference. These references take a variety of form, from spoken dialogue, to characters from other shows reprising their roles. Each reference requires a range of knowledge from the show's audience, from general knowledge about trends in television (reality shows) to obscure knowledge about individual shows or characters (*Mayberry RFD*).

Industry Standards

Much like the industry standards in the references to an individual show or genre, this subcategory refers to the general standards of the television industry as a whole. If a

reference to a television industry convention transcends a specific show or genre, then it belongs here. For example, when *Boston Legal* makes a reference to characters being guest stars in episode 2.23, "Race Ipsa" as mentioned above, when Melissa tells Alan not to get involved with a guest star. This reference highlights the television convention that guest stars are rarely in relationships with main characters because they do not appear in more than one or two episodes. In episode 3.02, "New Kids on the Block", two new main characters are introduced (Jeffrey Coho and Claire Simms, played by Craig Bierko and Constance Zimmer). Alan tells Denny "these are the new guys", to which Denny replies, "please, if these were the new guys, they would have been in the season opener." Introducing new characters in the season opener is a television convention that crosses genre and show, typically because of contract negotiations or changes that take place during the off-season. As Denny astutely points out to a television savvy audience, *Boston Legal* is mixing things up and commenting on that convention by introducing the characters in the second episode of the season. These references to industry practices and conventions usually only require a basic familiarity of the way things are usually presented in television shows. It does not require knowledge of the practice of a specific show or genre if it refers to the medium of television as a whole.

<center>*References to Events in the Corporeal World*</center>

A new category needs to be added to Olson's framework of self-reflexive techniques, where he only outlined three main categories of self-reflexivity, or metatelevision as he calls it. TV shows often make references to the corporeal world, or the "real world" itself. *Boston Legal* especially references current events in its storylines, making the series seem timely and relevant. For example, a recent episode (4.04, "Do

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Tell", aired 10/16/07) dealt with the military's policy toward gay soldiers, colloquially known as "don't ask, don't tell". Alan Shore (played by James Spader) regularly spouts statistics when talking about current events. The statistics are most likely accurate, but this becomes self-reflexive when he is having a casual conversation with other characters and references data that takes a great deal of research to obtain. As Siska (1979), Withalm (2004), Jones (2005), and Spzczepanik (2002) identify, there are self-reflexive elements that refer to this corporeal world that do not fit into Olson's (1987) original framework. References to current events, references to the author (writer, creator, producer), references to the actor, references to the show as a corporeal object, unmasking the mechanisms of production, references to the modes of distribution, and intermedia textuality are all examples of self-reflexive devices that refer beyond the televisual world and into the corporeal one. Many times, these statements are done to add an element of play into the text, but sometimes they carry a broader meaning about the state of the world or social commentary.

References to Current Events

  Boston Legal makes many references to current events, but not all are self-reflexive, although a case can be made that anytime a show refers to events or issues currently in the news, it goes beyond the show's fictional confines in much the same way as intertextual references do. For example, when Shirley says, "listen to us. We've stooped to the level of…presidential candidates" during the 2008 election campaigns, it implies that the characters themselves are watching television and paying attention to the race. While some might consider this to be political commentary, there is a self-reflexive

element when a show blurs the boundaries between events in the corporeal world and the fictional world of the show.

There are references to current events in *Boston Legal*, though, that are most certainly self-reflexive because of the topic. References to news and events about television as a corporeal object definitely point out to the viewer the nature of the fictional television show. For example, in episode 4.15, "Tabloid Nation", Denny quotes a writer who says "no tears for the writer. No sex". This statement was in the first episode back after the recent writers' strike that affected the entire television industry in 2007-2008. In another reference to the strike, Jerry Espenson tells Katie Lloyd (played by Tara Summers) that "during the strike, [he] fell in love", to which Katie replies, "What strike?" The references to current events that have affected the television industry are self-reflexive in that they make light of the events and their impact. In Jerry's dialogue, the writers make it seem as if plot lines had continued for some characters during the strike and not for others. The fact that one character is aware of the current events in the corporeal world while another character seems oblivious is playfully self-reflexive.

References to the Author

The two references above, from episodes 4.15 and 4.16, referring to the writers' strike are also examples of the type of reference Siska (1979) says is the "artist as creator reflecting upon himself" (p. 285). While Siska discussed metacinema, not television, authorial reflexivity can be used in television as well. In the references to the writers' strike, *Boston Legal* is referring to their writers as author. Siska applies the term more generally to the directors of some iconic films, but it could be applied, even in the cinematic realm, to the writers, the directors, or the producers. Anyone with a creative

contribution to the final form the film or television show takes can be the subject of a reference. In these reflexive references, the viewer needs specific knowledge about the subject of the reference in order for it to make sense. The writers' strike was covered in the news often enough that viewers of *Boston Legal* most likely understood the reference easily, but a reference to David E. Kelley as a producer might require more obscure knowledge. Such references are more difficult to connect to the audience because the average viewer most likely knows little about the production crew and the writers of any given show.

References to the Actors

Viewers are much more familiar with the actors in television shows, as they are the ones who are more visible. While this subcategory was not mentioned in the review of the literature, the actors themselves can be the subject of a self-reflexive statement just as the author can. When a reference is to the actor himself or herself, and not to one of the characters they have played in the past, the reference becomes a reference to the corporeal world, and not the intertextual world of television. And so the references to *Star Trek* are intertextual, but the reference in episode 4.17, "The Court Supreme" to William Shatner's short-lived singing career is to the actor himself, not any of the characters he has played. In that episode, Denny gets up on stage with his band and sings a song. Only someone familiar with William Shatner, the actor, would find the similarity between Shatner's corporeal accomplishments and his character's accomplishments. Another example is seen in episode 2.09, "Gone", when Denny says, "I can act, you know. I've won an Emmy", to which Alan Shore replies, "just the same" (James Spader has also won Emmy awards). Viewers that are unfamiliar with the actors and their careers

can easily dismiss this blurring of the character and the actor, but to the informed fan, these references are highly self-reflexive rewards for their loyalty.

References to the Show as a Corporeal Object

Some of the more clever self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* refer to the show as a corporeal object. None of the previous literature on self-reflexivity identifies such references or has a category for them, but this textual analysis of *Boston Legal* observed six times where the show referred to itself as a "real world" object. For instance, in episode 2.04, "A Whiff and a Prayer", Denny says that he wants "to go out with his pride…or at least his old time slot". This statement comes after *Boston Legal* got moved from Sundays to Tuesdays so ABC could make room on Sundays for *Grey's Anatomy*. Another reference to the move comes in episode 2.23, "Race Ipsa", when Alan and Chelina have a conversation about the last time they saw each other, prior to being "taken off the air, moved to Tuesdays…and here we are with old footage." Later, when *Legal* moved to Wednesdays, the actors again had conversations about the move. In episode 4.17, "The Court Supreme", Denny and Alan talk about that move, and in episode 4.18, "Indecent Proposals", all of the main characters are sitting in the firm's break room when someone comes in and tells them they're on. They are all confused about what night it is and what night they go on. The show makes references to the time slot changes with good humor, but with some obvious frustration as well. Viewers who are aware of the time changes (the ones who watch the show regularly) understand the references and the producers' frustrations, but viewers unfamiliar with the moves will read the dialogue to be referring to the time for a court case.

Boston Legal makes self-reflexive statements about more than its time slot, though. At the end of season 2 (episode 2.27, "BL: Los Angeles"), Alan and Denny are sitting on the balcony as usual. They are talking about all of the beautiful things America has to offer and toasting to them. Finally, Alan pauses, picks up his glass and says, "to next season, my friend." Denny replies, "same night?" and Alan says, "God, I hope." The reference to the ending season and the upcoming season 3 is reflexive of the show itself. In a similar manner, at the end of season 3 (episode 3.24, "Trial of the Century"), Alan and Denny discuss all of the events that happened that season and Alan says, "I can't wait to see what we do next season." This highly reflexive statement points out to viewers that the show is an object, has creators and writers, and that even the actors do not know what storylines will be coming up in season 4. Even viewers that are unfamiliar with the show would typically understand the references "to next season."

Unmasking the Mechanisms of Production

Technological unveiling can be a clear way to create self-reflexive awareness within the audience (Siska, 1979, Withalm, 2004, and Jones, 2005). When the technology used to create the show is seen by the audience, it is immediately apparent that the television show is simply a fictional narrative created for the viewers' benefit. The fictional "mask" created by the narrative is lifted, and the audience is allowed to see the production process and tools. Such references take a variety of forms, but all serve to inform the viewer about the production.

In *Boston Legal*, there are five instances where the mechanisms of production are unmasked, yet they are all done in a way that the viewer can read the reference to be simply part of the narrative. For example, in episode 4.11, "Mad About You", Denny is

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seen by other characters on the television set because of his involvement in a high-profile

court case. Later in the same episode, Denny says to the cameraman, "Denny Crane,

ready for my close up" right before a close up is shown of his face. In episode 4.12, "Roe

vs. Wade the Musical", when Denny and Alan are on the balcony, Denny is talking about

the case. The camera cuts to Alan, who doesn't talk until the camera cuts back to Denny

and Denny gives Alan the "cue talent" signal used by floor directors in live television.

Alan then jumps in with his opinion on the case. In a different type of unmasking (in

episode 4.15, "Tabloid Nation"), Denny is getting ready for a date with Shirley and is

getting makeup and special equipment to allow him to look like he is crying whenever he

squeezes a water pouch. Indeed, these types of pouches are regularly used in television

and films during dramatic scenes when a character needs to be able to cry on cue. Denny

refers to the makeup artist as someone who works in film doing special effects. The

audience is left feeling disillusioned, but perhaps more educated, about the use of special

effects in dramatic productions. References to the mechanisms of production typically do

not require much outside knowledge, but instead give the viewer knowledge about the

way television shows are produced in an educational way.

References to the Modes of Distribution

Withalm (2004) breaks down references to the modes of distribution into three

different areas: distribution outlets, accompanying documents, and assessment

institutions. Although Withalm only discusses cinema and the film industry, the concepts

can be carried into an analysis of self-reflexive television. For example, instead of film

distributors, television shows can make references to broadcasting, cable, satellite, the

sale of DVDs, and even online distribution. Withalm defines accompanying documents

as "the entire promotion, trailers, film magazines, critique, fanzines, etc." While

television shows do not typically have trailers, they do have commercial promotions,

billboards, radio ads, articles in the TV Guide, fan websites, and other peripheral

elements that can be references in the show itself. Finally, by assessment institutions,

Withalm means film festivals, judging, and censorship. This concept can be adapted for

television texts to include ratings and awards.

Distribution Outlets. Television shows are distributed through a variety of outlets,

from broadcasting to online media. ABC originally broadcast *Boston Legal*, but one can

also watch episodes by watching reruns on other cable channels (one of the reasons the

producers fought to produce 101 episodes is syndication), by accessing online sources, or

by purchasing the DVD collections. *Boston Legal* makes a reference to its distribution by

a broadcast network in two episodes (episode 1.05, "An Eye for an Eye", and episode

1.09, "Greater Good"). In the first one, Alan says, "I want to be on cable, that's where all

the best work is being done." In the second reference, Paul Lewiston (played by Rene

Auberjonois) warns Alan not to interfere in a case or he will be fired. Alan replies, "in

that event, I will go to cable." These references to cable highlight the differences between

broadcast television, which is regulated by the FCC and typically tries to appeal to a very

broad audience, and cable, which typically does not attract the numbers of viewers of

broadcast television, but is not as regulated and has so many channels that "niche"

programming has evolved to appeal to specific groups with specific viewpoints. These

references reflect the desire of the show's writers and producers to be able to discuss

controversial subjects and points of view without reprimand from ABC or the FCC.

Accompanying Documents. None of the episodes of *Boston Legal* make any references to the show's promotion, but the producers are certainly aware of the fan following and the boston-legal.org website forum. The forum's creators have even posted comments about David E. Kelley and how he responds to their comments about plotlines and characters. The show does also make reference to critiques and letters it receives. In episode 3.05, "Whose God is it Anyway", Alan rants about how freedom of religion is overrated, and then says, "I know, I'll get letters." In episode 3.21, "Tea and Sympathy", Alan makes fun of Mitt Romney and Mormonism. The judge then says, "Okay, that you'll get letters for." The references to letters the show receives by viewers who are upset about the topics and viewpoints expressed by *Boston Legal* show to the viewer that *Legal*'s producers are aware of the criticism and choose to ignore it. Browsing through the online fan forum (boston-legal.org), there are numerous posts by viewers who say they are fans of the show, but will stop watching because of one political statement or another. The way the show takes on controversial political topics and seemingly desires to do so more often could also be seen as a reason why audience numbers declined by the fifth season.

Assessment Institutions. Withalm's assessment institutions can be adapted for television as well. While there are not necessarily festivals that TV shows compete in, there is a ratings system and awards for shows and actors. *Boston Legal* references the ratings system in episode 2.27, "BL: Los Angeles", when Denny is trying to talk Shirley into kissing him, saying, "this is the sweeps episode." The statement was made during "sweeps period", when Nielsen participants are mailed 7-day dairies to record their viewing habits. Typically during that month, television shows air new and exciting

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episodes in an attempt to get these Nielsen participants to tune in. This type of reference

acts much like reflexivity that unmasks the mechanisms of production, in that they

educate the viewer about the way the Nielsen ratings work, taking some of the illusion

and mystery away from the process.

In another episode (2.09, "Gone"), *Boston Legal* references the television awards

institution, the Emmys. Denny says to Alan, "I can act, you know. I've won an Emmy."

As a lawyer, Denny would not be able to win an Emmy. Only the actor playing Denny

(William Shatner) would have his name on such an award. References to the awards won

by actors serve to remind the viewer that the show is a fictional construct, and "closes the

distance between the author [or in this case, the actor] and the audience" (Jones, 2005).

Intermedia Textuality

As Spzczepanik (2002) describes it, intermedia reflexivity is a type of intertextual

reference that goes beyond one specific medium. Intertextuality between different media

sources allows viewers to access information from various sources, utilizing the benefits

of each medium to their full advantage. In *Boston Legal*, references are made to video

game consoles, the Internet, and even cinema. In episode 4.07, "Attack of the

Xenophobes", short videos of Clarence (the man who dresses as Oprah and a number of

other personalities) are posted on YouTube. The partners of the firm are concerned that

the videos will damage its reputation, but do not quite know what to think of YouTube

itself as a medium. In another episode (4.19, "The Gods Must be Crazy"), Denny is

looking at pictures of Hillary Clinton online, accessing Barack Obama's Facebook

profile, and watching a McCain video on YouTube. These references do not typically

express a viewpoint about the other medium, but do serve to explore their uses.

Another reference that expresses the writers' or producers' fascination with new technology and different media happens in episode 4.09, "No Brains Left Behind", when Denny and Alan play tennis on the Nintendo Wii game console. In the second reference (episode 4.15, "Tabloid Nation") to the Wii, Denny is training for an interactive boxing game, but the game console is not turned on. Finally, in a reference to the film industry, Jerry discussing watching the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the impact it had on his life. Just as with medium reflexivity, intermedia reflexivity can easily be read by audiences as part of the narrative or plotlines, but the references are self-reflexive because "the viewer's attention turns to the structural components of specific technologies of seeing" (Spzczepanik, 2002, p. 29). Intermedia reflexivity can be easily understood by audiences with little background knowledge, but can also be read on a deeper level as a comment on other media and their consumption by society.

Audience

Many of the reflexive devices identified in this chapter require extensive background knowledge on the part of the audience member to be able to read it on a deeper level. A reference to the *Boston Legal* changing the time when the program airs will only be understood by an audience who is familiar with the show and its history. Many of the self-reflexive devices have a dual meaning, so that audiences who are not as knowledgeable can also understand the reference. Using the same example, an audience unfamiliar with the time slot change would simply read the characters' confusion about what night it is as a discussion about a court case. The best references have these dual meanings, but not all self-reflexive references in *Boston Legal* are able to do so. The next chapter will look at the way audiences actually read the self-reflexive statements in

Boston Legal, focusing on both groups of fans that are familiar with the show, its characters, its producers, and its storylines, and groups of non-viewers who have never seen the show before. Presumably, fans will understand most of the references because they possess the necessary background knowledge, and non-viewers will have a different reading of the self-reflexive statements or not pay attention to them at all.

Chapter 5: Audience Analysis

One of the most noticeable oversights in the prior literature on self-reflexivity is the absence of the audience. Many authors, including Stam (1992), Olson (1987), Jones (2005), and Withalm (2004) complete textual analyses that project the ways an audience might read and react to self-reflexivity, but none interview audience members to see how they actually read self-reflexivity. As detailed in chapter 3, this study looked at both fans and non-viewers of *Boston Legal* in order to understand the ways that the self-reflexive statements in the show are read and understood. Three groups of fans and three groups of non-viewers participated in the focus groups, for a total of twenty-nine participants.

Each group watched episode 2.23, "Race Ipsa" together and wrote down the thoughts that entered their heads at given intervals (three times during the 42-minute episode and once at the end, approximately 10-12 minutes apart and during natural breaks in the action). When asked if these breaks had been distracting, participants said that they felt like commercial breaks and were not distracting. Other groups collectively decided that instead of waiting for the breaks, they would write while they watched and thoughts entered their heads (the show was still paused at the same places, but for shorter periods to allow participants to fully explore their thoughts). For the most part, the results were expected: fans occasionally wrote their reactions to one of the self-reflexive statements in the episode, while the non-viewers did not write anything about them. While the thought listings produced some interesting statements, all of them were repeated (or at least paraphrased) in the focus group interview transcripts. Because of

this, the thought-listings will be used mostly to supplement the analysis and discussion of the actual interviews in this chapter.

