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Chapter 2

The Dales: A 'Uses and Gratifications' Investigation of a Daytime Radio Serial

Although the project brief referred to television viewing, a first survey centring on a radio programme was undertaken for two reasons:

1. *The Dales* was due to finish in April, 1969, after having run without a break for 21 years. Evidence suggested that many people had listened to this programme for a long time. It was expected that its impending termination would generate among many regular listeners a heightened awareness of the programme's functions.
2. In the past some of the best 'uses and gratifications' research had focused on daytime radio serials (which had been exceptionally prominent in American programme schedules in the 1940s).^[1] These programmes and *The Dales* had many features in common, including a largely female audience. It was considered advantageous to launch the project's first exploratory efforts in an area that had already received some fruitful attention.

Procedures

1. A series of tape-recorded group discussions with both working-class and middle-class female fans of *The Dales* was held in February and March, 1969, and a questionnaire was compiled in the light of the analysis of the material thus obtained.
2. In April, 1969, while the serial was still on the air, this questionnaire was administered by interview to a quota sample (controlling for age and social grade) of 70 women in Leeds who listened to the serial at least three times a week.
3. The questionnaire included the following items:
 - A. A list of 42 reasons for liking *The Dales*, to be endorsed if applicable to the respondent – and if endorsed to be rated in terms of their importance to her.
 - B. Questions about *Dales* listening patterns – e.g. incidence of repeat listening and number of years the respondent had regularly followed the programme.

- C. Questions about the social context of *Dales* listening and about use of *Dales* materials in conversations with acquaintances.
- D. Evaluative questions about the serial – e.g. the realism of its characters and plots.
- E. Questions about other media use patterns.
- F. A number of social indicator variables:
 - a. Customary demographic particulars – e.g. age, occupation of head of household, school-leaving age, and religion (including frequency of church attendance)
 - b. Place of birth.
 - c. Size and position in family of origin.
 - d. Size and composition of present household.
 - e. Number of friends and club/association memberships.
 - f. Frequency of visits outside the home, degree of contact with friends, and subjective feelings of loneliness.
 - g. Political party preference.
 - h. Scores on a general measure of social and political conservatism.

4. In June, 1969, two months after *The Dales* had ended, a second questionnaire was administered to the respondents, of whom 55 were successfully re-contacted. The first-round list of reasons for liking *The Dales* was repeated, as were certain other evaluative questions about the serial. Various possible substitute activities were checked. And in a substantial open-ended part of the interview some findings of the first round were fed back to the respondents as a basis for discussion.

Results

The results of the study are presented below under five headings: the social composition of the sample; sample members' orientations to *The Dales*; the gratifications derived from listening to *The Dales*; gratification patterns and social background; and changes in the outlook of listeners over time.

1. The Social Composition of the Sample

A set of social indicator variables was incorporated into the *Dales* study questionnaires, first, to facilitate an examination of associations between the gratifications women derived from listening to the programme and various features of their social situations, and, second, to try out certain methods of eliciting background information that might serve the project's long-term measurement needs. The exact distributions on each of the survey's social indicator variables appear in the Appendix: it remains to comment here on four points of interest that emerged from these distributions.

First, the family-centred character of *The Dales* as a programme was strongly reflected in the social experience of the respondents to the survey. Only four of the 70 sample members were single, for instance, the remainder either being married at the time of the interview (57), widowed (7), or divorced (2). Perhaps in most other respects the *current* family situation of the respondents was unremarkable. Naturally very few of them were actually living alone (5). Among the rest, the distribution of household sizes ranged from two to nine (averaging 3.6 members). But 38 of these listeners were alone during the day, since all the other members of their families were out of work or at school. And although only about a half of the respondents had been born in or around Leeds, most of them resided within easy reach of one or more members of extended families living in the vicinity (only 14 not being so placed). In contrast to the current family situation, however, some possibly distinctive features did characterise the *past* family background of the sample members. For example, many of them had come from large families of origin – only six having been only children and the average number of siblings being 3.8 in a range of 1-14. Furthermore, among those with siblings, the number of eldest children seemed exceptionally high (19), a proportion which differed significantly from what would have been expected.^[2]

Second, this sample of regular followers of *The Dales* was markedly conservative in social and political outlook. For example, when interviewed in the second round, only ten of the 55 respondents failed to mention a religious affiliation or indicated they never attended church services. And 29 of the 42 women who were prepared to state a political party preference supported the Conservatives. The fact that only five supported the Labour Party was particularly remarkable since the quota control for social grade had ensured that one half of the respondents would come from manual working-class homes. Another measure of conservatism in the sample appears in Table II.1 below, which shows how scores on a recently validated test of social conservatism^[3] were distributed. It can be seen that two thirds of the *Dales* listeners fell in the two most conservative categories of the table, compared with only a half of the members of another sample who had been interviewed in Leeds in the same year.

