

RICHARD & JUDY'S BOOK CLUB AND 'CANADA READS'

Readers, books and cultural programming in a digital era¹

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This article is a result of a transnational comparison of two broadcast book programs' influence on readers' book choices. Online surveys and focus group interviews in Canada and the UK illustrate active audience participation in the converged era of print books, the internet, television and radio. The analysis examines readers' negotiation of book choices through uses and gratifications theory as informed by a cultural critique of the programs themselves. Readers simultaneously respond to and create a hierarchy of cultural tastes that are bound up in the cultural assumptions that they have about the different media.

Keywords Books; radio; TV; reader response; Canada; UK; cultural tastes

Introduction

'Oprah's Book Club' is the cultural phenomenon that has led US talk show host Oprah Winfrey to become the promotional dream of publishers, the point of criticism of scholars and cultural analysts, and the embodiment of readers' book choice conundrums. Building on the continuously increasing popularity of face to face book clubs that meet in people's homes, Winfrey and her producers televise a book club and host an interactive online forum that reaches out to 'ordinary readers', and in the process provide discussion material for supporters and critics of the place of literary fiction in popular culture. The program, which began in the fall of 1996, has become a model for British and Canadian broadcasters who through the popular media and industry press became acutely aware of what critics have termed 'The Oprah Effect': The popular daytime talk show host can move books (Farr 2005).

The economic effects tell only part of the story. Another related, and as important, piece is the cultural taste hierarchies that are created, represented,

reinforced and sometimes resisted by those television viewers, radio listeners and internet users who interact with the book programs.

We find ourselves at a unique moment in media history when the internet, radio and television converge with the printed book, but little is known of how this media convergence influences readers' negotiation of cultural taste hierarchies, and what role interpersonal contacts play in those negotiations. The research question then that this article seeks to answer is: how do broadcast reading programs influence readers' book choice selection? Using the uses and gratifications model of communication theory, I demonstrate how respondents to online surveys and focus group interviews in Canada and the UK use 'Canada Reads' and 'Richard & Judy's Book Club', respectively, to help them choose the books they read. I argue that the broadcast book programs and their websites are locations for negotiating cultural taste and acquiring cultural capital.

Negotiating cultural taste and acquiring cultural capital

I have argued elsewhere that readers recognize the cultural significance of books and reading (Rehberg Sedo 2004), and others have identified how readers use reading not only as a source of pleasure (Ross *et al.* 2006), but also as a process for identity formation (Radway 1988, 1991) and as a tool to gain cultural capital (DiMaggio 1987; Bennett *et al.* 1999). The cultural value readers place on cultural products such as books, and works of fiction in particular, is dependent upon not only what they learn from parents, but also through what they learn through school and university (Bourdieu 1984), work and social networks (DiMaggio 1987; Hunter 1988; Erickson 1996; Bennett *et al.* 1999).

Cultural tastes and preferences might be explained by understanding reading choices as representing 'socially constructed organizing principles that imbue artworks with significance beyond their thematic content and are, in turn, responsive to structurally generated demand for cultural information and affiliation' (DiMaggio 1987, p. 441). Readers' choices are at once their own, but are also informed by social structures of the family, the education system, the workplace and social networks such as a book group. Although a variety of sociocultural forces play a role in valuing books and reading, 'education ... plays a significant role in cultivating a capacity to distinguish between the formal aspects of literary texts and their content, as well as a preference for the former over the latter' (Bennett *et al.* 1999, p. 161). In other words, not only does the formal education system influence readers' literary tastes, the formal education readers receive also works to determine the importance of books and reading itself,

and their cultural repertoire of interpretive frameworks. The resultant cultural capital gained and used serves to distinguish readers' class positions from 'the masses'.

Media uses and gratifications

The 'uses and gratifications' theory found most widely in media and audience studies provides a useful framework through which to analyse readers' participation in broadcast book programming. The approach presumes that media choice and use is motivated by the desire to satisfy or gratify a need or needs (Katz *et al.* 1974). According to Katz *et al.*, the evident or implicit assumptions of the uses and gratifications model are:

1. The audience is active. Some media use is casual [such as turning on the radio when in the car or flipping through television stations, or browsing the internet], but 'patterns of media use are shaped by more or less definite expectations of what certain kinds of content have to offer the audience member' (p. 21).
2. Individuals make the links between media choice and gratification. That is, media 'effect' is questioned because the assumption is that individuals use certain media instead of the media using them.
3. The media are only one of the many ways that individuals can satisfy their needs. 'Consequently, a proper view of the role of the media in need satisfaction should take into account other functional alternatives including different, more conventional, and 'older' ways of fulfilling needs [such as interpersonal relations]' (p. 22).
4. People will self report in sufficient ways.
5. 'Value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms' (p. 22).