After each group watched the episode, they also individually filled out a questionnaire about whether or not they read the self-reflexive statements in the show and how they reacted to them. There were two references that were noticed in the textual analysis of the episode that the questionnaire asked about specifically. The first reference was made by Alan and Chelina when they discussed how Kerry Washington (Chelina) took time off from the show to work in movies for a while and during that time, *Legal* changed the night it aired on. The second reference came when Melissa Hughes (played by Marisa Coughlan) referred to Chelina's character as "just a guest star". The results of the questionnaire were again fairly predictable: most of the fans indicated that they did see self-reflexivity in the episode and identified the two references without prompting, while most non-viewers said that they did not see any self-reflexivity and did not understand what the statements referred to when asked about the two specific references in the episode. The questionnaire asks specifically about the two self-reflexive statements mentioned above, and like the thought-listings, all of the participants' answers and comments were reiterated in the focus group interview transcripts. For that reason, the transcripts will be the main focus of this chapter.

Using the constant comparison method first developed by Glaser (1965) and expanded on by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the transcripts were analyzed first by flagging any comments made about self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. Many times, the discussion turned to characters, plotlines, stereotypes, and other topics that, while interesting, did not pertain to the self-reflexivity this study is looking at. After the comments were flagged,

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they were typed up onto strips of paper. These strips of paper were then organized into groupings based on the type of statement that was made using the constant comparison method. Interestingly, fans and non-viewers often said similar things about the self-reflexivity, although most often, the non-viewers were coming from the opposite direction than the fans. For example, fans would say how much they love the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, and non-viewers would say that they would love the self-reflexivity if they understood it. Because of this, all of the groupings have statements made by both fans and non-viewers that address certain reactions to self-reflexivity. After grouping the statements in this way, the categories that emerged were compared using the open-ended questionnaire. The answers and comments in the questionnaire were very similar to the statements made in the focus group interviews, and fit into the categories nicely. The categories that emerged were: reactions (initial reaction, cognitive reaction, and emotional reaction), meaning negotiation (realism, intertextuality, and the role of the writer), and relationship to the show (interactivity, investment level, "Easter Eggs", and parasocial relationships).

Audience Reactions to Self-reflexivity

Research question two asked, "how do viewers read the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal"* and, "are there differences (in the reading) between fans and non-viewers?" The different fan groups reacted in very similar ways, most often laughing at the self-reflexive statements. Although the non-viewers also laughed at the statements, when asked about the self-reflexivity, the non-viewer groups also reacted in similar ways to each other, most often by ignoring the reference or saying that they didn't hear it altogether. As the groups were interviewed and the transcripts were analyzed, it became

clear that there was more to their "reading" of the self-reflexive statements than their initial reaction (whether or not they laughed) and their ability to understand the references. Viewers also had interesting cognitive and emotional reactions to the references.

Initial Reaction

Initial reactions were the first thing that entered the viewers' minds when they saw and heard a self-reflexive statement in *Boston Legal*. Participants were asked specifically what they thought when they first heard the reference to the show changing nights and to the "guest star" statement, but they also commented on other times they have heard or seen self-reflexivity both in *Boston Legal* and other shows. Fans and non-viewers both commented on two distinct areas: they typically either laugh and think the reference is funny, or else they don't "pick up on it", meaning they glossed over the reference altogether.

I didn't pick up on it. Many non-viewers seemed to have the same initial reaction to the self-reflexive statements in the specific episode of *Boston Legal* viewed in the study; they simply glossed over the references. For example, when asked about the line by Melissa, "don't fall for her…she's just a guest star", non-viewer 3-5 (the 3rd participant in focus group number 5) responded "I didn't pick up on it at all" and non-viewer 2-5 responded "I didn't pick up on it", meaning that they did not even remember hearing the line after it had happened because they did not understand the reference. Because the reference was not important to the plot, these participants put it out of their mind completely. Similar things were said about the reference to the show changing nights. Non-viewer 3-4 claimed that they "didn't even hear that" when asked about this

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reference, and non-viewer 8-4 chimed in, "I didn't get that at all". Non-viewer 7-4 said, "I didn't even catch that." Similar sentiments were said in every non-viewer focus group.

Surprisingly, some of the fans commented on the ability to "pick up on" the self-reflexive references in the show. Fan 5-2 said that they miss references often when they miss even a few minutes of an episode: "That's why I think a lot of peop-, I was so surprised when I started asking people if they watched this show, especially lawyers. I just thought almost everybody would say they watched it. But most people don't that I've talked to. And I think it's because if you don't sit and watch it, if you miss like 10 minutes, you have no idea what's happening because there's all those little things that, you know, get you through the episode, so." This fan alluded to what most of the non-viewer groups seemed to agree on: many self-reflexive references require background knowledge in order to understand them. It is interesting, though, that the "guest star" reference that did not necessarily require any background knowledge was still not "picked up on" by many of the non-viewers, while many of the fans did notice the statement. Perhaps, as some of the non-viewers put it, "I caught it, but I wasn't sure how to take it, since I don't watch the show. Like I didn't know that, if she was just [] like, a guest star or not. Like, you know, I wasn't sure how to take it." Without both the background knowledge of the show, and the knowledge of how to read the show, first-time viewers have a difficult time understanding even references that refer to television conventions that are accessible to all viewers.

I think its funny. Not surprisingly, all of the fans, and even some of the non-viewers found the self-reflexive references in *Boston Legal* to be funny, entertaining, and clever. As fan 3-1 put it, "I think it's so funny. And I think it's, it's pretty clever too."

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This fan even said that he purposefully "look(s) for it" ever since his father pointed

something out one time they were watching together. Several fans indicated that they

laughed at both references. Even non-viewer 2-4 said that references like those can be

funny:

> NV2-4: I mean, it's an analogy. People use analogies
> NV6-4: Yeah
> NV2-4: all the time to relate stuff. It's just funny and ironic since
> they use it on a TV show. That's the only reason why they did it.

Overall, both fans and non-viewers agreed that when they understand a self-reflexive

statement, they find it humorous. Although they admitted that they did not understand the

self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, non-viewer 7-6 turned the conversation to similar

references made in the show, *The Office*. This fan said that such references "make it more

enjoyable. It's funny if you don't get it, but it's really funny if you do get it." This

statement explains the fact that, even though several non-viewers indicated in the

questionnaire that they did not catch any self-reflexive references in the show, when

asked about the specific statements in the show, they indicated that they found them to be

funny.

Cognitive Reaction

After their initial reaction, participants talked about their cognitive reaction to the

self-reflexive references in the show. These reactions came after their immediate

response and described the process of reading the text. Cognitive reactions included

several participants who simply read the text as everyday dialogue, as well as some who

felt smart and got excited when they understood the self-reflexive reference.

I didn't look beyond the surface. Many non-viewers dismissed their lack of

reaction to the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, saying that they read the statements as

everyday dialogue, not looking past the surface. For instance, one non-viewer group had

this exchange:

> NV7-6: I read it more of like as part of the plot as opposed to
> [NV4-6: an actual guest star] like in real, literally her being a guest
> star. I just read it more of like, "Well, I work with you, so I'll be
> here more." [NV4-6: mm hmm] That kind of thing.
> I: So people say this in real life?
> [chuckles]
> NV?-6: I hope not.
> NV6-6: I hope not.

Non-viewer 6-4 talked a little more about this type of surface reading: "Like, I don't

know, like he was saying, it's just kind of like an analogy. It's not like. It wouldn't have

been, have been funny if she had been like, 'Don't get attached to her, she's only here for

a little bit.' You know, like the way she's like, 'Um, she's just a guest star.' Like, 'I'm

the real deal.' I don't know. I didn't really look at it past that until we talked about it at

all." Even one of the fans missed the "guest star" reference, saying that they only read it

at the surface level: "Well, it's kinda like, like I was to the point, to me I I I totally missed

the second one. Well at least, maybe more than that. The, the guest star thing. I heard it

and in my mind, I didn't think about it being the fact that she was guest starring. I

thought, took it to be, Oh, it's paralegal talking about the guest-star being kind of like a

one-night stand with him versus the fact that she wanted to form a relationship. And so I

took it like that. It was like a double-entendre and I was, I totally missed it." Even

though this fan is familiar with the show and the way *Legal* uses self-reflexivity, they still

only read the reference as common dialogue because of the fact that the reference was

intended to be read by people who are unfamiliar with the show as well as people who

are familiar with it.

I feel smart. Some fans that were able to look beyond the surface of the references indicated that they felt smarter or got excited when they realized what the self-reflexive statement was referring to. In focus group 3, the fans had this exchange:

I: Do you, do you enjoy those
F1-3: Yeah
I: those things? OK.
F1-3: [laugh]
[I and F2-3 laughs]
F1-3: You know, cause if I catch them, I thought..
I: Yeah.
F2-3: Yeah. [laugh]
F1-3: sweet.
F2-3: It makes you feel smart.
F1-3: [chuckles] []
I: It makes you feel smart?
F1-3: That you actually remembered?
I: Yeah.
[laughter]
F1-3: With me anyway. [chuckle]

Both fan 1-3 and 2-3 had reactions indicating the cognitive reaction they had to the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*. Not all fans felt as excited as fan 1-3 when he said, "I enjoy it. It doesn't phase me one way or the other. I just, excited that I remember those things." Some fans did indicate that they did not necessarily feel smarter or get excited when they "picked up on" the self-reflexive references, but all of them indicated that they found them funny and liked that aspect of the show.

Non-viewers had the opposite cognitive reaction. Instead of getting excited or feeling smarter, those that noticed the reference, but did not understand it felt confused (non-viewers 5-4, 3-4, 8-4, 4-5, 5-5, and 3-6 all used the word "confused" to describe their thought process when they heard and saw the self-reflexive statements in the show). Non-viewer 5-4 summarized their though process best when they said, "I caught it, but I wasn't sure how to take it, since I don't watch the show. Like I didn't know that, if she

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was just [] like, a guest star or not. Like, you know, I wasn't sure how to take it." The difference between the fans that felt smarter or got excited about the references and the non-viewers who indicated confusion illustrates the gap in cognitive reactions between fans that have the background knowledge to understand the references and the non-viewers who are lacking that background. This is the key difference between the fans and non-viewers when it comes to their reactions to self-reflexivity, as their emotional reactions are divided in a similar way.

Emotional Reaction

Emotional reaction refers to the statements participants made when discussing how they felt when they saw and heard the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*. Although laughing or finding the statements funny could be considered an emotional reaction, the emotional reactions discussed here came after the initial reaction, once participants had time to consider how they felt about the references. Emotional reactions were also split between the fans and the non-viewers, with non-viewers saying they found the self-reflexivity to be weird or awkward on one side, and fans saying how much they liked self-reflexivity on the other side.

It's weird. Although many non-viewers said that they did like self-reflexivity in other shows they watched, for the most part, non-viewers said that they did not like it in *Boston Legal*. Instead, several of the non-viewers thought the self-reflexive statements in *Legal* were "just kinda weird" (non-viewer 3-5), and "kind of just awkward" (non-viewer 7-6). Non-viewer 4-6 explains further: "It's a little weird. I mean, I guess it's kinda the same thing when like, the people in a show stop and like talk to the camera and it like pauses in the background. Kind of the same thing as that. But, just like talking about it

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to the other characters is kind of different and it's kind of just awkward." This non-viewer felt that direct address to the camera was not awkward, but that the way *Boston Legal* made self-reflexive statements that had dual meanings or subtlety outside of the plot was "awkward". Even fans acknowledged that it can be awkward if self-reflexivity is not incorporated in just the right way: "I think that's probably one of the reasons you don't see it very often, because it's a pretty awkward thing to do and be able to slip it in and out, of it, is, I I just imagine that that's a pretty difficult thing to have to pull off and they do it really well" (fan 2-2). It is interesting that both fans and non-viewers use the same word to describe the phenomenon when the reference is not understood. But it is also interesting that none of the fans, who presumably understand the references, found the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* to actually be awkward. Only the non-viewers, who admit that they did not understand the self-reflexive references, used the word "awkward" to describe what they saw.

I like it. Almost all of the fans of *Boston Legal* said that they liked the way the show incorporated self-reflexivity. The non-viewers did not share this emotional reaction to the self-reflexivity in the show. While some non-viewers admitted to liking self-reflexivity in general, very few of them liked the way *Legal* used it. As fan 2-3 put it, if someone doesn't like the self-reflexive statements in *Legal,* "they don't watch the show then", meaning that even someone who watches the show must not be a true fan if they don't like the self-reflexive humor. Fan 3-3 said, "I like, I kinda like it when they throw things in like that.", and fan 2-1 said "I think that.. I think it's part of the reason why I like the show so much. It's just like, "Oh, well." You know, "Yeah, that was funny." But like, I I don't really know even, it's just kind of. It's it's like I can I can appreciate it, I

guess." Some fans even said that after our focus group discussions, they were going to go

back through old episodes and look for the self-reflexive statements, looking closely for

any references they could:

> F2-2: But I, I I don't know. It gives gives it a rewatchability, that's
> for sure. About watching, trying to watch more than once and pick
> up on it. I'll I'll watch reruns if they're on, just because it's better
> than most anything. [F3-2: Mm hmm] And, I I don't think I've
> ever specifically gone out to look for it, but I know, when I'm
> going to the imdb page, I look for, they've got examples of when
> when they broke the fourth wall. [I: yeah] And I've read through
> some of those to see if I've caught them all. [I: yeah] And most of
> them I have. But I didn't catch the Mayberry one, so I might just
> go back and watch em.
> [chuckles]

Another fan told a story about how his father used their DVR to rewind and show him

one of the self-reflexive references:

> F3-1: Yeah, I I definitely picked up on it. I just remember there
> was one where they were sitting outside on the balcony, whatever.
> It was one of those that was kind of like a two part show, and part
> one and part two. And my dad just started busting out laughing.
> And at first I didn't get it. And then, we have DVR, he like
> rewinded it, and I was like, "Oh." So ever since then I always kind
> of look for it in the show.

These fans like the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* so much that they are willing to go

back and re-watch episodes or parts of episodes to see if they missed something. Very

few participants in either the fan groups or non-viewer groups said that they will look up

references on the Internet while they're watching the show, but it is something that came

up with both sets of viewers. These behaviors are in stark contrast to the non-viewers

who said they "don't like it" (non-viewer 5-5) or the ones who said, "If I had been like

flipping through the channels and like landed on that at the beginning, I would have seen

that, I probably would have been like, just flipped the channel, cause I wouldn't have got

it" (non-viewer 3-4). These non-viewers indicated that they disliked the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* so much that, unlike the fans who go back and look for the reflexive statements, they would probably even change the channel because of their inability to understand the reference.

The reactions to the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* of fans and non-viewers are noticeably different, primarily based on the amount of background knowledge they have and whether or not they "pick up on" the meaning of the statement. For the most part, fans of *Boston Legal* like the references and find them humorous, whereas non-viewers typically did not like the self-reflexivity in the show. Non-viewers either ignored the references altogether or found them to be weird. Fans reported feeling smarter, getting excited, and enjoying the show when they understood the references. When it comes to negotiating the meaning of the references, fans and non-viewers discussed the self-reflexivity in similar ways.

Negotiating the Meaning of Self-reflexive Statements

After their initial reaction, the focus groups discussed how the negotiated the meaning of the self-reflexive statements. This negotiation goes beyond whether they understood or liked the references to an understanding of what the reference means to them as viewers. For most of the fans of the show, the negotiation of meaning went fairly deep, with references to politics and social justice issues. For non-viewers, the self-reflexivity seemed to be more of a distraction than anything. Focus groups made comments that were grouped into three different categories. Both fans and non-viewers talked about what self-reflexivity does for the realism of the show. Both sets of groups

also discussed the show's reflexivity in relation to other shows, and what the role of the writer is in the self-reflexive script.

Realism

Perhaps more than the average television show, *Boston Legal* uses its televisual presence to raise discussions about current events, political topics, and social commentary. Because of this, the show's viewers are often either aligned with the things being said on the show, or opposed to the statements the show is making. As several of the focus group members, both fans and non-viewers, pointed out, self-reflexivity plays a role in how these statements are received. As part of the negotiation of meaning, viewers commented on how self-reflexivity affects the realism of the show and its topics.

Fans of *Boston Legal* typically commented on how the self-reflexive statements allowed the show to make very bold social and political statements. As fan 2-1 puts it, "its hard to be mad when you're laughing at something." Fans 1-3 and 2-3 talked about the controversial issues the show takes on and how self-reflexivity lightens the subject:

> F1-3: But, you know, you think about some of it, especially like
> with Mel Brooks and them. Some of the, the way they do it, kind
> of makes some of the, like your prejudice and stuff seem so light
> and so, just not important.
> F2-3: Yeah.
> F1-3: And I imagine to some people, that would probably.. And
> it's just not, just not race, but it's [F2-3: It's {offensive}] a lot of
> choices that people have made in their lives. And he makes such,
> by doing that, he makes it your, you know, it's just not important.
> It's just something to make fun of and go on.

These fans discuss how the self-reflexivity makes controversial things seem like something to joke about and not get upset about. Another fan (2-3) talked about how the humor and self-reflexivity "balances out" the serious topics:

> I: Do you think, with Boston Legal, do you think that because the

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topics are so serious, they throw in the self-reflexive things and some of the humor to kind of

F2-3: They have to balance it out, yeah.

F1-3: Balance it out. Mm hmm.