Table II.1: Distributions of 'C Scores' among Dales Listeners and a Leeds Quota Sample

	C Scores	Dales Listeners	Leeds Quota Sample
Radical	0-20	7	7
	21-40	5	14

	41-60	20	30
	61-80	44	33
Conservative	81-100	24	16
		100	100
		n = 55	315

Third, despite the prevalence of claims to the enjoyment of a lively social life, there were signs that a small group of rather lonely women had been included in the sample – although indirect measures were apparently more successful in detecting them than direct ones. When asked to estimate how many close friends they had, the range of response from sample members was quite diverse, the median falling at about eight friends. In addition, nearly a half of the sample (30) claimed to belong to at least one association, organisation or club. However, when asked directly about any feelings of loneliness, the following responses to a seven-point forced-choice scale were registered:

I have never felt lonely	26
I occasionally feel lonely	15
I sometimes feel lonely but I know how to get over it	20
I often feel lonely	2
I often feel lonely but I know how to get over it	3
I feel lonely most of the time but I know how to get over it	1
	70

Evidently there was some resistance to acceptance of a description of oneself as lonely, although some women were prepared to do so when offered the saving clause that they knew 'how to get over it'. A more indirect measure of loneliness involved a cross-tabulation of answers to two questions:

- Thinking about the amount of time you spend with your friends, would you like to spend more time with them, about the same amount of time, or a little less time?
- Do you get out of the house enough these days?

These yielded the following distributions:

Like spend more time with friends, but do get out of the house enough	13
Like to spend more time with friends; don't get out of the house enough	14
Like to spend same or less time with friends and do get out of the house enough	28
Like to spend same or less time with friends, but don't get out of the house enough	15
	70

It may be assumed that the women in the second group (a fifth of the sample) were the most lonely while those in the third group (two fifths) were least dissatisfied with their patterns of social contact.

Finally, many of the sample members were not only ardent fans of *The Dales* but heavy consumers of broadcast fare generally as well. For example, one third of the respondents admitted to listening to the radio for six hours per day or more! And of the 65 women with television in the house, 44 (68%) were classified as 'heavy' viewers, since they watched TV 'most nights for three hours or more. This compares with a figure of approximately 40% heavy viewers found among the members of a Leeds sample interviewed in 1964.^[4]

2. Orientation to *The Dales*

Although the main function of the survey was to collect gratification data from the respondents, the opportunity was taken to examine some of their other orientations towards *The Dales* as well.

It was clear, first of all, that in most cases the association of sample members with the programme was frequent and of long standing. To qualify for inclusion in the study a woman should have listened to at least three episodes per week; in fact 65% claimed to be tuning in daily. Moreover, the incidence of repeat listening was remarkably frequent. *The Dales* was first broadcast at 4:15 every afternoon and then repeated the following morning at 11:15. In fact nine of the respondents claimed to listen to both broadcasts 'always', while 38 admitted to doing so 'sometimes'. Thus two thirds of the sample were accustomed to indulge in some degree of repeat listening. And although the quota controls provided for a fairly large number of younger sample members (15 respondents each in the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups), a majority (41) had listened regularly to *The Dales* for more than ten of its 21 years of life (19 having listened for between five and ten years and ten having listened for less than five years).

A second feature of the sample's outlook was widespread agreement that *The Dales* was 'true-to-life' both in story line and in character portrayal. Many broadcast serials are criticised for lack of realism – or at least described as if the strength of their appeal must depend on the extent to which they depart from realism. Characters are regarded as too good to be true, story conflicts as unduly stereotyped, and plot resolutions too convenient and tidy. However valid such observations may be as specimens of cultural criticism, they are evidently not accepted by many fans of *The Dales* as characteristics of the programme that they had patronised regularly. In their eyes a part of its appeal derived from its fidelity to a view of social reality that conformed to their own notions and experiences. It is true that in portraying the life of a Doctor's family, certain conventions were respected and certain ideals were highlighted. Nevertheless, most of the respondents were convinced that in essence the programme did not depart from a vision of family life that could be put into practice and that was to some extent actually being realised in many British homes. Thus, four fifths of the sample (56) claimed that all or most of the episodes were realistic. Moreover, when asked to nominate, first, their three favourite characters and then the three most realistic ones, there was much overlap,

more than a half of the women producing lists with at least two names in common. In both cases, however, the longest established characters were nominated most frequently, and there were a few divergences between the most liked and the most realistic characters, as the following lists show:

Liked Best		True-to-life	
Dr. Dale	41	Dr. Dale	36
Mrs Dale	33	Mrs Freeman	28
Gwen Dale	33	Gwen Dale	28
Jenny Dale	25	Mrs Dale	23
Bob Dale	24	Bob Dale	20
Mrs Freeman	24	Jenny Dale	15
Mrs Maggs	6	Mrs Maggs	12
Others	22	Others	38