I: Yeah.

F2-3: Well cause, I mean, I think that's the idea, is it's to make you think about a serious topic like gun control, but make it so that you can find that breaking point within yourself and say, "Gun Control. Where do I stand on this?" And kind of figure it out because they take it to such an absurd and like satirical level that you get to a point where [chuckling] you're like, "Well that's just ridiculous. Here's my line down here." [F1-3 laughs] So, I mean it's like, I don't know. If you watch it for those, those reasons, I don't know. You could probably find out a lot about yourself.

Finally, fan 2-2 went even further to say that the self-reflexivity is "kind of self-deprecating [F1-2: mm hmm] in the sense that they're, they're, they're not trying to think they're too important, push the message to you. So you, like you said, it kind of lends more credence to the message that, that they're delivering. I like it." This fan sees the self-reflexivity as more than simple humor. They see self-reflexivity as actually giving the show more credibility in the political and social statements it makes.

Non-viewers of *Boston Legal* tended to think the opposite: that the self-reflexivity detracted from the serious statements made by the show. Almost all of the non-viewers that commented on the relationship between self-reflexivity and reality said that *Boston Legal* was "too serious for that kind of humor" (NV 2-5) or that the humor "detracts from the seriousness" (NV 5-5) of the topic. Other fans said that the self-reflexivity actually made the show less realistic:

I: How did these self-reflexive statements affect the way you view these shows.

NV4-6: It makes it a little less realistic.

I: OK. It makes it less realistic?

NV4-6: Like, cause it's so, like out of the setting.

NV7-6: It reminds you that it's just a show. [NV4-6: Yeah] Like kind of takes you, even if you were into it, it kind of takes you out

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and [NV4-6: Mm hmm] reminds you that it's just a show.

These non-viewers thought that even though the self-reflexivity operated in the same way identified by fans (to cause the viewer to step back and evaluate the charged message), that the statements distracted from the show because self-reflexivity "kind of like messes with the fact that it's a fictional show" (non-viewer 2-4). Perhaps these non-viewers understood that these self-reflexive devices were meant to "balance" the serious topics of the show and simply preferred to have an entirely serious show when serious topics were being presented. If so, there might be personality differences that explain why fans of *Boston Legal* tend to like the self-reflexivity in the show, while non-viewers typically did not. If fans saw self-reflexivity as adding to the credibility of the show and allowing the show to balance out serious topics, then self-reflexivity was seen as contributing to the overall quality of the show, where non-viewers saw self-reflexivity as a distraction, thus lowering the quality.

Intertextuality

Interestingly, non-viewers seemed to need a reference point in order to make sense of the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. When discussing the meaning of the different reflexive statements, non-viewers typically referenced another show that used humor in a similar way. When describing the dedication needed to understand the reflexivity in *Legal*, non-viewer 7-4 referred to *The Office* (2005, NBC), saying, "Like I, I really like *The Office*. And I think that maybe a little bit it's kind of like that, but um, like if you watch one episode, you can watch a single episode and completely enjoy it for that, and not feel like you miss out on something." Another non-viewer (2-4) said *Legal* "was kind of a uh, lawyer version of *Scrubs*." *Scrubs* (2001, NBC, 2009, ABC) and *The*

Office were both shows that participants referenced when discussing the self-reflexive

humor in *Boston Legal*. Non-viewers were not the only ones that referenced other shows

when discussing the self-reflexivity, but fans seemed to be much more knowledgeable

about the intertextual references. For example, one fan talked at length about *Ally McBeal*

(Fox, 1997) because they were both David E. Kelley productions:

> F1-2: Yeah. I love the ther-, I was so, you know, I love the fact
> that the therapist [yeah] was the one lead council from *Ally
> McBeal*, you know, an old legal show. And then you have Chelina
> or whatever, the black lady, come in. The two of them were on
> *The Practice*. You know, I I thought that was entertaining.
> I: Have you seen those shows?
> F1-2: Oh yeah!
> I: *Ally McBeal* and *The Practice*?
> F1-2: Oh, I used to watch--my, yeah. We used to watch *Ally
> McBeal* all the time. Back, like when I was just getting into Law
> School which fazed me a little bit. [chuckles]
> F1-2: It was actually before that, I think. But uh. Actually, yeah,
> god, it would have been. God, I'm getting old. Anyway. But it
> was a, cause that was a, a quirky, crazy legal show that was more
> more quirky than this one. It had less realism. But the therapist,
> the guy getting, getting shot, being on *Ally McBeal*, that was very
> entertaining to have him come back and be in this role now. For
> me it was like, I don't know, it added a whole level that…
> I: Were, were there similarities between his character on *Ally
> McBeal* and this one? Or, or just the, seeing the actor's face?
> F1-2: Uh, seeing the actor's face. He was always a very, real
> wordy, high-brow. He was a lot more quirky in *Ally McBeal*. He
> had this, he almost was kind of like uh, uh, god, what's his, what's
> his face? Um, [snaps], who's the guy in this, *Boston* uh, *Legal*
> now, that the hops and skips?
> F2-2: Oh.
> F4-2: Oh, yeah. What's his name?
> F5-2: [simultaneously] Oh, the guy with the Asperger's?
> F1-2: Yeah! I can't think of his name, but…
> F2-2: Jerry Espenson. Jerry Espenson.
> F1-2: Jerry. Jerry. He had, I mean, he had kind of Jerry-like
> Espenson-like qualities, uh, when he was on *Ally McBeal*.

While this conversation in one of the fan focus groups does reference another show, it

does so in a way that ties all of the intertextual references together between the shows.

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These fans identified the therapist as a character from another David E. Kelley show, but noted the subtle differences between the two, and then transferred the qualities of the original character on *Ally McBeal* to a regular character on *Boston Legal* and noted the similarities in the characterization done by the writers. Non-viewers, even when referencing similarities between *Legal* and *Ally McBeal*, tended to discuss the similarities on more of a surface level:

> I: What, do you guys recognize some of these actors,
> NV6-4: Oh, yeah.
> I: actresses. What else have they been in?
> NV6-4: Um, *Ally McBeal.*
> NV8-4: [laughs]
> [talking at once]
> I: It's OK.
> NV3-4: William Shatner does commercials, doesn't he?
> I: What was that?
> NV2-4: Star Trek.
> NV3-4: William Shatner.
> General: Oh yeah.
> [talking at once and laughter]
> NV6-4: Oh! Wasn't he the therapist in um, *Ally McBeal*.
> NV7-4: Yeah, I was going to say, I recognized him.
> I: Was he?
> NV6-4: I think so.
> I: I haven't seen that show.
> NV6-4: Yeah, it's []
> NV7-4: Yeah, he's a quiet, kind of neurotic guy.
> NV6-4: Yeah, I thought it, yeah. I really liked that character.

While one of the non-viewers did reference the characterization ("neurotic") of the therapist in *Ally McBeal*, much like fan 1-2, this non-viewer did not take the reference further and analyze the characterization on *Boston Legal*. Focus group 4 left the reference with "I really liked that character", and said little about how the producer was the same for the show, or how other characters had similarities. While fans seemed to have the tools needed to dissect intertextual references, non-viewers seemed unable to look

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beneath the surface of those references. Fans had knowledge of the writers, producers, and especially the actors on *Boston Legal* that non-viewers lacked.

The Writer

The role of the writer in the production process came up several times as participants tried to negotiate the meaning of the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. Participants, mostly fans, gave the writer credit for the self-reflexive devices in the show. While the writer is most likely the one responsible for putting the words or the self-reflexive statements into the show by writing them into the script, it is also possible that the director added them during shooting, or that the talent had the room to improve them into the show. Fans of the show seemed to be fans of the writers of the show, as well as the producers and production personnel. Fan 2-2 mused,

> I think you've got to be a pretty talented writer to be able to slip em
> in and get away with it, [F1-2: mm hmm] cause I I don't think, I
> mean I think that's probably one of the reasons you don't see it very
> often, because it's a pretty awkward thing to do and be able to slip
> it in and out, of it, is, I I just imagine that that's a pretty difficult
> thing to have to pull off and they do it really well.

In the same focus group, participants had a lengthy conversation about the role of the writer in self-reflexive shows:

> F2-2: I think a lot of it is kind of to show off too. I mean, I think
> there's some boasting, boastfulness about it that they're [F4-2:
> hmm] that good of writers and they can get away with it.
> F1-2: You couldn't pull this off, but I can.
> F2-2: Yeah. Yeah.
> F2-2: And why would you drive an Aston-Martin? Cause you
> can.
> F1-2: Aaron Sorbin.
> F2-2: Sorkin.
> F1-2: Aaron Sorkin. That's the name of the guy I was thinking of.
> That writes for West Wing, that dialogue.
> [agreement]
> F1-2: But he writes a lot better when he's high. I mean, so he's

[chuckles]
F1-2: Seriously. When he went off drugs, West Wing suffered.
[I laughs]
F1-2: For those first two or three seasons, he admits he was high
the whole time.

The thoughts that writers have to be talented to encode self-reflexivity into a text in a way that audiences enjoy, or that writers do it to show off are similar to another fan (3-1) who just said self-reflexive statements are in the show "because they can be", exhibit a sort of awe or reverence for the writer or producer that encodes the self-reflexive reference into the text. Especially fans seemed to know more about the writers and producers of *Boston Legal* in a way that shows respect for the way the show is created.

Participants also saw self-reflexivity as an attempt by the writer to communicate directly with the viewer. As one non-viewer (1-6) said, self-reflexivity is done so writers and producers "can relate more to their audience, their viewers that watch it all the time." Fans had a lot to say about how self-reflexivity was a way for the writers to "talk to the viewers, like they know they're there" (Fan 3-1), or a way for the writers and producers to say "if we're going to make fun of everybody else, we've got to take a little bit of time and make fun of ourselves a little bit too" (F2-1). Fans seemed best able to make sense of self-reflexivity by putting words into the writers' mouths, alluding to what the writers might be thinking when they encode the references into the script. Fan 1-2 imagined self-reflexivity to be the writers saying, "don't take us too seriously. We know it's just a show." Fan 2-1 said, "It it it's a way to tell the viewers, 'Hey. Chill out.' It doesn't piss people off that they're making fun of." Fan 1-3 said, "well, in some ways it's telling you that they appreciate you following them" and "it's, it's just a way of telling you that 'Hey! We know you're out there. We appreciate you supporting us.'" These imaginary

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conversations between the writer and the viewer help develop the relationship that

viewers, especially fans, have with the show. They see self-reflexivity as a way for the

show to interact with the audience.

> F2-3: I'm sure, I mean I'm sure it's hilarious for them. I don't
> know. I wasn't, I mean, I come from a writing background too,
> where I mean, any like little, little thing that you can slide in there
> and get away with, it's it's more fun for you. And then, you're still
> getting to, and they'll interact with your audience. Like you don't
> get to be on the show, but you still want to be able to circumvent
> that and interact with your audience a little bit too.

Of course, most fans saw this interaction as a positive thing, where non-viewers saw it as

a drawback to the show.

> NV4-5: If I was gonna sit down and watch Jackass, like I don't
> expect like to, for them to like tell me a story and to watch like
> something that has like a beginning, middle, and end. They just
> like do random stuff throughout the whole show. And so like
> whenever you watch something like Boston Legal, like, you [NV5-
> 5: expect], you're expecting a story, you're not expecting to be
> interactive and [NV5-5: something thrown at you]. Like, you
> kinda want to believe that this stuff is actually happening. Like,
> you kinda want to believe that when you're watching it, but then
> like whenever they say like, "This is just a show," you're just kind
> of like, "Yeah, it is just a show." Back to reality. [chuckle] You
> know?

As viewers negotiate the meaning of the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*, they

go through a range of thinking about the writers of the show, and their relationships to the

writers and producers. Fans tend to enjoy the interaction offered by self-reflexivity,

where non-viewers saw it as a distraction, much the same way as the fans and non-

viewers differed on the sense of realism and credibility self-reflexivity gave to the show.

Overall, it is fair to say that fans of *Boston Legal* felt that self-reflexivity enhanced their

relationship to the show, allowing them to understand the topics and storylines on a

deeper level, and asking them to make intertextual connections unavailable to non-viewers.

<p align="center">*Audience Relationship to the Show*</p>

As the participants commented on their immediate reactions to self-reflexivity and the ways they negotiated the meaning of self-reflexive statements, they also talked about how the self-reflexivity affected their relationship to the text, its authors, and its actors. Participants commented on four areas of their relationship to the show. They discussed how self-reflexivity made the show more interactive, how self-reflexivity affected their investment level in the show, how they felt producers and writers used self-reflexivity to reward regular viewers, and how self-reflexivity affected the parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956) viewers develop with the show's characters and actors.

Interactive

Many participants commented on self-reflexivity and its ability to make the text feel more interactive. Fans seemed to enjoy this aspect of the show especially, saying that self-reflexivity "kind of makes you feel like a part of the show" (Fan 3-1) or that "you get to be, like, part of it [the show]" (Fan 2-3). In almost every fan focus group, participants made similar comments. Fan 3-2 expanded on the interactivity with viewers:

> I think also, you know, they they reference the, have prior events
> in the show, like, like Seinfeld did that all the time. And for some
> reason I just felt, I mean I loved Seinfeld. And, you know, I don't
> know why, but it just feels like you're kind of growing along with
> the cast and the issues. I I don't know. I just think it's uh, it's fun,
> it's witty.

Fans of the show feel as if they are "growing along with the cast and the issues" because of the self-reflexive references to prior events in the show. This feeling of growing is because fans of *Boston Legal* feel as if they are a part of the show. They feel that they

know the writers and actors in the show and that these people are "real people too" (Fan

2-3). Fan 2-3 expanded on this though, saying that because fans identify with the

producers as "real people", they see some of the self-reflexive statements as being let in

on their frustrations:

> Oh yeah. Well I mean, you get to be like part of it. I mean they're
> they're probably struggling with a change in their time too and
> you're going, "Well shit! I don't know what day to record now if I
> can't [F1-3 chuckles] sit down [I: yeah] and watch it." And then
> you've missed your show and then it's just downhill. Like it pisses
> me off that AB, this is on ABC and it's like the only show that is
> not online. So I can't watch it. That makes me very mad.
> [chuckle] But, it's like, when they do things like that it lets you in
> on their frustrations too. [I: yeah] And it may just be the writers
> adding it in. I mean, they're all pretty funny people. They could
> be adding it in too. So you don't know. But it could be something
> that they're just kind of letting you in on.

This interactivity is an expansion of the viewers who commented that as they negotiate

the meaning of the self-reflexive statements, they take into account the role of the writer.

Because these viewers read self-reflexivity as an attempt by the writer to be more

interactive, they see the show as interactive. They see how the writers and producers are

in-tune with their audience, and fans contribute to that interactivity by continuing to

watch the show, creating online forums, and writing letters to the producers and to the

network.

Parasocial Relationships

Expanding on the interactive concept further, as viewers and fans see the show as

attempting to interact with them, they develop parasocial relationships with the actors,

characters, writers, and producers of *Boston Legal*. Horton and Wohl (1956) described

the perception of a face-to-face relationship a viewer has with a performer a "parasocial

relationship". Self-reflexivity promotes this type of relationship by rewarding fans for

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paying attention to past events on the show, past events in the characters' storylines, and

even rewarding fans for their knowledge of the producers and actors corporeal lives. Fan

5-2 discussed how self-reflexivity helps develop these relationships:

> I think I wrote this down, but I think it personalizes the characters
> a little more because they go from talking from them to the show
> to you. And it just goes to you more directly, kinda like they're
> talking to you. So you feel a little bit closer to them. Which is
> maybe another reason that he likes to use well-known characters in
> a similar way because you're going to say, "Oh, well I like James
> Spader, so I'm going to watch this show," or like.. You know,
> there's people on that show that fit every demographic who then
> might watch this show. [I: yeah] So it just seems familiar. Like,
> "I've seen this before, so I'll watch it."

Many of the fans made similar comments about how they started watching *Boston Legal*

because of the producer, or a specific actor or actress. Fan 1-2 even said, "David Kelly

loves certain actors and actresses." For example, Fan 5-2 felt "comfortable with [John

Larroquette] because he was already a lawyer on another show [*Night Court*]. And so, he

came here and here he is, a lawyer again, so it all makes sense." The fact that John

Larroquette had already played a lawyer on *Night Court* allowed viewers to immediately

connect with him when he became the managing partner for Crane, Poole, and Schmidt

on *Boston Legal*. This is in contrast to the Non-viewer (3-5) who said they "never really

pay attention to the producer or anything." Fan group 3 had the following conversation

about the actors:

> I: Are you a Star Trek fan as well?
> F2-3: Uh, I used to watch it with my dad, growing up. Like that
> was Saturday night. We got to [yeas] hang out. [laugh] So, yeah.
> I got into it. I was a nerd as a kid. It was funny. And then
> Candace Bergen, we used to watch Murphy Brown all the time.
> I: Yeah. Are are there similarities between this and Murphy
> Brown? I've never really seen Murphy Brown.
> F2-3: pblbhbh. Like, I mean, as far as Candace Bergen's
> character? I would say a little bit. [F1-3: yeah] I never, I mean, I

don't remember watching enough of like the show. I just
remember her character. And there
F3-3: She was very outspoken
F2-3: Yeah.
F3-3: domineering.
F2-3: And for an 80s show, that was pretty rare.
F1-3: Mm hmm.
F2-3: So, now she's getting into, I mean it's the same type of thing.
It's a domineering, very aggressive lawyer type, so.

This conversation illustrates how even fans of the actors and actresses create certain

expectations for a character played by that actor. These viewers feel as if they "know" the

actor or actress based on their previous work. When *Boston Legal* makes a self-reflexive

reference to those other characters from other shows, such as when Denny Crane (played

by William Shatner) opens his cell phone and it makes the *Star Trek* communicator

sound, the writers and producers are promoting and reflecting upon the relationship

between the fans and the actors. Writers even use these relationships to allow them to

develop characters in certain ways:

F5-2: Candace Bergen from Murphy Brown. I think she was
pretty, I think she's pretty similar in both shows. You know, that
strong female role.
I: Does, does that make you want to watch Boston Legal more?
Or before those characters.
F5-2: It makes me maybe believe her a little bit more.
I: Okay.
F5-2: Um, because she's always had that same kind of role.
I: Okay.
F1-2: It's very level and rational. But she's like the voice of
reason.
F5-2: The supervisor, yeah. Like calms everybody down.

Fans indicated that Candace Bergen was a natural to play Shirley Schmidt, the

"motherly" character on the show, because of her role as Murphy Brown. The writers and

producers used that expectation to create more depth to Shirley's character. When

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viewers create expectations or stereotypes about a character, writers do not have to spend as much time developing the role, and can move on to deeper topics.

Although this was the reaction of many fans, many of the non-viewers reacted in the opposite way when it came to the interactivity and parasocial relationships encouraged by the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. As one of the fans even admitted, "it's really kind of counter-intuitive for them to put reality back in by acknowledging that they're a television show" (Fan 4-2). Non-viewers pretty much agreed that self-reflexivity caused them to "lose their concentration" (Non-viewer 5-5), and that reflexive references "distracted" from the plot (Non-viewer 3-5). Non-viewers explained why they felt this way, arguing that self-reflexivity shatters the illusion of reality created by the show:

> NV6-5: It just kinda brings you out of the story, [NV5-5: mm
> hmm] like you're following the story
> NV5-5: You lose your concentration
> NV6-5: and all of a sudden you're like,
> I: That's, that's what I was wondering. Tell me more about that.
> NV6-5: I don't know. I like reading, so, when you're reading,
> you're into the story. You don't want anything distracting you,
> pulling you out of it. Well, if you have references like that, it's
> making you think about how it's just a show, and kind of pulls you
> away from the story.
> NV1-5: They they do that, they do in, they do that in reading as
> well though.
> I: I don't read those books.
> [chuckles]
> NV1-5: I know of a really good book, that's, that's like in in like
> reading or the arts, one one of the one of the one of the one of the
> big things you'll learn if if you wanna become like a really good
> writer, first rule, there are no rules. You know what I'm saying?
> So
> NV5-5: I think it's just
> I: Why, go ahead.
> NV1-5: [simultaneous] go ahead.

NV5-5: I was just going to say, personal preference more or less, like I just didn't think it was funny. Like I didn't think it needed to be said. And it, I think it pulled more away from the show.
I: Do you, do you guys agree with this
NV3-5: I'd say yeah.
I: pulling you out of the narrative?
NV3-5: Yeah, it did pull me out of like, the plot, like what was actually going on in the show.

Non-viewers had a difficult time with the transition because, as Non-viewer 7-6 put it, "It reminds you that it's just a show. [NV4-6: Yeah] Like kind of takes you, even if you were into it, it kind of takes you out and [NV4-6: Mm hmm] reminds you that it's just a show." To elaborate further, this participant said that self-reflexivity takes them out of the fictional narrative "because we weren't [NV4-6: mm hmm] really sure why they were saying those things or what it was supposed to mean." This is the primary difference between fans of the show, who have seen many seasons and most of the episodes of the show, and non-viewers who might be watching the show for the very first time. As Jenkins (1988, p. 86) describes fans, their "reading becomes a type of play, responsive only to its own loosely structured rules and generating its own types of pleasure." Fans of *Boston Legal* respond to the self-reflexivity in the show differently because they are used to seeing it, because they understand many of the references, and because they read in a different way than non-viewers. In short, fans of the show have a different level of investment in the show than do non-viewers.

Investment Level

Self-reflexivity gave *Boston Legal* another level of meaning for fans of the show. Although there are many fans that would watch the show for other reasons, self-reflexivity gave fans something more to watch than the characters and the plotlines. This heightened fans' enjoyment of the show and made them want to watch more. As Fan 3-2

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put it, "I think it strengthens my connection for the show when I can figure those out. I

like it a lot more just because, you know, these guys are trying to be subtle and quietly

talk about something and you can pick up on it. That, that makes me appreciate the show

more." Fan 2-3 described their connection with the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* in this

way:

> F2-3: For me, it's the extra, like, behind the scenes, like, you just
> got more involved the more times that you can be involved in that
> way. So, it's more of an investment, I guess. Like, the more I can
> pay attention to it, the more often I see it, it becomes an investment
> with whatever movie or show or whatever it is you're watching.
> I: So it helps you become more invested in the show.
> F2-3: Right.

"Investment" seems to be the appropriate way to describe the relationship between the

self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal* and its fans. Fans are willing to do the work

necessary to understand these references. Fans watch more than one episode so they can

understand references made to earlier characters or plot lines. Fans read articles about the

show, they go onto fan websites and post in discussion forums, and in some cases, they

even research the references made in the show (more about this in the next section). This

level of investment gives the show another dimension for fans. One fan even referred to it

as "an addiction" (Fan 1-1), with Fan 2-1 adding, "you can sit there and just just watch

the show with your computer and totally revamp your Facebook quotes if you wanted to.

[I chuckles] Like, 'Wow. That's a really good line. We'll put that in our quotes.'" The

self-reflexive statements in the show, "make you watch it every week" (Fan 1-1). Self-

reflexivity is something that fans look forward to, giving some of them a reason to watch

every week, and certainly giving them a reason to pay attention to the show while they

watch. One fan group described how the show uses self-reflexivity in order to keep

viewers watching the show each week:

> F2-2: Yeah. I mean it's, it just, it builds on, on itself. If you
> watched one episode, it's not nearly as enjoyable as watching all
> 48. It just builds and builds and builds on itself.
> I: Yeah.
> F5-2: Like the mad cow.
> F2-2: Yeah.
> F5-2: You wouldn't understand that if you haven't sat down and
> watched that.
> F2-2: Exactly.
> F5-2: But, they all come together.
> F1-2: It took me forever, {I thought} Mad Cow was a pseudonym
> for Alzheimer's. I didn't realize. I mean, it's really kind of a
> serious undertone, but, you know, the way he plays it it doesn't feel
> like it.

As these fans point out, "the more you watch it, the better it is, the continuity over time"

(Fan 1-2). As the show builds on previous storylines, characters, and other self-reflexive

elements, fans are rewarded for watching each and every week. Of course, this use of

self-reflexivity has the potential to leave non-viewers feeling lost. One non-viewer group

had a similar conversation to the fan groups, but instead of describing the connection they

felt to *Boston Legal*, they talked about how the self-reflexivity can turn people away:

> I: Yeah. Um. How do, how do.. you guys kind of answered this,
> but I want to go back to it. How does it affect your attitude
> towards the show. You said, "If I was a fan of the show, I think I
> would get into [NV5-4: yeah] get into it and enjoy those things,"
> but otherwise it kind of turns you off?
> NV5-4: Yeah, I would say like just right at the beginning cause
> like I have never seen it before and like, right off the bat it didn't
> like hit me as something I would want to watch and then just like
> that just kind of confused me and it didn't really like make me want
> to like try to find an interest in it like, I don't know. It just didn't
> really appeal to me.
> NV3-4: If I had been like flipping through the channels and like
> landed on that at the beginning, I would have seen that, I probably
> would have been like, just flipped the channel, cause I wouldn't
> have got it.

NV5-4: Yeah.
NV3-4: it was confusing.
NV7-4: I think if it's, if it's a show that, you know, you watch
regularly, I think that that kind of twisted humor is really funny.
Like that's um, I don't know, I I like TV shows where, where they
can make fun of themselves and be lighthearted about it--it's not
like drama all the time. So, but yeah, I didn't recognize that at all,
and I was like, "What are you talking [laughing] about? I don't
remember this part at all." So, yeah. I know it's kind of like the
inside joke thing, I don't think that, you know, like, "Well, I feel
kind of excluded. Thanks, guys."

Although these Non-viewers discussed feeling "excluded" from the self-reflexive

reference or the "inside joke", most of them said that self-reflexivity did not "turn them

off" to the show. Only one Non-viewer admitted that "if you don't watch it, it could more

like, it could even like turn you off from the show, because I know it completely

confused me. Like, so, I don't know. And like, especially since it was kind of like right

off the bat, like um, like it kind of could turn people away, especially like in the

beginning of the show" (Non-viewer 5-4). As this Non-viewer alludes to, viewers are

willing to endure a certain amount of feeling lost or excluded, but if a show does it too

much or at strategic times, self-reflexive references have the potential to turn viewers

away. And so producers must strike a balance between using self-reflexivity to enhance

fans' viewing, while not losing too many non-viewers in the process. It is likely for this

reason that *Boston Legal* embeds the self-reflexive references so deeply that non-viewers

can still have a surface reading of the statement, while Fans get meaning on a different

level. In turn, Fans invest more in their viewing so that they can "uncover" the self-

reflexive references.

Easter Eggs

Interestingly, both fans and non-viewers saw the self-reflexive references as a reward for regular viewers of the show. Fans lovingly referred to these rewards as "Easter eggs" (Fan 2-2), whereas non-viewers referred to them on many different occasions as "inside jokes" (for example, Non-viewer 6-6). The difference between these two descriptions is the vantage point from which the speaker is looking. Fans are looking at self-reflexive references from an "insider" point of view. They see the references as "Easter eggs", placed throughout the show for them to find and collect. Non-viewers see the references as the same thing—something placed there to reward regular viewers—but fully acknowledge that they are not the insiders such references were meant for, leading to an "outsider" point of view. For example, one non-viewer lamented during the focus group, "I think if I was a, if I watched it, more episodes, maybe, maybe it'd work on me. But like just seeing it for the first time, I didn't like it" (NV 5-5). Another of the non-viewer focus groups had this to say about it:

> NV5-4: I think it's funny for people who watch it, but if you don't watch it, it could more like, it could even like turn you off from the show, because I know like it completely confused me. Like, so, I don't know. And like, especially since it was kind of like right off the bat, like um, like it kind of could turn people away, especially like in the beginning of the show.
> NV2-4: Definitely like an inside joke sort of thing. [NV6-4: mm hmm] Follow the show [NV6-4: right] pretty much till you get the jokes or if not, it's kind of awkward, you don't know what they're talking about.

Or this group that used the words "inside joke" and "bonus for the regular viewers" to describe the self-reflexive statements:

> NV7-6: And I agree with the fact that it's kinda just like a bonus for the regular viewers. And like she said, like an inside joke. You don't have to necessarily get it in order for it to make the

whole episode. [NV1-6: mm hmm] But if you do get it, it's just
like a little inside joke. Just something that, like a little bonus for
people who know what they're talking about.
I: Yeah? No?
NV1-6: Yeah.

These descriptions by non-viewers indicate their feelings about being on the "outside" of

the self-reflexive references. Because they don't watch the show regularly, they were

unable to understand the references and "get" the joke. For some non-viewers, this led to

frustration and dislike of the show itself, but to others, the "inside jokes" were peripheral

to the story and did not impede their enjoyment of the screened episode of *Boston Legal*.

Several non-viewers even indicated that they might watch an episode if it came on as

they were flipping through the channels, indicating that this research study might have

sparked their interest in the show, and that the self-reflexivity did not completely distract

them from enjoying it.

Fans, on the other hand, maintained an "insider's" point of view in their

descriptions of the self-reflexive devices. They referred to the devices as "rewards",

saying:

I think they're kind of like Easter eggs. They're not necessary to
enjoy the show, but you enjoy it that much more when you pick em
up cause you're like, "Hey, that referred to the second season, the
episode about this." Or, even if you just pick up on it, it makes
you feel like you've, you're accomplishing more than just watching
the show [F4-2: mm hmm] for an hour. I don't know, I just think
it's, it's an extra little reward. (Fan 2-2)

This group continued on to explain the idea of "Easter eggs" and rewards as a reward not

only for the viewers, but for the writer as well:

I: You mentioned this Easter egg idea. Um, and I, I I've had some
other focus groups say, "Well, they think the writers put these self-
reflexive things in to kind of reward the fans for watching all the

time, or for going back to the first two seasons," or…. Um, do do you think that's accurate?

F2-2: I think, I I think it is somewhat for that. But I also think that it's for their own humor. I think it makes them appreciate it, cause they try to see what they can sneak in.

I: Yeah.

F2-2: Um, cause it, the whole Easter egg thing started with uh, uh, one of my buddies in law school when we would skip class and the other would cover for us, we would put little, little jokes in the notes that weren't really jokes, we'd try to sneak stuff in by each other. And that's where [I: um], we'd always say, "There's 7 Easter eggs. Can you find them?" or whatever. [I laughs] And then you try to pick them out. And, so that's why I think of Easter eggs. It's not, I didn't think of it. He, he was the one that came up with it. But, I think it's rewarding for both the writer and the reader.

I: OK.

F2-2: I think it's kind of a cat and mouse game.

I: It it helps develop a relationship between the two?

F2-2: Mm hmm.

Another Fan described self-reflexive references as part of the DVD extras, or a "blooper reel" that is actually left in as a part of the show:

F2-1: I think that.. I think it's part of the reason why I like the show so much. It's just like, "Oh, well." You know, "Yeah, that was funny." But like, I I don't really know even, it's just kind of. It's it's like I can I can appreciate it, I guess.

I: Yeah.

F2-1: Or like, it's like, wh- when you watch, um, [snaps] mistake reels or whatever they were called on movies, they're always like, "I'm going to keep talking even though I know the cameras [I laughs] rolling after I messed up." And it's kind of like you're doing that, only it's part of the show! So

I: Yeah. That, that's interesting. That's a good way to put it. Jim Carrey does that a lot in his outtakes.

F2-1: Yeah. He does.

I: What um. Do, do you typically pick up on those things when you're watching Boston Legal? Those sort of statements?

F1-1: I don't really watch it. Like I'll watch an episode and then skip a couple and I'll watch [I: yeah] another one. So I don't ever really pick up on em because of that, but so.

I: OK. Do you think if you, if you watched it every week, you'd pick up on more?

F1-1: [simultaneous halfway through above] Yeah, definitely.

I: OK. What about you guys?

F3-1: Yeah, I I definitely picked up on it. I just remember there
was one where they were sitting outside on the balcony, or
whatever. It was one of those that was kind of like a two part
show, and part one and part two. And my dad just started busting
out laughing. And at first I didn't get it. And then, we have DVR,
he like rewinded it, and I was like, "Oh." So ever since then I
always kind of look for it in the show.

Fan group 1 was not only the first focus group, but it was made up of younger viewers

who were fans of *Boston Legal* typically because their parents watched the show. While

these viewers considered themselves to be fans of *Legal*, this participant's story about

understanding the self-reflexivity with prompting from his father seemed more typical of

this group. They enjoyed the references, and even understood them, but needed help

picking them out of the context, plotlines, and surrounding dialogue of the episode. The

difference between this group and the group of lawyers who make a game of looking for

"Easter eggs" could indicate a difference in viewer literacy and the response to self-

reflexivity, or the contextual background knowledge about characters and other show

elements that younger fans lack. Fan 3-1 talked about the subtlety of the references and

how he began to look for them after his father pointed one out to him:

I would think that it really would lose the meaning if they do it too
much, to where. Cause like he said, it is still like subtle, that
sometimes people would miss it? So like that's what's special
about it. So if they did it every single week, at a certain point in
the show, like everybody's going to get it. But if they don't do it all
the time, then it kind of keeps it subtle and the fun of it, I guess.

This fan understands the underlying balance that producers must consider when

incorporating self-reflexivity into their shows. For *Boston Legal*, at least, it seems that

there must be a balance between using self-reflexivity to enhance the experience of fans,

and yet making the self-reflexivity subtle enough that non-viewers still enjoy the show

and understand it without understanding the references. At the very least, self-reflexive

devices seem to have the capacity to both enhance some viewers' experiences and at the same time, make others feel excluded.

Overall, many factors influence viewers' reactions to self-reflexive devices. Some viewers simply gloss over reflexive references while others seek out such statements. Non-viewers feel excluded from the "inside jokes" that self-reflexive statements make, while fans feel like these jokes are "Easter eggs", left by the writers for them. Some viewers feel as though self-reflexivity occurs because writers and producers want to be more interactive with their audiences, while others see reflexivity as a distraction from the fictional plots and characters that make up their viewing experience. In general, though, fans who are "insiders" tended to enjoy the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, where non-viewers were distracted or disoriented by the references, or simply ignored the references altogether. What this study did not ask was whether the differences between fans and non-viewers was because of the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, or whether the differences were already there and created the separation between fans of the show and non-viewers. In other words, are fans of *Boston Legal* drawn to the show because of its elements, characters, and plotlines, and become fans of self-reflexivity, or were they fans of self-reflexive shows that were drawn to *Boston Legal* because of its use of the devices? In the discussion that follows, the concept of fandom might lend insight into the interaction between fans and non-viewers, and the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

This study looked at the phenomenon of self-reflexivity in the television show, *Boston Legal*. By many measures, *Legal* is a well-written and fairly well received show, with a dedicated fan base and intensely focused target audience of liberal intellectuals. This study looked at not only the types of self-reflexivity used in *Boston Legal*, but also how fans and non-viewers of the show received that self-reflexivity. The results of this study provide insight into the use of self-reflexivity, its reception, and also demonstrate a template for future audience studies. This summary chapter discuses these insights by breaking them down into five areas. First, it will revisit the definition and concept of self-reflexivity. Next, it will discuss the importance of the categorization scheme for self-reflexive statements developed by the textual analysis. It will then discuss the importance of the audience analysis and the need to examine both fans and non-viewers when doing research in this area, as well as the methodological limitations of the study and suggestions for future research. Finally, it will conclude by summarizing the significance of the findings and how they can be applied to other television shows and other forms of media.