Third, both prospectively and retrospectively many fans of *The Dales* reacted to its disappearance from the programme schedules with a sharp sense of loss. When, for example, the respondents were asked in the first round of interviews how disappointed they were by the impending termination of the programme and how long they expected to miss it, the following answers were given:

Extremely disappointed	27
Very disappointed	25
Fairly disappointed	12
Doesn't make much difference to me	6

I will miss *The Dales* for:

A very long time	21
A fairly long time	25
Only a short time	23
Don't know	2

It can be seen that three quarters were 'extremely' or 'very' disappointed by the winding up of *The Dales* and that two thirds expected to miss it for at least a fairly long time. Indeed, when re-interviewed two months later, seven tenths (39 of 55) confessed that they still missed *The Dales*. Some of their replies to an open-ended question about what they missed most of all revealed the strength and depth of a typical fan's relationship to a familiar serial:

Well it was a family and you were following a family pattern, a family way of life and that's all gone. They were young people growing up and I have a son of the same age – I followed it. I do miss them, one grew up with them.

... it was like having a fifteen minute gossip everyday.

They were 'characters', educated people who talked about things that were interesting to me.

You got used to them all, Dr. Dale and Mrs Dale were like a family to me.

Well I used to come in at 4 o'clock and sit down with a cup of tea and enjoy the programme ... they were just ordinary people of my generation. I understood their lives.

It was part of my life. I don't rush home any more. I miss the story and the friendly characters. I used to listen with my mother when I was young, it seems terrible that it has gone, it was so much a part of me and my life ever since I can remember. Gwen was like a sister to me.

A content analysis of all the responses to this question suggested that it was the programme's projection of a well-ordered family life that was missed most keenly:

Most missed	Frequency
Family life and atmosphere	14
The programme in general	8
Knowing the characters	6
Following the story	6
The typical everyday events that happen	6
Not being able to switch on something that was looked forward to	4
The conversations	3
The friendliness of the characters	2
No longer knowing what is happening to them	2
The general moral tone of the programme	1
Something to listen to while doing chores	1
Learning about life by following stories with a moral	1
Useful hints about domestic life	1

In view of these indications of the respondents' involvement with *The Dales*, some of their other orientations to the programme were initially surprising. First, it was found at the second round of interviews that as many as 21 of the final sample of 55 had not actually heard the last episode of the serial (which, like all the other episodes, had been broadcast twice). When asked why they had not heard it, many respondents replied in rather vague terms, often suggesting that they might have been out at the time. It is possible that some of the women had positively avoided tuning in to the final episode of a serial that had previously meant so much to them.

A second possibly unexpected finding was that identification processes had only rarely helped to forge the bond between listener and programme. When asked, 'Is there any character who you sometimes think is a little bit like yourself?', only 15 sample members replied affirmatively, nominating quite a diverse range of identificands in their further responses. The attraction of *The Dales* had apparently stemmed more from its projection of a *situation* which listeners found congenial than from its portrayal of a *character* on whom they could model themselves. Perhaps the scripting of *The Dales* was responsible

for this feature of audience outlook, although it may also be the case that only a minority of adults feel a need to identify directly with fictional characters as such.

Third, partly because of the large numbers of close friends claimed by the sample members, it was expected that incidents in *The Dales* would often serve as 'coins of exchange' in the respondents' conversations with other people. Though not exactly falsified by the evidence, neither was this expectation strongly upheld, only 31 of the original 70 respondents having said that they ever talked about *The Dales* with other listeners. It would be interesting to know whether anything in the typical fan's relationship to a programme like *The Dales* had tended to inhibit references to it in her contacts with friends and acquaintances. For example, she might have been 'para-socially' involved with the main *Dales* characters, finding in her relations with them some of the satisfactions that can also be gained from intimate friendships.^[5] If so, such a relationship could seem rather personal to the listener – not suited to being shared with other people in her real-life circles of acquaintanceship. In fact it was found that the typical fan's relationship to the programme was in a sense solitary, since 54 of the 70 respondents reported usually listening to it on their own.

3. The gratifications derived from listening to *The Dales*

The essential elements involved in operationalising a gratifications system were first devised by the investigators for use in the *Dales* survey and were subsequently applied, with various technical modifications, to all the project's programme studies. Group discussions with members of a programme's audience were conducted. The research team then listened to recordings of the discussions and prepared a check-list of statements about the programme. In drawing up the check-list an attempt was made a) to cover all types of response to the programme and b) to phrase the items using the style of audience members' language so that respondents would tend to 'recognise' the sentiment expressed.

In the case of the *Dales* study a 42-item inventory was formulated. An experienced interviewer piloted the instrument, after which some modifications were made. The final version is set out in the Appendix, where the sample's frequencies of endorsement are also entered. The respondent was given the check-list and asked to indicate with a tick those items which expressed her reasons for liking to listen to *The Dales*. Then for each of the endorsed items, she was requested to rate its importance to her by ticking columns headed, 'very important', 'fairly important' and 'slightly important'. Two forms of the inventory, differing in item order, were administered in order to reduce the possible influences of serial position, fatigue and learning.

The first approaches to the analysis of the resulting data were exploratory in character, and (unlike the information collected for the later programme studies) they were not prepared for computer processing. In the end a 42 x 42 contingency table was produced,

which was converted by nomograph into a set of phi coefficients. McQuitty's elementary linkage analysis was then used to cluster the items.^[6] This is a technique which assigns all items to a cluster and does not include any item in more than one cluster. The method of assignment ensures that the level of inter-correlation of items within a subset is high and that between subsets is low. In carrying out these procedures, the three-point scale of importance on the check-list was not utilised, all calculations being based on the endorse/not endorse distinction. The final results of this analysis suggested that the appeal of *The Dales* might be explained in terms of six clusters, whose constituent items, together with brief descriptions and labels that seem to express their dominant meanings, are listed below:

Cluster A – Personal Reference

2. You could count on it in an ever-changing world.
3. I can compare the people in the programme with other people I know.
8. Being on regularly at the same time it helped me to organise part of the day.
14. It gave me a break from chores for a while.
17. I like to imagine myself in some of their situations.
21. I can pick up useful tips from the *Dales*.
27. It gives me a chance to sit down and relax.
30. It helps to remind me how time is going.
32. The programme reminds me that I could be worse off than I am.
35. It reminds me of things that have happened in my own life.
37. One can talk about it afterwards with other people.
41. It sometimes brings back memories of certain people I used to know.

The dominant item in this cluster (the one with the greatest number of high-correlation links to the other items) was 32, 'The programme reminds me that I could be worse off than I am'. Although the cluster apparently embraces several themes, many of the items (notably 5, 17, 35 and 41) seem to reflect a disposition to use material in *The Dales* to underline or emphasise some feature of the listener's own life or social situation.

Cluster B – Reality Exploration

16. It sometimes helps me to understand what is happening in my own life.

- 19. The people in *The Dales* sometimes have problems that are like my own.
- 28. I sometimes have a good cry about something that has happened in the programme.
- 29. It is a programme that ordinary people can enjoy.
- 38. It helps me to forget my worries.
- 42. It deals with realistic problems without offending me.

The dominant item in this cluster is 16, 'It sometimes helps me to understand what is happening in my own life'. When considered in conjunction with items 19 and 42, the central theme of the cluster seems to be the listener's interest in using *Dales* material as stimuli to reflection upon various social problems, some of which could conceivably arise in their own lives. This cluster differs from the previous one chiefly in terms of this orientation towards the exploration of problems.

Cluster C – Reinforcement of Family Values

- 1. It sometimes gives me useful medical advice.
- 4. It's nice to know that there are families like the *Dales* around today.
- 9. Sometimes after listening to *The Dales* I think that my life is not so bad after all.
- 13. It reminds me of the importance of family ties.
- 24. It puts over a picture of what family life should be like.
- 33. It broadens my experience of life.

The dominant item is 4, 'It's nice to know that there are families like the *Dales* around today'. When considered in conjunction with items 13 and 24, this cluster seems to reflect the appeal to listeners of a serial that upholds traditional family values – a feature of the programme which emerged from another stage of the interview as something the respondents had missed most often after it was taken off the air.

Cluster D – Companionship

- 2. It reminds me of what my generation should stand for.
- 3. The characters have been like close friends to me.
- 11. It gives me something in common with other *Dales* listeners.

- 12. It gives me something to look forward to each day.
- 15. I can share the happiness and sorrows of the characters.
- 18. I like the sound of the characters' voices in my house.
- 23. It keeps me in suspense about what will happen next.
- 26. It helps to get me through the day.
- 31. I can see how to handle things that might happen to me.
- 34. It is good company when you're alone.
- 36. It gives me something to think about when I am on my own.
- 40. It takes me out of myself.

The dominant item is 15, 'I can share the happiness and sorrows of the characters'. This is consistent with the meaning of a number of other items that also seemed to reflect the companionship satisfactions offered by the programme – e.g. 3, 11, 18, 34 and 36. The potential importance of this cluster is further suggested by the fact that item 34, 'It is good company when you are alone' (and many of the listeners were alone during the day), was endorsed by more respondents than any other statement on the check-list.

Cluster E – Reinforcement of the Social Role of Women

- 5. It is free from the bad language you get so much on TV.
- 22. It is a way of being nose-y with harming anyone.
- 25. It makes a pleasant change from all the violence in society these days.
- 39. It is a programme that is suited to women.

Considered from one standpoint, the items of this cluster sound a note of 'refinement': the programme is 'nice'. It has the appeal of respecting conventions that are often neglected or violated both in society at large and on a medium (television) to which many of the respondents were highly exposed. In fact the dominant item is 5, 'It is free from the bad language you get so much on TV'. But a further interpretation, taking account of the role of items 22 and 39, would suggest that the programme helps to reinforce a specific view of the social role of women, one of maintaining decent standards on all fronts.