Definition of Self-reflexivity

In previous literature on self-reflexivity, there was some debate over the definition of the concept, whether it was a post-modern art form or a modernist element in the evolution of the form, and some scholars couldn't even agree on what to call the phenomenon. This study looked at the previous literature across disciplines and makes some suggestions about what self-reflexivity is and what it is not. After this in-depth

analysis of both the text and the audience, I suggest both a name and a definition for self-reflexivity, and I also suggest a way to think about where self-reflexivity fits into the mediated form in which it appears.

What's In a Name?

While many authors across disciplines and across media forms simply call self-reflexivity, "self-reflexivity" or "self-reflexive", there is some discrepancy. Some authors prefer to use a term specific to the medium they are studying. For example, Olson (1987) and Loshitzky (1991) use the term "metatelevision" and Stam and Xavier (1988) and Siska (1979) use a similar term, "metacinema". These terms appear to stem from Psychology and the study of "metacognition" (Flavell, 1976), or "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes or anything related to them" (p. 232). Other researchers prefer the term "self-referential" (White, 1986, and Withalm, 2004), and still others simply refer to the phenomenon as being "reflexive" (Jones, 2005, Szczepanik, 2002, Campbell, 1979, and Davies et. al., 2004) and most likely feel that the term "self-reflexive" is redundant. But for many more authors (Johnson, 1979, Maas, 2003, Wood, 2005, Bishop, 2000, and Aden, 1991), the terms "self-reflexive", "self-reflexivity", and "self-reflexiveness" are the words that most accurately describe it. For this study, the term "reflexive" did not do justice to the statements used in *Boston Legal*. *Legal* goes beyond simply "turning back on itself" (Davies et. al., p. 360). The statements made in *Legal* not only refer to the text itself and the world of television, but also to the corporeal world. *Boston Legal* uses self-reflexivity to go beyond forcing "viewers to confront their own understanding of their literacy" (Aden, 1991, p. 401) to forcing viewers to confront their own understanding of the world in which they live. This is opposite of mere

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reflexiveness because it actually takes the focus away from the text and turns it to the broader context.

Others might call this "breaking the fourth wall" (a layman term). While "breaking the fourth wall" is definitely self-reflexive, not everything self-reflexive "breaks the fourth wall". For example, when a character addresses the viewer directly, this is considered "breaking the fourth wall". In the framework outlined by this study, this would also be considered "direct address". Direct address would fall into the framework under autodeconstructive voice. But there are many other parts of the framework that do not specifically ignore the fourth wall construct. For example, when Alan Shore says he "wants to be on cable" because "that's where the best work is being done" (episode 1.5: An Eye for an Eye), he is not directly addressing the viewer. He is talking to another character on the show in a way that could pass as typical conversation. But of course, he is also referring to the corporeal world in a self-reflexive way. Thus, "breaking the fourth wall" is not an adequate term to describe the many different aspects of self-reflexive references. "Self-reflexive" is the only way the phenomenon can be described as a whole.

At the start of this study, I proposed that using Stam's (1985) definition of self-reflexivity was the most relevant: "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation." While this definition encompasses many of the elements of self-reflexivity and suggests that this occurs in multiple media, it is too specific and therefore exclusive. It also does not focus on the fact that self-reflexivity can typically be broken down into the message unit or statement, and by the referent. Although Stam's definition was perfectly fine to convey the phenomenon of self-reflexivity for this study

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of *Boston Legal*, the findings suggest that a new definition is in order. For example, Stam limits his definition to texts that are literary and filmic, excluding television texts, comic books, YouTube videos, and other forms. While this is merely an oversight, it is easy enough to change the definition to say, "media texts" or simply leave it with the word "text", meaning all forms a text might take.

Very few researchers who write about self-reflexivity in television or cinema even take the time to define it. Even though Olson (1987) goes into great detail to describe what self-reflexive statements do, does not actually define self-reflexivity. Siska (1979) merely defines it as "consciousness turning back on itself" (p. 285), and Loshitzky broadly describes it as "an exploration of the artistic medium itself" (p. 557). Jones (2005) has the best general definition for self-reflexivity as he discusses the phenomenon in comic books: "reflexivity will be conceptualized as a process by which the author of the text and/or the audience of the text functions to call attention to the text as an artificial construct" (p. 6). Jones goes on to justify this definition by pointing out that it "places agency in the hands of individuals (author and audience) rather than in the hands of a neutral artifact (the text)" (p. 6). By emphasizing the role of the author and the audience, Jones's definition does something that Stam's does not. But Jones's definition goes slightly too far by removing the text altogether. Without it, the audience can only see the text as a construct of the author, producer, or writer. In *Boston Legal*, the text is absolutely a part of the process. Even though the writer engages in self-reflexivity in *Legal*, the text must be able to convey the reference to the audience, and the audience must have the necessary knowledge to comprehend the reference. As seen in this study, however, the text goes on, even if the reference is ignored.

Because of the role of the author, the audience, and the text, a definition of self-reflexivity must also include elements from Aden's (1991) argument that self-reflexive texts can lead to media literacy. Aden says that "exploring self-reflexive television requires students to understand the relationships among text, genre, audience, and form" (p. 401). If we include in the definition that self-reflexivity requires the audience to understand relationships, we start to arrive at a solid definition of self-reflexivity that future studies can move forward with. I propose that self-reflexivity should be defined as the process by which a text calls attention to the relationships between the audience, author, text, and/or context within which it resides. This definition places the audience first, since their reception of the text is the key to its self-reflexiveness. It acknowledges the role of the author and the text, and does not exclude context as a factor in the process.

Modernist Trend

While self-reflexivity may seem like a post-modern trend, the textual analysis of *Boston Legal* would indicate that it is instead a modernist exposition of the television form. Olson's (1987) excellent description and categorization of self-reflexive techniques argues that self-reflexivity is a post-modern phenomenon because "metafiction has been described as a major element of literary postmodernism (p. 284)." Jones (2005) uses Olson's (1987) argument in his application of reflexivity to comic art, and neither author challenges the notion that self-reflexivity is a postmodern phenomenon. Even Stam and Xavier (1988) liken self-reflexivity to Carnival, which is typically done as critical researchers try to make sense of post-modern texts, although to be fair, the authors do not attempt to situate self-reflexivity in either tradition, saying that "Brazilian cinema is in step, of course, with international cinema, with its ever-increasing tendency to reflexivity,

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whether modernist (early Godard), Brechtian (late Godard) or post-modernist (Steven Spielberg)" (p. 16). While these authors understand that certain elements of self-reflexivity can be considered post-modern, they ignore the fact that the encoding of self-reflexivity in the text is truly a modernist trend.

Post-modern television acknowledges that the viewer can read a text in multiple ways. Fiske (1996), might argue that all television is post-modern because the medium is merely a representation of reality. As far as self-reflexivity is concerned, a strong case could be made that it is a post-modern trend in television. Even this study shows that audience members are free to interpret the self-reflexive statements in a number of different ways. Some non-viewers glossed over references altogether. Even fans have the ability to read references differently based on their background knowledge of the show, the characters, the actors, the producers, the storylines, or intertextual understanding. But thinking of self-reflexivity as a post-modern trend ignores the encoding of the message.

When looking at the modern period of art, painters broke from the tradition of realism in order to expose their audiences to the process of making art. Pablo Picasso's experiments with cubism exposed to viewers that traditional paintings were on a 2-dimensional surface. As he abstracted his paintings to show movement and the third-dimension, he was breaking with conventional painting to expose the process and limitations of traditional art. In a similar way, self-reflexive television turns "in on itself to consider its nature and structure" (Siska, p. 289). Self-reflexive television can be considered modernist because the producers and writers are showing the viewer the conventions and forms of the medium. Just as there are a limited number of ways to read Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon", there are also a limited number of ways to read

self-reflexive references in television. Viewers either read them the way the producer intended, or they read it as part of the fictional narrative or conversation. As seen in this study, fans often "got" the self-reflexive references (such as the reference to a character being a guest star) and non-viewers did not, instead reading the reference as scripted, typical dialogue (such as the non-viewer who said people refer to others as "guest stars" all the time in real life). Because self-reflexive television is an attempt by the authors and producers to unmask the mechanisms of production, and because there are not an infinite number of possible readings, as Siska (1979) argues, the phenomenon can, and should, most definitely be looked at as a modernist trend in television.

Research Question 1: Types of Self-reflexivity

Research question 1 asked, "How are the self-reflexive statements encoded into *Boston Legal*? What do the statements refer to (referent in the corporeal world, the medium, the genre/show, or the individual episode text)?" This study looked at previous efforts to categorize the types of self-reflexivity used in television, such as Olson's (1987) framework of "meta-television". It also drew from research in other areas, such as Jones's (2005) study on comic art and Siska's (1979) study on "metacinema". What this showed was that self-reflexivity had not been looked at as a whole and general phenomenon. Each researcher made claims about the types of self-reflexivity and their impact on the audience.

Previous Framework

Olson's (1987) framework was the most developed categorization of self-reflexive statements. He categorized self-reflexivity into 3 different broad categories and offered several subcategories to distinguish between the different types. When adding the

research in other media forms to Olson's framework, and when adding other research about the televisual form, the literature review for this study came up with nine different broad categories and nineteen subcategories. Many of the categories could have been moved to become subcategories of the broader categories identified by other researchers, but still others simply overlapped the research done in other media forms. In order to consolidate this framework and appropriately identify the different types of self-reflexivity, this study attempted to generalize across media, instead of focusing on narrative and aesthetic similarities.

Current Framework

The new framework proposed by this study could be applied to television, but it can also be used to discuss cinema and many aspects of literature. For example, when a character in a book discusses the way that books are written or printed, it only takes a little bit of extrapolation to see that this is a reference to the medium itself. Although the proposed framework in appendix D calls this, "references to the medium of television", it could just as easily read "references to the medium of cinema" or "references to the printed format." This study consolidates previous categorizations of self-reflexivity into one universal framework that can be applied across media forms.

The current framework consolidates and simplifies existing literature across media on self-reflexivity by proposing a streamlined categorization based on referent. The framework begins locally (the show itself), expands to encompass references within the genre, then to references of the medium itself, and finally it reaches globally (to the media object's location within the corporeal world), and situates subcategories within these four comprehensive categories. The framework is meant to be flexible: new

subcategories may be added based on future research, but the general categories remain firm. The framework put forward here also adds new subcategories that had not been mentioned in previous literature.

References to the Medium: Industry Standards

The framework put forth by this study adds a subcategory within the broader context of references to the medium. No other scholars discussed self-reflexive references to the industry standards of a medium, even though such references appeared in the episodes of *Boston Legal* that were analyzed for this study. These references are not new, but they had not been identified as a category of self-reflexivity in previous research. Such references illuminate aspects of the industry that are specific to the medium being consumed for the audience, acting as both an acknowledgement of a more sophisticated consumer and as an educational tool as well. Including this subcategory within the framework will give future researchers the ability to analyze the demystification of the industry standards that self-reflexivity allows.

References to the Corporeal World: Current Events, Actors, Show as Object

Within the broader category of references to the corporeal world, there were no sources that discussed self-reflexive references to current events, to the actors who play characters on a television show, or to the show as an object within the corporeal world. The new framework adds these subcategories to the list, allowing for such references to be studied. Shows do not just make reference to their authors, as previous studies in literature suggest. In television and other mass media, the actors make references to themselves as people who exist in the corporeal world. Current events are discussed in a way that is self-reflexive and highlight the fact that viewers are interacting with and

consuming a mediated text. And clever shows are even making references to themselves as corporeal objects. These references are definitely self-reflexive, and show the perceived sophistication of viewers who are fully capable of distinguishing between the corporeal world and the mediated world.

New Terms

This study also introduces two terms that are not new to the vernacular, but are new within the context of self-reflexivity. These terms have been used by scholars to describe other media phenomenon, for example, Brand Hijacking, a term used by Alex Wipperfurth (2005) to describe the way consumers exhibit loyalty to brands and "hijack" the marketing of the brand away from the company or marketing firm. Jenkins (2006) describes the way fans of a text "poach" the narratives, conventions, aesthetics, and other defining characteristics into their own projects within the realm of participatory culture. But the words "hijacking" and "corporeal world" have not been used to describe self-reflexive references and their interactions with other texts and the broader world.

Hijacking. In the context of self-reflexivity, hijacking refers to when one media text borrows the conventions, characters, plotlines, or other unique aspects of another texts. The reference seeks to capitalize on the viewers' knowledge of the borrowed aspect, thus making it a "hijacking", and not merely a reference. This is very similar to Wipperfurth's (2005) "brand hijacking", except that other writers and producers are doing the hijacking, not the consumers. When writers and producers use the viewers' familiarity with a text's elements in order to make a self-reflexive statement, they "hijack" the first text into their own text. Because of this, the category of references to other shows in the framework self-reflexivity is different from the others. The references

in this category are typically, if not always, a hijacking of the other text. This is important for viewers to understand and for future researchers to look at because of the effect such references can have on the original text or even on the culture surrounding the text. For example, few people remember the exact words that Sarah Palin said to Katie Couric (CBS News, September 24, 2008). Instead, they remember the words spoken by Tina Fey on Saturday Night Live when she parodied the Palin interviews (NBC, September 27, 2008). When one text hijacks another, it has the potential to affect popular thought and culture.

Corporeal World. The second term this study proposes using within the context of self-reflexivity is the phrase "corporeal world" to describe the world in which the audience lives. In a televisual world where the "reality" genre is increasing in popularity, the lines between the media world and the "real world" are slowly eroding (Potter, 2011). Even the use of self-reflexivity, as it refers to the corporeal world, has the effect of blurring the line between the two. Thus, the term, "real world", is no longer an effective way to describe the world in which the audience lives. Instead, "corporeal world" should be used, implying that the world the audience lives in is tangible and has physical presence (not just in the mind of the viewers). The term, "corporeal" has traditionally been used in contrast to the "spiritual" world, implying that the latter does not have a physical, tangible presence. Television and the media are similar to the spiritual realm in that the characters and narratives only exist inside the experience of the audience. Because of this, "corporeal" is an appropriate word to contrast the realm of media texts when referring to the world that the audience lives in.

Research Questions 2,3,4: Audience Reactions,

Meanings, and Relationships

After the textual analysis of *Boston Legal* looked at the ways television dramas

use self-reflexivity in their dialogue and narratives, this study wanted to expand the

research to actually look at how audiences read self-reflexivity. This study expands the

literature on self-reflexivity to include the ways audiences react, negotiate meaning, and

develop relationships by answering the following questions:

2. How do viewers read the self-reflexive statements in *Boston Legal*? Are there

    differences in the readings of fans and non-viewers?

3. How do the self-reflexive statements affect the way viewers negotiate meaning?

    Do fans negotiate meanings in different ways than non-viewers? Is there any other

    contextual information either in the viewers' own experiences or within the text

    that affects the way meanings are negotiated?

4. How do the self-reflexive statements affect viewers' relationship with the text?

    Do fans or non-viewers feel more connected to *Boston Legal* and its actors,

    writers, and producers?

Previous Assumptions about the Audience

Prior to this study, research looked at self-reflexivity as a phenomenon to be

described and defined. If the audience was mentioned, it was to conjecture about the

possible reactions to self-reflexivity, with nothing empirical to support those

assumptions. As it turns out, many of the studies were correct in their assumptions. The

audiences of *Boston Legal* that were studied here discussed the amusement they found in

self-reflexivity. They also confirmed that they feel more intelligent when they understand

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a reference, and that they feel as though the author is writing to a fan base and developing a dialogue between the two groups.

Amusement

Withalm (2004) says that audiences are increasingly used to self-reflexivity and amused by it (p. 337). White (1986) says that viewers are "fascinated" by self-reflexivity. Indeed, this study certainly found that fans of *Boston Legal* are amused by and enjoy the self-reflexive statements the show makes. While these previous studies are critical textual analyses that look at the commercialization of self-reflexivity, they do also make a few statements about how the audience might react. Their assumptions that viewers find humor in self-reflexivity are confirmed by this study.

Intelligent Viewers

Olson (1987) goes so far as to say that audiences might be "bored" when the shows they watch do not match their level of television literacy (p. 296). Aden (1991), and Siska (1979) also see self-reflexivity as an acknowledgement by producers that their audiences are intelligent and literate consumers of media. Again, these authors make statements about the audience that are confirmed by this study. Fans of *Boston Legal* did read the self-reflexive statements as an acknowledgement that they contained the background knowledge and intelligence to be able to understand the references. In fact, they felt smarter and savvier when they understood a more obscure reference that they felt others might have missed due to their lack of knowledge or intelligence. So not only is self-reflexivity something used by producers to recognize a more intelligent audience, the references also have a way of making the audience feel more intelligent.