Cluster F – Emotional Release

- 10. Sometimes I think 'I wish that were me'.

20. Sometimes it makes me want to cry.

Since both these items received few endorsements, no use was made of them in subsequent analyses. Nevertheless, the items are meaningfully related by the emotional release that listening to a programme like *The Dales* can occasionally provide.

4. Gratification patterns and social background

Because of the project's particular concern with the social origins of the gratifications sought from broadcast materials, it was decided to carry out a detailed examination of the relationships between the gratification data collected from the *Dales* fans and what was known about their social background. For this purpose only the final sample of 55 respondents was used, each member of which was assigned a cluster score to express her orientation towards each of the Clusters A-E described above. These scores were initially calculated simply by counting the number of items in a cluster that the respondent had endorsed. They were then re-grouped into three categories (high, medium and low), the boundary lines for these distinctions depending on the distribution of scores for a particular cluster. Thus, the scores for clusters of unequal size became comparable and their reliability increased. But since only a few individuals fell into the 'high' category of most clusters, the analysis of relationships with social background information was often based on a straightforward comparison between low scorers (L) and a collapsed group of high and medium scores (H/M). Finally, each respondent was given a total gratifications score to reflect the number of clusters on which she had received a high or medium score.

A series of cross-tabulations between these cluster scores and the social background variables represented in the survey was carried out and is presented in the Appendix. In considering the results two limitations of the analysis (stemming from the small size of the sample) should be borne in mind. First, it would have been inappropriate to calculate any significance tests, and this has not been done. In any case the method adopted, of surveying and noting the various possible relationships, was more in keeping with an essentially exploratory investigation. Second, in a small sample, there was no way of distinguishing between meaningful relationships of cluster scores to social background particulars and relationships that could have arisen from interconnections between the background variables themselves. In discussing the results below some attempt has been made to pick out certain associations which might be intrinsically important, but any such effort is inevitably speculative at this stage. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that some apparently meaningful relationships have emerged from the data. Of course it is possible in a large-scale investigation (such as has been prepared for the project's second stage) to control for the effects of interconnections between associated social indicator variables.

A survey of main results follows. These seem both a) to have located certain respondents who were deriving more satisfaction overall from following *The Dales* than were other listeners and b) to have highlighted the distinctive interests of certain groups in particular elements within the range of gratifications offered by the programme.

Total Gratifications

According to their gratification scores, the needs of the following sorts of women were most fully met by the programme:

- 1) The middle-aged and elderly (40+).^[7]
- 2) Those who had been born into large families.
- 3) Those who were living in small households at the time of the interview.
- 4) Those reporting a relatively small number of friends.
- 5) Church-goers.
- 6) Those who received highly conservative scores on a measure of social and political conservatism.

This pattern of findings draws attention to three main functions that *The Dales* could have been serving for many of its listeners. First, in projecting conventional values, it appealed most strongly to older people, church-goers and conservative-minded women. Second, in presenting a number of sympathetic characters whom listeners could feel they know well, it catered for the affiliation of women with few friends. And third, in asserting the value of stable family ties, it elicited a special response from women who, though residing in small households at the time of the interview, had themselves been brought up in large families.

Cluster A – *The Dales* as a Source of Personal Reference Material

High and medium scores on this cluster were recorded most often by the following types of women:

- 1) The young and the old (pre-30; 50+)
- 2) The low in social status (husbands in semi- or un-skilled jobs).
- 3) The minimally educated (left school at 15 or earlier)
- 4) Those who had been born into large families

- 5) The admittedly lonely
- 6) Those who felt no need to get out of the house more or to see their friends more often.

In this pattern of findings it is most difficult to interpret the role of size of family of origin and of the variables that refer to the respondents' social contacts (4-6). But the age result suggests that a need for personal reference materials could be felt most keenly at a time when life-cycle transitions are experienced or anticipated. And the social status results suggest that less educated women may particularly depend on broadcast materials to help to define their personal situations because other materials that might serve the same purpose are less accessible to them.

Cluster B – Use of *The Dales* in Reality Exploration

High and medium scores on this cluster tended to be recorded by the following:

- 1) The high in social status (husbands in non-manual jobs).
- 2) The middle-aged and elderly (40+).
- 3) Those with few friends.
- 4) Those who are alone in the house during the day.
- 5) Those who are dissatisfied with their opportunities to see friends and get out of the house.
- 6) Conservative Party supporters.
- 7) Church-goers.

The first two associations in the above list suggest that groups which are known to follow reports of public affairs in the mass media relatively frequently (middle-class and older people) are also more likely to use fictional materials to prompt reflections on social problems. These last two associations may merely be artefacts of the role of class and age. The relationships expressed in three different measures of social contact and loneliness are particularly intriguing, however, since they may reflect the dependence on media materials for reality exploration of those women who have fewer opportunities to talk over the problems that interest them with friends and acquaintances.

Cluster C – Use of *The Dales* to Reinforce Family Values

High and medium scores on this cluster were often recorded by the following:

- 1) Those who had been born into large families.
- 2) Those who were living in small households.
- 3) Those who had no living husband.
- 4) Those who were alone during the day.
- 5) The admittedly lonely.
- 6) Those who were content with their opportunities to see friends and get out of the house.
- 7) The middle-aged and elderly.
- 8) Those who are highly conservative in social outlook.
- 9) The low in social status.
- 10) The minimally educated.

Except for the confusing intrusion of the composite variable of expressed satisfaction with social contacts (6), this pattern of findings seems exceptionally clear. As interest in using *The Dales* to reinforce one's sense of the value of family ties is found not only among older and more conservative-minded women, but also among the more lonely listeners, and among those women who, while deriving from large families of origin, were residing at the time of the interview in small households (in some cases no longer having a man in the house). Although it is not immediately apparent why this concern should also have characterised low-status women, it is possible that they felt a special need for materials that would help them to counteract challenges in their environment to their own acceptance of conventional family values.

Cluster D – *The Dales* as a Source of Companionship

High and medium scores on this cluster were recorded by the following:

- 1) Those with few friends.
- 2) Those who had been born into large families.
- 3) Those who were living in small households.
- 4) Those who had no living husband.
- 5) The elderly (50+).
- 6) Wives of manual workers.

- 7) Church-goers.
- 8) Those who are highly conservative in social outlook.

Some of the by now familiar variables in this list may reflect the tendency of certain groups to get more satisfaction out of following *The Dales* than other groups did. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, in comparison with the variables that figured in the family values analysis, number of friends constitutes a new entry and that it is related inversely to a disposition to use the programme as a source of companionship. In addition, high scores among the elderly may reflect their reduced opportunities to see friends.

Cluster E – *The Dales* as an Upholder of Woman's Social Role

High and medium scores on this cluster were recorded by the following:

- 1) Those who had been born into large families.
- 2) Those who are highly conservative in social outlook.
- 3) Conservative Party supporters.
- 4) Church-goers.
- 5) The middle-aged and elderly (40+).
- 6) Those who had no living husband.

This is another example of an analysis that has yielded an apparently meaningful set of relationships. An interest in *The Dales* as an upholder of the values associated with the conventional social role of women seems to have stemmed both from the early family background of the listener and from her present membership of the more conservative-minded social categories.

5. Changes in the outlook of fans over time

The first round of interviews was held in the last week of *The Dales* transmission. Two months later the sample was re-contacted and interviewed again. In part this procedure was followed in order to collect more data than could manageably be obtained at one interview. The two-stage survey was also intended to introduce a dynamic element into the study, including an attempt to assess the long-term meaning of the loss of the programme to fans. A third reason for visiting respondents after the programme's termination was to feed back certain first-round data to the sample in order to clarify further their meaning and implications.

One specific focus of the second-round interviews involved an attempt to find out how far broadcast programmes were functionally interchangeable. After *The Dales* went off the air, did its fans try to get similar satisfactions from any other radio or television programmes? By and large the answer that emerged from this part of the investigation was negative. For example, when asked, 'Now that *The Dales* has been off the air for a while, is there any other programme which has somehow taken the place of *The Dales* for you?', only 15 of the 55 respondents (27%) replied affirmatively, mentioning a miscellany of individual programmes in their answers.

One possibility open to the respondents would have been to continue to listen to the radio at the very times when *The Dales* had been scheduled – which would have involved following *Waggoners' Walk*, a serial about a group of young office girls sharing a London flat together. Such a course might have been pursued, if the motivational significance of *The Dales* had been shallow, or if the needs it served were not specific to *The Dales*, but merely demanded some form of fictional fare. But in fact most of the sample members showed distinct signs of having positively avoided and rejected *Waggoners' Walk*. Although 51 of the 55 respondents had tried out the new serial at some time or other, 26 had definitely decided by the time of the second interview not to listen to it any more, and only five were following it as regularly as they had tuned into *The Dales* (hearing three episodes a week or more). And when asked about the suitability of *Waggoners' Walk* as a replacement for *The Dales*, the following replies were given:

Very suitable	1
Suitable	3
Not suitable	18
Very unsuitable	29
	51

The attempt to amplify the meaning of the various functions served by *The Dales* was based on a procedure whereby some of the gratifications emerging from the first-round data were described to the respondents, who were then asked to recall whether they had also 'felt this way' about the programme. Follow-up questions and probes were employed in an attempt to seek out new and alternative sources of the fulfilment of each of the gratifications concerned. In all, eight sorts of gratifications were mentioned, and in each case four questions were put, as in the following example:

Some people felt that *The Dales* helped to remind them of the values of family life.