Show Authors' Subjectivity

Olson, Siska, Szczepanik, and Stam all discuss how self-reflexivity causes the viewers' attention to shift to the production and the authors of the text. Jones (2005) uses the term "authorial awareness" to describe the ways in which the authors inject themselves into the text and allow the viewer to see their thought processes and their biases. In this study, viewers of *Boston Legal* indicated that the self-reflexive statements made them more aware of the author's role in the show. Even the non-viewers agreed that self-reflexivity in *Legal* and in other shows allow viewers to understand the perspective of the author. In fact, several participants alluded to the fact that *Boston Legal* is a very political show that does not hold back its opinions. To these viewers, self-reflexivity allowed the writers and producers to interject their opinions into their presentations of political topics without turning viewers away. Because of the humor and cleverness inherent in self-reflexivity, viewers were able to agree or disagree with the self-reflexive references to political events in the corporeal world and still enjoy the references. To these viewers, self-reflexivity was a way for the writers and producers to make a difficult political statement while at the same time saying "don't take us too seriously, we're just a television show." Although future research could dive deeper into this use of self-reflexivity, it is something that this study suggests is consistent with previous literature about the interjection of author into a text.

Viewer inclusion/interaction

Finally, this study is similar to previous literature in its findings that viewers read self-reflexivity as a way for the writers and producers to acknowledge the viewer as a part of the communication process. As Jones (2005) says, "[self-]reflexivity is not

something that is located in the text itself, rather it is something that the author engages in while creating and the audience engages in while consuming" (p. 6). Olson and others also discuss this connection between the author and the consumer that is confirmed by this study. As the participants discussed self-reflexivity, they felt that it was a way for the writers and producers to not only acknowledge the audience, but to have a conversation with them. Users of the *Boston Legal* fan forum even have conversation threads for viewer-proposed plot lines and characters where they wondered if the producers of the show were reading the forum and including some of their suggestions. Reading through forum postings, it is clear that these fans see themselves as more than just avid consumers of the show. They see themselves as a part of the production process. They see the forum as serving the function of bringing the fans to the producers, and there is some evidence on the fan website to indicate that the producers see these fans as a valuable resource for the production of the show. On the website, the webmaster calls some of the actors and producers "friends of the website" and "friends of ours (the fan community)". And so the self-reflexivity on *Boston Legal* not only exposes the author to the viewers, but it also creates an interaction not seen in traditional television dramas.

Current Findings about the Audience

Although many of the findings about the ways audiences reacted to self-reflexivity, negotiated meaning, and developed relationships with the show reinforced existing assumptions, this study did arrive at some new and interesting findings about the audience. By using qualitative focus groups, the audience was given a voice. The focus groups studied provided a lot of insights into the ways audiences react to self-reflexivity.

For example, prior to this study, none of the literature had looked at the differences between fans and non-viewers.

Fans versus non-viewers

Jenkins (1988) describes how fans "refuse to read by the rules imposed upon them by the schoolmasters. For fans, reading becomes a type of play, responsive only to its own loosely structured rules and generating its own types of pleasure" (p. 86). This is a distinct difference between fans and non-viewers that was also seen in this study. While fans knew previous shows that actors had been in, personal facts about the actors, and other background information, non-viewers rarely had such knowledge. For example, when asked if they had seen any of the actors before, non-viewer 3-4 said, "William Shatner does commercials, doesn't he?" Fans, however, could reflect on specific storylines from Shatner's breakout television role as Captain Kirk on *Star Trek*. Although a difference in age might account for this apparent lack of knowledge, there were certainly young fans of *Legal* in this study that could recount specifics from the original *Star Trek*. Even some younger non-viewers were familiar with his role as Kirk, but typically not to the level of the fans in the study. They were definitely less aware of other, more obscure references to previous characters the actors in *Boston Legal* had played.

While Jenkins (2006) discusses fan culture in great detail, there is still room to explore the connection between fans and self-reflexive media. Many of the fans talked about how they began watching *Boston Legal* in the first place because of their love of a previous show that William Shatner or another actor had starred in. Some fans also discussed their love of David E. Kelly produced shows. Many mentioned that they had watched *The Practice* and kept watching its spinoff, *Boston Legal*. It merits another look

to see whether audiences or producers see self-reflexivity as a reward for following a specific actor, writer, producer, or spinoff.

Intertextuality

Certainly, one of the areas where fans have background knowledge that non-viewers lack is in the intertextual references made by *Boston Legal*. But another interesting finding in this study was that both fans and non-viewers tended to discuss characters, story events, actors, producers, and other aspects of the show in intertextual terms as well. For instance, many non-viewers seemed uninterested in the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*, but once they understood the concept, they began to get excited and say the names of other shows that use self-reflexivity. For example, many non-viewers wanted to detail certain scenes where *The Office* or *The Simpsons* use self-reflexivity. Even in conversations with people outside of this study, I have found that when I explain self-reflexivity, people begin to tell me about shows that I need to be watching that use self-reflexive references for humor. Or when I discuss the actors in *Boston Legal*, I typically say their names and other shows they've been in until the person I'm talking to makes the connection. It seems that all audiences tend to talk about television, its characters, actors, storylines, shows, producers, and conventions only in relationship to other shows, storylines, etc. The discussion about self-reflexivity seems to fall into the same pattern. It appears to be difficult to talk about self-reflexivity without having an intertextual conversation about similar shows and self-reflexive devices.

Parasocial relationships

This study also made an interesting discovery about the parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956) that self-reflexivity facilitates between the audience and the

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actors and authors of *Boston Legal*. While it is not surprising that fans develop parasocial

relationships with the characters on *Boston Legal*, it is interesting that self-reflexivity

seems to encourage it and extend the relationships beyond the characters to the actors,

writers, and producers. Self-reflexivity facilitates interactivity between the show and its

audience in a way that encourages the audience to seek more information about the

characters, the actors, the writers, and the producers. Self-reflexive references to the

actors themselves or to the producers themselves give the audience some information and

background, and creates a need in the audience to learn more so that they can understand

the references on a deeper level. One needs only go as far as the fan-run website (boston-

legal.org) to see the dedication fans give to the show's producers, writers, and actors.

Fans regularly post information about interviews with the actors and producers, and the

moderator for the website posts videos of interviews and clips from other shows that the

actors have been involved with even after *Boston Legal* went off the air.

Investment

Just as background knowledge aids in the understanding of self-reflexive

references, so does investment in the show, its plots, and its characters. Based on the

existing literature, it is no surprise that participants reported feeling that self-reflexivity

takes work to negotiate its meaning. The interesting finding here is that non-viewers

indicated an unwillingness to put in the work necessary to understand the references, both

in collecting background knowledge and in paying attention to the show as they watched.

Non-viewers did not have the level of investment fans had in the episode shown to

participants, and so they read the text at a surface level, even when the reflexive

statements made specific references to events that would not take much effort to read

into. For example, none of the non-viewers asked what Chelina and Alan meant when they said, "we were moved to Tuesdays…and here we are with old footage." These non-viewers were not interested in reading this as anything deeper than banter between two characters. As non-viewer 5-4 said, "I don't know, I don't like to take the time to figure it out." They made no effort to ask whether the show had been moved or had an interruption in production that would create "old footage" to use in future episodes. And they certainly did not spend any cognitive resources trying to understand that the show had probably changed time slots and that the characters were referring to this change.

Fans, on the other hand, were most certainly willing to pay attention to the show and put in extra work to find the objects of references. Fans indicated that they often looked up information on IMDB about the show, the characters, the actors, etc., in order to find the context they needed to understand self-reflexive references in *Boston Legal*. Fans were also willing to give the show more of their attention and processing ability than non-viewers. Many fans indicated a willingness to invest in the show's plotlines and characters deeply enough to understand self-reflexive references. Several fans even used the term "Easter Eggs" to describe this phenomenon of watching and looking specifically for "hidden" self-reflexive references, placed there by the producers specifically for them to find.

Easter Eggs

The term "Easter Eggs" is often used in video gaming (for example, see the extensive conversation about which Atari video game contained the first "Easter Egg" at atariage.com/forums/topic/59087-the-very-first-easter-egg-was-not-adventure/) referring to "hidden" surprises that one must work to find and uncover. Their existence is usually

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completely ancillary to the objectives in the game, but they are extras that players usually only find after playing the game several times or going to online forums where others post the location of the hidden item. For example, in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (LucasArts, 2003), one droid character beeps a melody from an episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space 9*. Since the audiences for *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Deep Space 9* overlap, fans of both might be able to pick out the melody and understand it as the intertextual "Easter Egg" that the producers intended it to be. Every other player will go through the game without having figured out the reference and probably not miss any significant enjoyment in their overall experience because of their oversight. But those who do find the "Easter Egg" most likely get significant enjoyment in the finding itself. In *Boston Legal*, fans certainly indicated that they would even watch an episode more than once in order to find any of these "Easter Eggs" that they might have missed the previous time. "Easter Eggs" have been a staple in gaming for a while, but the term is just now becoming widespread in the realm of television, thrust there by the gaming audience. Audiences are increasingly seeing such references as rewards for their investment in the show.

Reasons against Self-reflexivity

The use of self-reflexivity in television shows seems to be a balancing act. Audiences seem to enjoy the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*; with some fans even watching an episode several times looking for it, but self-reflexivity also seems to have the potential for turning audiences away. In *Boston Legal*, there seemed to be a good balance of self-reflexivity, where non-viewers indicated that the references did not detract from the plotlines or their reading of the show. But the same non-viewers indicated that

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they were often turned off by other shows that employed self-reflexivity too much.

Several of them indicated that self-reflexivity in *The Simpsons* turned them off to the

show. Even the younger participants indicated that they gravitated towards more serious

shows, such as *Law and Order* and *CSI*, and found the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal* to

be off-putting. For example, non-viewer 5-5 said,

> I don't know. I'm just, I'm a big fan of like, I don't like the humor
> stuff like in that kind of setting. Like, I'm a big Law and Order fan
> and CSI stuff, so
> I: Yeah
> NV1-5: I kind of see that too.
> NV5-5: I don't like the humor. I didn't like the humor in it.
> I: MK. You think that detracts from the
> NV5-5: Yeah, right.
> I: the seriousness of racial profiling.

The non-viewers here indicated that the topics *Boston Legal* addressed should have been

treated with more seriousness. They saw the self-reflexive references to be distracting

from the serious argument being raised. This is the same use of self-reflexivity that fans

indicated enjoying because it was a way for the show to say "don't take us too seriously,

we're just a television show." But this turned off some non-viewers. In general, it is fair

to say that none of the non-viewers enjoyed the self-reflexivity in the episode of *Boston*

Legal they watched in focus groups so much that they indicated wanted to explore the

show further. This seems to indicate that non-viewers are willing to tolerate a certain

amount of self-reflexivity if it is discrete, but it is not something that will create new fans

of the show. Self-reflexivity does; however, seem to keep existing fans dedicated to the

show.

Methodological Improvements

This is the first study of self-reflexive television to look at both the text and the audience. The textual analysis in this study of *Boston Legal* is similar to what Jones (2005) did with comics, White (1986) did with commercials, Loshitzky (1991) did with news coverage, and Stam and Xavier (1988) did with Brazilian cinema. But none of those studies conducted focus groups with audiences to fully understand the connections between the self-reflexivity in those texts and the audience's relationship with that text. Those studies made claims about audiences, but were not able or willing to take the next step and discuss the self-reflexivity with those audiences. Methodologically, this study sought to make these connections. By conducting focus groups with both fans and non-viewers of *Boston Legal*, this study was able to confirm some of the previous assumptions and find out new things about the ways audiences react to and interpret self-reflexivity.

But this study was still limited to the text and the audience. While this is an improvement over previous research on self-reflexivity, it still did not have the opportunity to discuss self-reflexivity with the producers, writers, and actors themselves. Future research could look at the writers who encode the self-reflexivity into their texts to see if they understand the intricate nature of fans' relationships to the writing. For example, if fans see self-reflexivity as a way for the writers to interact with them, do the writers see it the same way? Do producers realize the delicate balance required when incorporating self-reflexivity into the narrative and dialogue? Perhaps producers intuitively understand that there are fans of their show that are looking for "Easter Eggs", but do they understand that they also have the potential to turn away people watching the

show for the first time? An ideal study of self-reflexivity might need to include the text, viewer, and author to really uncover the complex relationship between the three. But for now, it is enough just to learn more about the relationship between the self-reflexive text and its fans.

<div align="center">Application of Findings</div>

The findings in this study are important because the use of self-reflexivity is increasing in television shows (White, 1986). As shows incorporate self-reflexivity into their narratives and dialogue more, it will be more important to have an understanding of how producers use the references and how viewers interpret them. Certainly, this study is important for producers of television so that they understand the role self-reflexivity plays in audience dedication and behavior. And it is important for producers to understand that viewers can also be turned away by self-reflexivity. But this study has more important application than in the industry. It also has important implications for media literacy and media education.

As Aden (1991) says, "by referring to themselves, texts force viewers to confront their own understanding of their literacy because in reading the text they are also reading about the text; the artifice of the narrative is acknowledged" (p. 401). While some authors like Zettl feel that they key to media literacy is aesthetic analysis, others like Messaris (1994) argue that production skills are essential. Without discrediting their extensive research on the subject, few authors except Aden actually mention self-reflexive television as a way to produce a more literate audience. But self-reflexive television has a way of educating an audience while they are consuming the very text they are learning about. They do not need classes in television production or formal training in aesthetics

and media analysis in order to become more literate. When viewers are exposed to television shows that give insight about the production, writing, acting, distribution, and other aspects of the televisual world, they become increasingly more educated about the medium. This is not to say that consumption of self-reflexive texts will lead to a media literate society, but compared to traditional television shows that do not incorporate self-reflexivity, these texts have an increased potential for education and should be incorporated into the media literacy curriculum alongside production and analysis skills. While much more information still needs to be gathered on the connection between self-reflexivity and media literacy, this study at least began the process by looking at how audiences read and react to self-reflexivity in television dramas.

Conclusions

The topic of this dissertation was sparked by a conversation with a friend of mine about the self-reflexivity in *Boston Legal*. As a fan of *Boston* Legal, he said that he did not like it when characters on the show would allude to "next season" or make other self-reflexive references. While I can't say I learned any more about my friend and his personal tastes about self-reflexivity, this dissertation did uncover a vast amount of new knowledge about the phenomenon and how audiences read and relate to it. Where there were studies in different areas looking at the self-reflexivity within a specific medium, this study sought to synthesize the existing literature into an extensive framework that combined the terminology and concepts from the previous studies. This framework can be used by future research to identify specific self-reflexive devices within narratives and it gives future research a common language with which to discuss those devices. At the very least, when I began this line of research, I did not know how much existing research

I would find, or how much information I would be able to gather together about self-reflexivity. What I found was that there was enough research in different areas to get a good grasp on the concept, but enough left to learn to give me the sense that I was uncovering new and exciting perspectives.

Anecdotally, self-reflexivity must be an interesting topic for a lot of people. As I worked on this project and people would ask me about it, I can't remember a single conversation where the person would not give me an example of self-reflexivity from their favorite television show. Granted, I tend to socialize with people with similar tastes to my own, but their willingness to share and their excitement about the topic makes me think that self-reflexivity is not as obscure a concept as the lack of literature about it might suggest. This dissertation is the first look into the complexities of self-reflexivity and the relationships between author, text, context, and audience. There are more avenues of research left to explore for myself and for others who will build on my observations and findings.