Was that something you got out of *The Dales*?

If so, was it important to you?

If so, in what way was it important to you?

Now that *The Dales* is off the air, is there anything else which does this for you?

Table II.2 presents a summary of the sample's answers to these questions.

TABLE II.2: The Availability of Functional Alternatives to the Gratifications Served by *The Dales*

REASONS FOR LISTENING	Was that something you got out of <i>The Dales</i> ?		If yes: was it important to you?		If yes: is there anything else which does this for you?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Reminds me of the values of family life	37	18	28	9	10	18
2. <i>The Dales</i> gave regular companionship; it was good company when you were alone.	44	11	30	14	6	24
3. <i>The Dales</i> also helped people to relieve their feelings, it gave them a chance to cry now and then.	16	39	6	10	22	4
4. <i>The Dales</i> took people out of themselves and helped them to forget their worries.	15	30	15	10	3	12
5. It was a programme that women especially could enjoy.	50	5	37	13	21	16
6. It was a welcome change from violence and bad language.	42	13	39	3	17	22
7. It was a programme to look forward to and arrange the day around.	34	21	26	8	4	22
8. It gave people a lot to think about which they could apply to themselves and their problems and their friends.	20	35	9	11	1	8

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the table is its indication that two months after the programme had ended, few *Dales* gratifications were yet being supplied by any other sources of satisfaction. The overall ratio of answers indicating some success in finding an alternative to those indicating failure was 1:2. In fact the number of 'successes' exceeded the number of 'failures' in only one case – 'It was a programme that women especially could enjoy', for which *Woman's Hour* was the most popular alternative means of satisfaction.

Items 5 and 6, which reflect the possibly dual meaning of Cluster E (i.e. a projection of the woman's social role and a stress on 'refinement') were most frequently endorsed as important gratifications that had been derived from *The Dales*, and they were also the most readily catered for by other sources. But the highly endorsed item 2 (30

respondents having claimed that its companionship function was an important feature of *The Dales*) proved more difficult to replace, only six women having found an alternative source of companionship some two months later. Similarly, only ten respondents had found alternatives to *The Dales* as a source of reminders of the value of family life (compared with 18 who had not yet done so). And of 26 women who felt *The Dales* had been important as 'a programme to look forward to and arrange the day around', only four had managed to find an equally effective point of anchorage for 'bracketing the day'.

[8]

In addition to the evidence summarised in Table II.2, some rich open-ended comment was obtained through this line of questioning, a full record of which has been kept. Considerations of space prevent the reproduction of this material here, but the manner of the sample's response to the interviewers' brief verbal descriptions of each of the main gratifications in turn may be illustrated by reference to item 1 – *The Dales* 'reminds one of the value of family life'.

When asked whether and how this feature of the programme had been important to them, three main themes were expressed in many of the respondents' spontaneous replies. One perspective regarded family values and activities as under threat and on the wane:

Because I feel that family life is extremely important and these days it is not sufficiently held as important.

This is important to me because we are in danger of losing sight of these values today – all the bad side of life is shown on TV and radio, much more than the worthwhile ones.

In a second set of replies the *Dales* family was described as a model of family life that could be appreciated and to some extent followed. Even a measure of reassurance was derived from the sheer existence of the *Dales*.

It stood for a good solid, respectable family; it does you good to realise there are these kind of respectable people around.

And, according to a third group of listeners, the *Dales* family set standards against which the fan could assess the ethos and behaviour of her own family.

It lets you see what a good family should be like; you feel that your own family should be like that.

Well, I think, you know, I think of my family life and I wish ours could be like theirs; there's six of us and we don't agree, whereas they all seemed to stick together.

Finally, the respondents were asked in both rounds of the survey to assess the realism of the characters in *The Dales*: 'And thinking of the various people in *The Dales*, how many characters seemed really true-to-life to you: all of them, most of them, some of them, or

none of them?'. A cross-tabulation of the answers elicited on both occasions is presented below as Table II.3.

TABLE II.3: Perceived Realism of *The Dales* Characters during Last Week of Broadcasting and Two Months after Termination

Characters seeming true-to-life two months after end of programme

Characters		All	Most	Some	None	Total
seeming true-to-life during last week of programme	All	5	7	1	0	13
	Most	4	21	4	0	29
	Some	1	2	6	0	9
	None	0	0	3	1	4
	Total	10	30	14	1	55

Although the two marginal distributions are markedly similar (before: 13-29-9-4; after: 10-30-14-1) inspection of the table yields a total of 22 respondents who had changed over time. In ten cases there had been an increase in the number of realistic characters; in twelve there had been a decrease. Although this result might have been due to the use of an unreliable scale, its simplicity militates against such an explanation. Further investigation of the inconsistent respondents suggested that the changes represented a genuine reassessment of the characters rather than a randomness of response. Consequently, the sample was divided into three groups: non-changers; those whose ratings had shifted towards increased realism; and those who had voted the characters as less realistic. Then the responses of these groups to the inventory of reasons for liking *The Dales* were checked, producing the result summarised in Table II.4.

TABLE II.4: Changes in Perception of the Realism of *The Dales* Characters x Average Number of Reasons for Liking *The Dales*

Respondent Groups

	No change	Increased Realism	Decreased Realism
Average no. of reasons endorsed 1 st round	15.4	10.3	13.2
Average no. of reasons endorsed 2 nd round.	18.2	9.9	19.4

The average number of endorsements of reasons for liking *The Dales* in the whole sample is 13.8 in the first round and 17.0 in the second round. The table shows that differences do exist between the groups. The no-change group showed a change upwards which was similar to that in the sample as a whole – three more reasons for liking *The Dales*. Those respondents who, after two months, had reassessed the realism of the characters and found them less realistic, had endorsed considerably more items in

the second round, an increase of six. A small average decrease in reasons for liking *The Dales* was registered by the increased realism group. And the difference between the average endorsements for the two groups of changers proved quite dramatic. The first round showed little difference between the two groups (10.3 and 13.2 reasons for liking *The Dales*). After two months that difference had increased threefold to 9.9 and 19.4.

The small number of respondents involved make it difficult to shed light on this finding by any further analysis of the data. Surprisingly, perhaps, the 'increased realism' group included a relatively high proportion of fans who no longer missed *The Dales* at the time of the second interview, as Table II.5 shows.

TABLE II.5: Missing *The Dales* after Termination x Changes in Perceptions of the Realism of *The Dales* Characters

	No change	Increased Realism	Decreased Realism	Total
Still miss The Dales	25	4	9	38
No longer miss The Dales	8	6	3	17

The relationships are puzzling. The overall tendency for respondents to endorse more reasons for liking the programme after its termination is consistent with a hypothesis which originally pointed to *The Dales* as a suitable programme for study – that the termination of a long-standing serial would sensitise fans to the functions it had served. Regarded in this light, the decreased realism group, registering the largest increase in reasons for liking *The Dales*, emerge as fans who have gained most insight into the nature of their relationship to the programme. They now have a more clear awareness of their own dependence on it, a perception which allows them, however, to regard more of the characters as unrealistic.

But what of the fans who, in retrospect, found an increasing number of characters true-to-life, while sailing against the wind by endorsing marginally fewer reasons for liking the programme? Perhaps to them *The Dales* had become less like a radio serial and the characters had become more like acquaintances who had moved on. It so happens that during one of the group discussions, its leader suggested that Dr. and Mrs Dale might retire to Ambridge and make regular appearances in *The Archers*. The immediate response of one of the participants is relevant to the preceding point and provides a fitting epitaph to this chapter:

Oh, no. That wouldn't be right. They are entitled to a bit of private life now.

[1] Herzog, Herta, 'What Do We Really Know About Daytime Serial Listeners?', in Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and Stanton, Frank N. (eds.), *Radio Research, 1942-43*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1944.

[2] Since, excluding only children, the average number of siblings in 49 respondents' families of origin was 4.16, the number of first children to be expected by chance would have been 11.8 (1/4.16 x 49). The presence of 19 first children in the sample proves significant beyond the .01 level ($z = 2.43, p = .007$). This finding is not without theoretical implications, especially when considered in relation to the fact that two of the six clusters of gratifications sought by the sample members from The Dales referred to a) its projection of family values and b) its use as a source of companionship. For a) oldest daughters may have been required to assume a special family (semi-maternal) role at an early age, looking after younger children preparing meals, etc. and b) according to Schechter (Schechter, S., The Psychology of Affiliation, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1959) adults who were first-born or only children exhibit a great need to affiliate when anxious than do others.

[3] Wilson, G and Patterson, J., 'A New Measure of Conservatism', British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, n.d.

[4] Blumler, Jay G. and McQuail, Denis, Television in Politics, Faber and Faber, London, 1968.

[5] The classic analysis of 'para-social' relationships between audience members and mass media characters may be consulted in Horton, D. and Wohl, R., 'Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction', Psychiatry, Vol. XIX, 1956, pp. 215-29.

[6] McQuitty, L. L., 'Elementary Linkage Analysis', Educational and Psychological Measurement, Vol. XVII, 1957, pp. 207-29.

[7] The figures below show, in the case of age, how relationships between background variables and gratification scores were tabulated.

	Age	
	20-39	40+
Total Gratification	20-39	40+
Score categories: High/medium	8	15
Low	18	14
	26	29

[8] The use of radio to 'bracket the day' is described in Mandelsohn, Harold, 'Listening to Radio', in Dexter, Lewis Anthony and White, David Manning (eds.), People, Society and Mass Communications, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1964.