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Appendix A: Framework for Classifying Self-reflexive statements based on referent

Pre-Analysis Framework

1. Medium Reflexivity (Olson, 1987)
      a. Audience Awareness (Olson, 1987, Loshitzky, 1991)
      b. Intertextuality/Allusion (Olson, 1987)

2. Metagenericism (Palmer, 1986, in Olson, 1987)
      a. Iconography (Olson, 1987)
      b. Archetypes (Olson, 1987)
      c. Setting (Olson, 1987)

3. Genre Conventions (Silverblatt, 2007)
      d. Plot Structure (Silverblatt, 2007)
      e. Ideological Conventions (Silverblatt, 2007)
      f. Production Elements (Silverblatt, 2007)
      g. Industry Standards (Silverblatt, 2007)

4. References to the Show's Own Textuality (Olson, 1987)
      a. Autodeconstruction (Olson, 1987)
          1) Duration (Olson, 1987)
          2) Order of Events (Olson, 1987)
          3) Frequency/ Repetition of Events (Olson, 1987)
          4) Voice (Olson, 1987)
          5) Mood (Olson, 1987)
      b. Ilinx (Olson, 1987)

6. References to the Author Themselves (Siska, 1979, Jones, 2005)

7. Unmasking the Mechanisms of Production (Siska, 1979, Withalm, 2004, and Jones, 2005)

8. References to the Modes of Distribution (Withalm, 2004)
      a. Distribution Outlets (Withalm, 2004)
      b. Accompanying Documents (Withalm, 2004)
      c. Evaluation/Assessment Institutions (Withalm, 2004)

9. Intermedia Textuality (Spzczepanik, 2002)

Appendix B: Listing of all *Boston Legal* episodes

	Season One: 2004-2005	Aired on ABC	Day of Week	Days Between
1	Head Cases	10/3/04	Sunday	1 week
2	Still Crazy After All These Years	10/10/04	Sunday	1 week
3	Catch and Release	10/17/04	Sunday	1 week
4	Change of Course	10/24/04	Sunday	1 week
5	An Eye for an Eye	10/31/04	Sunday	1 week
6	Truth Be Told	11/7/04	Sunday	1 week
7	Questionable Characters	11/21/04	Sunday	2 weeks
8	Loose Lips	11/28/04	Sunday	1 week
9	Greater Good	12/12/04	Sunday	2 weeks
10	Hired Guns	12/19/04	Sunday	1 week
11	Schmidt Happens	1/9/05	Sunday	3 weeks
12	From Whence We Came	1/16/05	Sunday	1 week
13	It Girls and Beyond	1/23/05	Sunday	1 week
14	Til We Meat Again	2/13/05	Sunday	3 weeks
15	Tortured Souls	2/20/05	Sunday	1 week
16	Let Sales Ring	3/13/05	Sunday	3 weeks
17	Death Be Not Proud	3/20/05	Sunday	1 week

	Season Two: 2005-2006	Aired on ABC	Day of Week	Days Between
1	The Black Widow	9/27/05	Tuesday	
2	Schadenfreude	10/4/05	Tuesday	1 week
3	Finding Nimmo	10/11/05	Tuesday	1 week
4	A Whiff and a Prayer	10/18/05	Tuesday	1 week
5	Men to Boys	10/25/05	Tuesday	1 week
6	Witches of Mass Destruction	11/1/05	Tuesday	1 week
7	Truly, Madly, Deeply	11/8/05	Tuesday	1 week
8	The Ass Fat Jungle	11/15/05	Tuesday	1 week
9	Gone	12/6/05	Tuesday	3 weeks
10	Legal Deficits	12/13/05	Tuesday	1 week
11	The Cancer Man Can	1/10/06	Tuesday	4 weeks
12	Helping Hands	1/17/06	Tuesday	1 week
13	Too Much Information	1/24/06	Tuesday	1 week
14	Breast in Show	2/7/06	Tuesday	2 weeks
15	Smile	2/14/06	Tuesday	1 week
16	Live Big	2/21/06	Tuesday	1 week
17	There's Fire	2/28/06	Tuesday	1 week
18	Show and Oww!	3/7/06	Tuesday	1 week
19	Stick It	3/14/06	Tuesday	1 week
20	Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	3/21/06	Tuesday	1 week
21	Word Salad Day	3/28/06	Tuesday	1 week

		Aired on		
22	Ivan the Incorrigible	4/18/06	Tuesday	3 weeks
23	Race Ipsa	4/25/06	Tuesday	1 week
24	Deep End of the Poole	5/2/06	Tuesday	1 week
25	Squid Pro Quo	5/9/06	Tuesday	1 week
26	Spring Fever	5/16/06	Tuesday	1 week
27	BL: Los Angeles			

	Season Three: 2006-2007	Aired on ABC	Day of Week	Days Between
1	Why Can't We All Get A Lung	9/19/06	Tuesday	
2	New Kids on the Block	9/26/06	Tuesday	1 week
3	Desperately Seeking Shirley	10/3/06	Tuesday	1 week
4	Fine Young Cannibal	10/10/06	Tuesday	1 week
5	Whose God Is It Anyway?	10/17/06	Tuesday	1 week
6	The Verdict	10/24/06	Tuesday	1 week
7	Trick or Treat	10/31/06	Tuesday	1 week
8	Lincoln	11/26/06	Sunday*	26 days
9	On the Ledge	11/28/06	Tuesday	2 days
10	The Nutcrackers	12/5/06	Tuesday	1 week
11	Angel of Death	12/19/06	Tuesday	2 weeks
12	Nuts	1/16/07	Tuesday	4 weeks
13	Dumping Bella	1/30/07	Tuesday	2 weeks
14	Selling Sickness	2/6/07	Tuesday	1 week
15	Fat Burner	2/13/07	Tuesday	1 week
16	The Good Lawyer	2/20/07	Tuesday	1 week
17	The Bride Wore Blood	3/20/07	Tuesday	4 weeks
18	Son of the Defender	4/3/07	Tuesday	2 weeks
19	Brotherly Love	4/10/07	Tuesday	1 week
20	Guise 'n Dolls	4/24/07	Tuesday	2 weeks
21	Tea and Sympathy	5/1/07	Tuesday	2 weeks
22	Guantanamo by the Bay	5/8/07	Tuesday	1 week
23	Duck and Cover	5/15/07	Tuesday	1 week
24	Trial of the Century	5/22/07	Tuesday	1 week

	Season Four: 2007-2008	Aired on ABC	Day of Week	Days Between
1	Beauty and the Beast	9/25/07	Tuesday	
2	The Innocent Man	10/2/07	Tuesday	1 week
3	The Chicken and the Leg	10/9/07	Tuesday	1 week
4	Do Tell	10/16/07	Tuesday	1 week
5	Hope & Glory	10/30/07	Tuesday	2 weeks
6	The Object of My Affection	11/6/07	Tuesday	1 week
7	Attack of the Xenophobes	11/13/07	Tuesday	1 week
8	Oral Contracts	12/4/07	Tuesday	3 weeks
9	No Brains Left Behind	12/11/07	Tuesday	1 week

10	Green Christmas	12/18/07	Tuesday	1 week
11	Mad About You	1/8/08	Tuesday	3 weeks
12	Roe vs. Wade the Musical	1/22/08	Tuesday	2 weeks
13	Glow in the Dark	2/12/08	Tuesday	3 weeks
14	Rescue Me	2/19/08	Tuesday	1 week
15	Tabloid Nation	4/8/08	Tuesday	7 weeks
16	The Mighty Rogues	4/15/08	Tuesday	1 week
17	The Court Supreme	4/22/08	Tuesday	1 week
18	Indecent Proposals	4/30/08	Wednesday*	8 days
19	The Gods Must Be Crazy	5/14/08	Wednesday*	2 weeks
20	Patriot Acts	5/21/08	Wednesday*	1 week

	Season Five: 2008-2009	Aired on ABC	Day of Week	Days Between
1	Smoke Signals	9/22/08	Monday	
2	Guardians and Gatekeepers	9/29/08	Monday	1 week
3	Dances with Wolves	10/6/08	Monday	1 week
4	True Love	10/13/08	Monday	1 week
5	Bad Seed	10/20/08	Monday	1 week
6	Happy Trails	10/27/08	Monday	1 week
7	Mad Cows	11/3/08	Monday	1 week
8	Roe	11/10/08	Monday	1 week
9	Kill, Baby, Kill!	11/17/08	Monday	1 week
10	Thanksgiving	11/24/08	Monday	1 week
11	Juiced	12/1/08	Monday	1 week
12	Made in China	12/8/08	Monday	1 week
13	Last Call			

* Represents a change in the day of the week the show aired compared to the scheduled season.

There were a total of 88 episodes analyzed for this study (Seasons 1-4). There were a total of 101 episodes during the 5-season run of *Boston Legal*.

Appendix C: (Pre-Analysis) Notes on Self-reflexivity while watching Boston Legal, sorted chronologically by season, episode number, and DVD chapter for easy future reference.

Season	Episode	DVD Chapter	Episode Title	Type of reflexivity	Statement
1	5	1	An Eye for An Eye	Modes of Distribution-Distribution Outlets	Alan says the best work is being done on cable
1	5	1	An Eye for An Eye	Does not fit any existing category	*Through a Scanner Darkly* Cartoon Effect in visuals
2	2	5	Schadenfreude	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Order	Denny and Alan are on the balcony earlier in the episode than usual and Denny asks if the show is over already
2	3	8	Finding Nimmo	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Denny says "cling on" (reference to "Klingon")
2	4	5	A Whiff and a Prayer	Does not fit any existing category	Denny says he wants to go out with his pride or at least his old time slot
2	9	3	Gone	Genre Conventions-Production Elements	Western Music plays when the homeless man comes for a showdown
2	9	9	Gone	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Denny says he's "the star of the show"
2	9	11	Gone	Other Shows-Icons	Denny goes on the Larry King show, but Gracie Jane is the host*
2	9	11	Gone	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Denny goes on the Larry King show, but Gracie

					Jane is the host*
2	9	12	Gone	Modes of Distribution-Assessment Institutions	Denny says he's "won an Emmy"
2	11	3	The Cancer Man Can	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Denny's cell phone makes a sound like the communicators in Star Trek
2	17	1	There's Fire	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Denny asks if he should beam himself to Boston
2	23	2	Race Ipsa	Does not fit any existing category	Alan says the last time he saw Chelina, they were taken off the air and moved to Tuesdays
2	23	4	Race Ipsa	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Melissa warns Alan not to get involved with a guest star
2	27	12	BL: Los Angeles	Does not fit any existing category	Alan toasts to next season
2	27	12	BL: Los Angeles	Modes of Distribution-Assessment Institutions	Denny says "this is the sweeps episode"
3	1	11	Can't We All Get A Lung?	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan says he feels "like a character in a TV show"
3	2	1	New Kids on the Block	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Jeffery Coho looks at the graphics on the screen as if he can see them
3	2	1	New Kids on the Block	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Voice	Denny looks at the camera and says "cue the music"
3	2	1	New Kids on the Block	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	Denny says "if these were the

					new guys, they would have been in the season opener"
3	4	11	Fine Young Cannibal	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan asks Shirley, "do you think we win so much we lose all suspense?"*
3	4	11	Fine Young Cannibal	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	Alan asks Shirley, "do you think we win so much we lose all suspense?"*
3	4	12	Fine Young Cannibal	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Voice	The singer of the theme song coughs as Alan and Denny smoke at the end of the show
3	8	10	Lincoln	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	Lincoln says to Shirley that if this were a movie, they "would hear an ominous chord", then one is heard
3	11	1	Angel of Death	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Voice	Denny plays the first few notes of the theme song on his trombone kazoo
3	12	3	Nuts	Other Shows-Icons	Claire asks Clarence (dressed as Oprah) to bump to a commercial break
3	13	12	Dumping Bella	Medium of Television-References to the Audience	Alan says if they're regular viewers, they know by now that anything goes
3	15	7	Fat Burner	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	Denny says how come the other

					side always has short closings
3	22	1	Guantanamo by the Bay	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Jerry points out eccentricities of all the main characters, leaving out minor ones
3	22	1	Guantanamo by the Bay	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Voice	Jerry sings the opening song
3	23		Duck and Cover	Does not fit any existing category	Alan says that sentencing priests in this country is unoriginal during the height of the Catholic Priest scandal in the U.S.
3	24	6	Trial of the Century	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Denny says he once captained his own spaceship
3	24	12	Trial of the Century	Does not fit any existing category	Alan says he can't wait to see what they do next season
4	1		Beauty and the Beast	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Denny says "every time someone counts me out of the game, I surprise them"
4	1		Beauty and the Beast	Other Shows-Icons	John Laroquette plays a lawyer from New York (as did his character on *Night Court*)
4	4		Do Tell	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan and Denny talk about "the new guys"-one from last season and one this episode

4	5		Hope and Gory	Does not fit any existing category	A suspect says to Alan, "Its not every day we meet compelling characters"
4	5		Hope and Gory	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Jerry references "Mayberry RFD" (a reference to the spin-off of Andy Griffith)
4	6		The Object of My Affection	Other Shows-Icons	Gracie Jane (a Nancy Grace reference) covers the case
4	6		The Object of My Affection	Unmasking the mechanisms of production	The paparazzi shove microphones in a woman's face
4	7		Attack of the Xenophobes	Intermedia Textuality	Videos of Clarence are posted on You Tube
4	7		Attack of the Xenophobes	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	John Laroquette says "Anytime you're in public, remember the cameras are watching"
4	9		No Brains Left Behind	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan says that they sue people and make it fun and informative to watch
4	9		No Brains Left Behind	Does not fit any existing category	Alan calls himself the town crier
4	9		No Brains Left Behind	Intermedia Textuality	Alan and Denny are playing tennis on the WII
4	11		Mad About You	Intermedia Textuality	Jerry talks about watching the film, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
4	11		Mad About You	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Jerry talks about watching the Las Vegas ads on TV

4	11		Mad About You	Unmasking the mechanisms of production	Denny says "Denny Crane, ready for my close up" during a close up of his face
4	11		Mad About You	Unmasking the mechanisms of production	Denny is shown on TV several times during the episode
4	12		Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Genre Conventions-Industry Standards	A character tries to make the episode into a musical, but gets cutoff every time
4	12		Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Medium of Television-recognition of audience	Alan says to Denny that "not enough" people have Alan-referencing the declining audience numbers of "Boston Legal"
4	12		Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Unmasking the mechanisms of production	Denny gives Alan the "cue" signal to start talking again on the balcony
4	13		Glow in the Dark	Does not fit any existing category	Denny says "Boston, the Patriots, a little swap action, all in one year" the episode after the Patriots won the SuperBowl
4	13		Glow in the Dark	Other Shows-Icons	Scott Bacula (the actor who plays captain Archer on the TV show "Enterprise") cameos as Shirley's ex-boyfriend
4	14		Rescue Me	Does not fit any	One of the cases

4	15		Tabloid Nation	existing category	involves teenage stress levels (referring to recent research in the news)
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Own Textuality-Autodeconstruction-Frequency	Denny has no pants on, a reference to the show's first episode, where Poole has no pants on
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Intermedia Textuality	Denny is training for an interactive boxing game (presumably on the WII). The game isn't turned on.
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Other Shows-Icons	A parody of Dr. Phil's show, called Dr. Ray, is on trial
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	Alan goes on a rant about reality shows (Boston Legal is in direct competition with American Idol on Tuesdays).
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Does not fit any existing category	Denny quotes a writer who says "No tears for the writer. No Sex" during the first episode after the strike.
4	15		Tabloid Nation	Unmasking of the mechanisms of production	Denny is getting ready for his date with Shirley and is getting makeup and special effects to make him appear to cry

4	16		The Mighty Rogues	Does not fit any existing category	Jerry says, "During the Strike, I fell in love". Katie Lloyd says, "What strike?"
4	17		The Court Supreme	Does not fit any existing category	Denny sings with a band (a reference to his singing career?)
4	17		The Court Supreme	Modes of Distribution- Distribution Outlets	When the opposing side addresses the court, Denny says "Dull, where's the remote?"
4	17		The Court Supreme	Does not fit any existing category	Denny and Alan talk about moving to Wednesdays (the three episodes immediately following this one were aired Wednesday instead of Tuesday)
4	17		The Court Supreme	Genre Conventions- Plot Structure	Justice Roberts tells Alan he might use the time he has (15 minutes left in the episode) on the case
4	18		Indecent Proposals	Own Textuality- Autodeconstruction -Mood	The judge says that political statements have no place in…Carl says "That would be a courtroom your honor (a reference to the TV show's critics who say it is too

					political).
4	18		Indecent Proposals	Does not fit any existing category	Shirley says, "Listen to us. We've stooped to the level of…presidential candidates". This episode aired during the 2008 presidential campaign
4	18		Indecent Proposals	Does not fit any existing category	The characters seem confused about what night they are on because of all the time slots the show has occupied
4	18		Indecent Proposals	Other Shows-Icons	Wolfgang Blitzkrieg keeps repeating that he is with the "best political news team in television". His microphone says "CCN".
4	19		The Gods Must Be Crazy	Does not fit any existing category	Alan talks about the head of NBC saying that they want audiences to tune in and mentally tune out.
4	19		The Gods Must Be Crazy	Intermedia Textuality	Denny is looking at online pictures of Hillary, a Facebook profile of Obama in drag, and YouTube video of McCain
4	19		The Gods Must Be Crazy	Medium of Television-Intertextuality	The Republican National Committee

					mentions Denny's appearance on Larry King Live

* Some statements appear twice because they constitute more than one type of self-reflexivity.

71 total self-reflexive statements, 2 statements fit into 2 categories (for a total of 73 categorized statements). 17 statements did not fit any category, but did refer to "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1985, p. xiii), or just generally referred to themselves as a television text, indicated the need to expand the initial framework.

Appendix D: Post-analysis Framework

1. References to the show's Narrative (Olson, 1987)
      a. Autodeconstruction (Olson, 1987)
          1) Duration (Olson, 1987)
          2) Order of events (Olson, 1987)
          3) Frequency and/or repetition of events (Olson, 1987)
          4) Voice (Olson, 1987)
          5) Mood (Olson, 1987)
      b. Ilinx (Olson, 1987)

2. References to Conventions from other shows/genres (hijacking conventions-Price, 2005, Silverblatt, 2007, Palmer, 1986 in Olson, 1987)
      a. Icons (Olson, 1987)
      b. Archetypes (Olson, 1987)
      c. Settings (Olson, 1987)
      d. Plot structure (Silverblatt, 2007)
      e. Ideological conventions (Silverblatt, 2007)
      f. Production elements (Silverblatt, 2007)
      g. Mocking industry standards (Silverblatt, 2007)

3. References to the medium of television (Olson, 1987)
      a. References to the audience (Olson, 1987)
      b. Intertextuality (Olson, 1987)
      c. Industry Standards (based on analysis of *Boston Legal*)

4. References to the corporeal world (based on analysis of *Boston Legal*)
      a. References to current events (based on analysis of *Boston Legal*)
      b. References to the author themselves (Siska, 1979)
      c. References to the actor themselves (based on analysis of *Boston Legal*)
      d. References to the show as a corporeal object (based on analysis of *Boston Legal*)
      e. Unmasking mechanisms of production (Siska, 1979, Withalm, 2004, and Jones, 2005)
      f. References to the modes of distribution (Withalm, 2004)
          1) Distribution outlets (Withalm, 2004)
          2) Documents (Withalm, 2004)
          3) Assessment institutions (Withalm, 2004)
      g. Intermedia Textuality (Spzczepanik, 2002)

Appendix E: (Post Analysis) Notes on Self-reflexivity while watching Boston Legal, sorted by type of reflexivity and specific referent.

Season	Episode	Name	Type of reflexivity	Specific Referent	Statement
2	2	Schadenfreude	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Order	Denny and Alan are on the balcony earlier in the episode than usual and Denny asks if the show is over already
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Frequency	Denny has no pants on, a reference to the show's first episode, where Poole has no pants on
3	2	New Kids on the Block	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Voice	Denny looks at the camera and says "cue the music"
3	4	Fine Young Cannibal	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Voice	The singer of the theme song coughs as Alan and Denny smoke at the end of the show
3	11	Angel of Death	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Voice	Denny plays the first few notes of the theme song on his trombone kazoo
3	22	Guantanamo by the Bay	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Voice	Jerry sings the opening

					song
2	9	Gone	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Denny says he's "the star of the show"
2	23	Race Ipsa	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Melissa warns Alan not to get involved with a guest star*
3	1	Can't We All Get A Lung?	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Alan says he feels "like a character in a TV show"
3	2	New Kids on the Block	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Jeffery Coho looks at the graphics on the screen as if he can see them
3	4	Fine Young Cannibal	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Alan asks Shirley, "do you think we win so much we lose all suspense?"*
3	22	Guantanamo by the Bay	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Jerry points out eccentricities of all the main characters, leaving out minor ones
4	1	Beauty and the Beast	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction -Mood	Denny says "every time someone counts me out of the game, I surprise them"

4	4	Do Tell	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan and Denny talk about "the new guys"- one from last season and one this episode
4	9	No Brains Left Behind	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction-Mood	Alan says that they sue people and make it fun and informative to watch
4	18	Indecent Proposals	Own Narrative	Autodeconstruction-Mood	The judge says that political statements have no place in…Carl says "That would be a courtroom your honor (a reference to the TV show's critics who say it is too political).
2	9	Gone	Show/Genre Conventions	Icons	Denny goes on the Larry King show, but Gracie Jane is the host*
3	12	Nuts	Show/Genre Conventions	Icons	Claire asks Clarence (dressed as Oprah) to bump to a commercial break*
4	6	The Object of	Show/Genre	Icons	Gracie Jane

		My Affection	Conventions		(a Nancy Grace reference) covers the case
4	13	Glow in the Dark	Show/Genre Conventions	Icons	Scott Bacula (the actor who plays captain Archer on the TV show "Enterprise") cameos as Shirley's ex-boyfriend
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Show/Genre Conventions	Icons	A parody of Dr. Phil's show, called Dr. Ray, is on trial
4	18	Indecent Proposals	Show/Genre Conventions	Icons	Wolfgang Blitzkrieg keeps repeating that he is with the "best political news team in television". His microphone says "CCN".
4	1	Beauty and the Beast	Show/Genre Conventions	Archetypes	John Laroquette plays a lawyer from New York (as did his character on *Night Court*)
4	17	The Court Supreme	Show/Genre Conventions	Plot Structure	Justice Roberts tells

					Alan he might use the time he has (15 minutes left in the episode) on the case
1	5	An Eye for An Eye	Show/Genre Conventions	Production Elements	*Through a Scanner Darkly* Cartoon Effect in visuals
2	9	Gone	Show/Genre Conventions	Production Elements	Western Music plays when the homeless man comes for a showdown
3	4	Fine Young Cannibal	Show/Genre Conventions	Industry Standards	Alan asks Shirley, "do you think we win so much we lose all suspense?"*
3	8	Lincoln	Show/Genre Conventions	Industry Standards	Lincoln says to Shirley that if this were a movie, they "would hear an ominous chord", then one is heard
3	12	Nuts	Show/Genre Conventions	Industry Standards	Claire asks Clarence (dressed as Oprah) to bump to a commercial break*

3	15	Fat Burner	Show/Genre Conventions	Industry Standards	Denny says how come the other side always has short closings
4	12	Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Show/Genre Conventions	Industry Standards	A character tries to make the episode into a musical, but gets cutoff every time
4	12	Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Medium of Television	References to the Audience	Alan says to Denny that "not enough" people have Alan-referencing the declining audience numbers of "Boston Legal"
3	13	Dumping Bella	Medium of Television	References to the Audience	Alan says if they're regular viewers, they know by now that anything goes
2	3	Finding Nimmo	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Denny says "cling on" (reference to "Klingon")
2	9	Gone	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Denny goes on the Larry King show, but Gracie Jane is the host*
2	11	The Cancer	Medium of	Intertextuality	Denny's cell

		Man Can	Television		phone makes a sound like the communicators in Star Trek
2	17	There's Fire	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Denny asks if he should beam himself to Boston
3	24	Trial of the Century	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Denny says he once captained his own spaceship
4	5	Hope and Gory	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Jerry references "Mayberry RFD" (a reference to the spin-off of Andy Griffith)
4	11	Mad About You	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Jerry talks about watching the Las Vegas ads on TV
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	Alan goes on a rant about reality shows (Boston Legal is in direct competition with American Idol on Tuesdays).
4	19	The Gods Must Be Crazy	Medium of Television	Intertextuality	The Republican National

					Committee mentions Denny's appearance on Larry King Live
2	23	Race Ipsa	Medium of Television	Industry Standards	Melissa warns Alan not to get involved with a guest star*
3	2	New Kids on the Block	Medium of Television	Industry Standards	Denny says "if these were the new guys, they would have been in the season opener"
4	5	Hope and Gory	Medium of Television	Industry Standards	A suspect says to Alan, "Its not every day we meet compelling characters"
3	23	Duck and Cover	Corporeal World	Current Events	Alan says that sentencing priests in this country is unoriginal during the height of the Catholic Priest scandal in the U.S.
4	7	Attack of the Xenophobes	Corporeal World	Current Events	John Laroquette says "Anytime you're in public, remember

					the cameras are watching"
4	9	No Brains Left Behind	Corporeal World	Current Events	Alan calls himself the town crier
4	13	Glow in the Dark	Corporeal World	Current Events	Denny says "Boston, the Patriots, a little swap action, all in one year" the episode after the Patriots won the SuperBowl
4	14	Rescue Me	Corporeal World	Current Events	One of the cases involves teenage stress levels (referring to recent research in the news)
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Corporeal World	Current Events	Denny quotes a writer who says "No tears for the writer. No Sex" during the first episode after the strike*
4	16	The Mighty Rogues	Corporeal World	Current Events	Jerry says, "During the Strike, I fell in love". Katie Lloyd says, "What strike?"*
4	18	Indecent Proposals	Corporeal World	Current Events	Shirley says,

					"Listen to us. We've stooped to the level of…presidential candidates". This episode aired during the 2008 presidential campaign
4	19	The Gods Must Be Crazy	Corporeal World	Current Events	Alan talks about the head of NBC saying that they want audiences to tune in and mentally tune out.
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Corporeal World	Author	Denny quotes a writer who says "No tears for the writer. No Sex" during the first episode after the strike*
4	16	The Mighty Rogues	Corporeal World	Author	Jerry says, "During the Strike, I fell in love". Katie Lloyd says, "What strike?"*
4	17	The Court Supreme	Corporeal World	Actor	Denny sings with a band (a reference to his singing career?)

2	4	A Whiff and a Prayer	Corporeal World	Show as Object	Denny says he wants to go out with his pride or at least his old time slot
2	23	Race Ipsa	Corporeal World	Show as Object	Alan says the last time he saw Chelina, they were taken off the air and moved to Tuesdays
2	27	BL: Los Angeles	Corporeal World	Show as Object	Alan toasts to next season
3	24	Trial of the Century	Corporeal World	Show as Object	Alan says he can't wait to see what they do next season
4	17	The Court Supreme	Corporeal World	Show as Object	Denny and Alan talk about moving to Wednesdays (the three episodes immediately following this one were aired Wednesday instead of Tuesday)
4	18	Indecent Proposals	Corporeal World	Show as Object	The characters seem confused about what night they are on because of

					all the time slots the show has occupied
4	6	The Object of My Affection	Corporeal World	Unmasking Mechanisms of Production	The paparazzi shove microphones in a woman's face
4	11	Mad About You	Corporeal World	Unmasking mechanisms of Production	Denny is shown on TV several times during the episode
4	11	Mad About You	Corporeal World	Unmasking Mechanisms of Production	Denny says "Denny Crane, ready for my close up" during a close up of his face
4	12	Roe vs. Wade the Musical	Corporeal World	Unmasking Mechanisms of Production	Denny gives Alan the "cue" signal to start talking again on the balcony
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Corporeal World	Unmasking Mechanisms of Production	Denny is getting ready for his date with Shirley and is getting makeup and special effects to make him appear to cry
1	5	An Eye for An Eye	Corporeal World	Modes of Distribution-Distribution Outlets	Alan says the best work is

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					being done on cable
4	17	The Court Supreme	Corporeal World	Modes of Distribution- Distribution Outlets	When the opposing side addresses the court, Denny says "Dull, where's the remote?"
2	9	Gone	Corporeal World	Modes of Distribution- Assessment Institutions	Denny says he's "won an Emmy"
2	27	BL: Los Angeles	Corporeal World	Modes of Distribution- Assessment Institutions	Denny says "this is the sweeps episode"
4	7	Attack of the Xenophobes	Corporeal World	Intermedia Textuality	Videos of Clarence are posted on You Tube
4	9	No Brains Left Behind	Corporeal World	Intermedia Textuality	Alan and Denny are playing tennis on the WII
4	11	Mad About You	Corporeal World	Intermedia Textuality	Jerry talks about watching the film, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
4	15	Tabloid Nation	Corporeal World	Intermedia Textuality	Denny is training for an interactive boxing game (presumably on the WII). The game isn't turned on.

4	19	The Gods Must Be Crazy	Corporeal World	Intermedia Textuality	Denny is looking at online pictures of Hillary, a Facebook profile of Obama in drag, and YouTube video of McCain

* Some statements appear twice because they constitute more than one type of self-reflexivity.

77 total self-reflexive statements, 6 statements fit into 2 categories (for a total of 71 categorized statements).

Appendix F: Approach Script

Introduction to Potential Participants

Hi. My name is Steve Price and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I am conducting a study on the viewing of TV shows. I am asking you to participate in one open ended focus group lasting between 1 ½ hours and 2 hours, depending on how much you have to say. You will first be asked to watch a television show as a group, and then participate in a focus group with 4-7 other audience members. After the study has been conducted, if you like, you will be given the opportunity to act as a member check to my findings. This means that you give me feedback on how well the results of the study reflect your experience. Acting as a member check should last between 10 minutes and ½ hour, depending on how much you have to say. Total time for the study, then, will be between 1 ½ hours and 2 ½ hours, depending on how many times we meet and how much you have to say.

There are no risks associated with this study, other than the usual risks you experience any time you watch television. Overall, risks associated are less than you experience in everyday life. Benefits to assisting with this research will be 20 points of extra credit for your participation in this study. If you choose not to participate in this study, you have the option to complete an alternate extra credit assignment that consists of reading the assigned article and writing a two-page to four-page paper discussing and analyzing the concepts in the article.

At this point, I am passing around a sign up sheet for the days I will be conducting the study. My schedule is very flexible, so if there is a day and time that enough of you would like me to offer it, I will do my best to work with you. Please sign up for one date, and make sure that you indicate whether or not you have ever seen the show "Boston Legal", and if you have, if you would consider yourself a fan of the show or not.

I need at least 4-8 people on any of the days to be able to run the study at that time slot. If there are less than 4 people or more than 8, I will ask you to sign up for a different date.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB):

      Office of Research
      483 McReynolds Hall
      Columbia, MO 65211
      573-882-9585

Appendix G: Consent Form

<div align="center">Consent Form</div>

Project Title: Viewing Boston Legal

Researchers: Michael Porter is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Stephen Price Jr. is a graduate student investigator also in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Purpose: I will be conducting a study using interviews to look at how you read and react to messages in the TV show Boston Legal. You may also choose to read and respond to results of the study. You must be an adult over the age of 18 and have seen the episode I will show you during this study.

Time: The study should take between 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours, depending on how much you choose to participate and on what you have to say. Interviews will be video taped on DVD.

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any question.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.

Benefits: The results of this study will help media scholars understand how certain messages are encoded and decoded in narrative television shows. You will also receive 20 points of extra credit for your participation.

Confidential: Your identity or any information that could be used to identify you will be revealed either in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality:
1. Consent forms will be separated from the data.
2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data.
3. You can refuse to answer any question asked.
4. DVDs will be kept in a locked office.

Contact: If you have any questions, feel free to contact the primary student investigator, Stephen Price Jr., at 673-9129. You may also email him at SLPrice@mizzou.edu. Dr. Michael Porter can be reached at 882-0525. You may also email him at portermj@missouri.edu.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights, contact Campus IRB:
Office of Research
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-9585

Thank you for your participation
Stephen Price Jr.

Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix H: Information Form

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and if you feel like you need to leave for any reason, please do not hesitate.

Step One: Information

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Age:

2. Sex:

3. Education Level:

4. How many hours of television do you watch on an average day (circle the appropriate response)?

      0-1   1-2   2-3   3-4   4-5   5+   hours of TV per day

5. About how many episodes of *Boston Legal* have you seen prior to this study (or parts of episodes if you have never seen an entire episode)?

      0-1 1-4 4-12 12-24 (1 season)   24-48 (2 seasons)   48-all episodes

6. Have you ever taken a course in TV or film production (circle one)?

    Yes   No

7. Have you ever taken a course in TV or film appreciation or criticism (circle one)?

    Yes   No

8. Have you ever worked in TV or film production (circle one)?

    Yes   No

Appendix I: Thought Listing Form

Step Two: Viewing *Boston Legal*

You will be asked to watch an episode (2.23) of the television show, *Boston Legal*. The show contains a cast of several main characters, most of which are lawyers for the fictional Boston firm, *Crane, Poole, and Schmidt*.

Denny Crane, played by William Shatner and Alan Shore, played by James Spader are the two main characters in one story line. Denny is a named partner of the firm, and Alan is a liberal lawyer who takes on very idealistic cases. Their storyline centers around Denny shooting his therapist.

Brad Chase, played by Mark Valley, and Denise Bauer, played by Julie Bowen, occupy the second storyline about Brad needing lessons on kissing.

I will pause the show periodically (about every 10-15 minutes) and ask you to list your thoughts about the show at those points. Please list 5-10 things briefly (the first things that pop into your head about the show and what is going on with the **stories**, the **characters**, the **narratives**, the **dialogue**, or **anything else** you find of interest). You may write words, phrases, or sentences to describe your thoughts.

Also, please indicate how interested in the show you are at the time it is paused.

Time 1

Level of interest: not interested   moderately interested   very interested

Thoughts:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Time 2

Level of interest: not interested   moderately interested   very interested

Thoughts:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Time 3

Level of interest: not interested   moderately interested   very interested

Thoughts:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Time 4 /End of the episode

Level of interest: not interested   moderately interested   very interested

Thoughts:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix J: Open-ended survey

Please do not begin until after viewing the episode (2.23) of *Boston Legal* shown to the entire group and completing the thought listing forms. Please answer every question to the best of your ability. Do NOT look ahead, and please do NOT go back once you have completed a question.

1. Self-reflexivity is defined as "the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their reception, or their enunciation."

Self-reflexivity can occur anytime a television show makes reference to the fact that it is indeed a fictional television show. Some call this "breaking the fourth wall."

This means anytime a character talks about the television show or other television shows, it is self-reflexive. Other examples of this are: when characters address the camera, or can read graphics on the screen.

Did you see any examples of self-reflexivity in this episode of "Boston Legal"? (Circle yes or no)

Yes

No

2. If you did see any self-reflexive statements in this episode of "Boston Legal", what did the show do or say (please describe any self-reflexivity you remember in the show)?

3. In the episode you just watched, the character Alan Shore discusses with another character about how they were taken off the air, moved to a different day of the week, and "here they are with old footage." What are they referring to?

4. What was your reaction when that dialogue (about the network moving the show to Tuesdays) happened in the episode?

5. Did you find it funny?

Yes

No

6. What did it mean to you to hear two characters talking about how the network moved their show to a different night of the week?

7. Later in the episode, a woman tells Alan Shore "not to fall for [Chelina] because she's just a guest star." What does this statement refer to?

8. What was your reaction when one character referred to another as a "guest star"?

9. Did you find it funny?

Yes

No

10. What did it mean to hear one character talk about the other character's status as a "guest star"?

Appendix K: Interview Guide

1. Do you like the way the storylines were told?
2. Are the characters in the show believable? Why or why not?
   a. What do you know about the actors that play those characters?
   b. What other shows have these characters been in?
3. What do you know about the producers or writers of *Boston Legal*?
   a. What other shows have they written for or produced?
   b. Are there any similarities between those shows and *Boston Legal*?
4. When the characters say something like "They can't get rid of me. I'm the star of the show", what is your reaction? (repeat with different examples from the specific episode)
   a. Do you notice when characters say things like that?
   b. What do you think of those types of statements?
   c. Do those statements make you laugh?
   d. Do statements like that make you feel smarter when you understand the reference?
   e. Do you like it when *Boston Legal* makes you aware that it is just a television show through the use of such writing and production techniques?
   f. How do these self-reflexive statements affect your attitude towards the show?
5. Do you regularly watch any other shows that incorporate self-reflexivity?
   a. Which shows?
   b. In what ways are they self-reflexive?
   c. Do you like that about the show?
   d. How does the self-reflexivity in the show affect the way you think about the show?

VITA

Stephen Price Jr. was born and raised in Jefferson City, Missouri. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Communication with a minor in Rural Sociology from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2000, and his Master of Arts in Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University in 2003. Price completed his doctoral studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2011. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mass Communication at Georgia College in Milledgeville, GA, where he teaches courses in Broadcast & Electronic Media.