While a complete uses and gratifications model would allow for analysis of readers' motivation in participation in broadcast book programming because it could attend to the 'psychological needs, psychological motives, communication channels, communication content, and psychological gratifications within a particular or cross cultural context' (Lin 1996, p. 574), like much recent uses and gratifications research, I group media gratifications into two categories: process and content. As Kayahara and Wellman (2007) explain, 'process gratifications are gratifications that arise from the performance of the activity . . . [and] content gratifications are gratifications arising from acquiring information' (p. 826). Furthermore, I draw on research that has distinguished between ritualistic and instrumental media use (Gunter Svennevig 1987; Perse & Rubin 1988; Lin 1993). Instrumental use

is usually goal oriented. It assumes that a viewer, listener or reader participates with the medium with a purposive intention. The individual seeks specific content that will lead to satisfaction. Ritualistic use of the media tends to be more habitual and satisfying a broader set of needs, such as to seek pleasure, humour, relaxation and the like.

While there has been criticism of the uses and gratifications approach (e.g. Stevens Porter 1973; Rubin 1986; Swanson 1987), Ang's (1990) critique is particularly relevant to this study because it includes an argument for less attention to the individual psychological gratifications and more to the social context of media use. In addition, she argues that researchers should attend to not only why people use the media, but also what meanings they make of their media use. Such a critique argues that not only are people psychological or sociological beings, but also cultural beings influenced by, as mentioned above, the education system, friends and family, social networks, and the media.

Case study sites

The two broadcast book programs that are the topic of this article – the televised book club section of the talk show 'Richard & Judy' (in the UK) and the radio program 'Canada Reads' (in Canada) – are nationwide reading events that are staged through mass media and broadcast into homes, cars and offices. Both host interactive websites to augment the viewer/listener experience. One is a radio program and one is a television program. This difference is not a limitation of comparisons, but rather, the listeners' interactions with the two programs suggest that they work differently to create and maintain cultural taste hierarchies. At a very basic level, 'Richard & Judy' can be classified as popular culture and 'Canada Reads' as high culture. While I will interrogate these notions further in the findings discussion below, it is worthwhile here to acknowledge that my use of the terms 'high culture' and 'popular culture' is based on Grossberg *et al.*'s (1998) definition of 'high culture' as 'art . . . [that is] both spiritually and formally (or aesthetically) more developed than other forms of culture' and 'popular culture' as 'that culture which, regardless of where or by whom it is produced, speaks to a large public audience. . .' (pp. 36–37). Furthermore, I think it particularly useful to refer to Cohen's (1999) interrogation of high and low art, and their audiences. He acknowledges that there are cultural products that might be deemed high art or popular art, but also argues:

A single person might join both audiences, and thus be an appreciator of both fine and popular art; and a single work might find favor with both

high and low audiences. Both possibilities seem to constitute curious bifurcations. . .

(p. 138)

The 'bifurcations' in this study are inherent in the two different book programs, and lie in the cultural values that readers assign to the type of media and networks on which the program is broadcast, the books the programs highlight, and the real and assumed audience of the programs.

'Richard & Judy's Book Club' is broadcast each winter and summer as a segment of a popular UK afternoon television show with a magazine format. Borrowing from, but adapting, key elements of Oprah's Book Club, such as the in studio book discussion and the opinions of 'real' face to face book clubs, the husband and wife team of Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan lead 'Richard & Judy's Book Club'.² They select a book a week from over 600 titles submitted each year by UK publishers to the show's producer, Amanda Ross, who has been dubbed as the most important woman in UK publishing (McCrum 2006).

Through the 'Richard & Judy' website (<http://forum.richardandjudybookclub.co.uk/>), readers can join a discussion forum and link to information about a book's author, publisher and plot. To date, there are 20 threads on the forum of the 2007 edition and 13,756 page views. After several of the 2006 book club segments, reader viewers could talk with authors and each other in a live webchat. According to Ross, more than 1,000 people participated in each discussion (personal communication with Fuller, 29 June 2006).

'Canada Reads' is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (or the CBC's) Radio One series that airs for one week each spring in the morning and also repeats in the evening. For the past five seasons, a pre taped celebrity panel has debated and voted for one book that 'All Canada Should Read', eliminating book choices over a five day period in a 'Survivor' style show.³ Debates and the voting results are broadcast on CBC Radio One daily for the five days, while summaries, additional features and podcasts of the radio broadcasts themselves are published on the show's website. In addition to the celebrity competition that is 'a spirited quest to find a homegrown book for all Canadians to read', the website includes a link to the CBC store to purchase the chosen books, and an online and moderated letters section entitled 'Your Say' ('Canada Reads' 2006).

'Richard & Judy' is a televised program on the UK's Channel 4, a commercial network whose ideological work is different from that of the CBC, the Canadian public broadcaster. While 'Richard & Judy's' late afternoon magazine format television show is targeted to an audience who works at home, the CBC uses the celebrity debate format of the radio program 'Canada Reads' as part of a bid to shed its culturally elitist reputation and thus to attract a 'younger, hipper audience' (T Vartanian, personal

communication, 7 July 2003). These mediated reading events have in common the ability to reach mass audiences. And while the two programs share neither economical resources nor goals, both programs offer opportunities for reader resistance of, and negotiations with, cultural taste hierarchies implicit in broadcast book programming.

'Richard & Judy's Book Club' does not share the instructional imperative that is inherent in 'Canada Reads' or Oprah's Book Club, for that matter. While the rhetoric in and surrounding 'Canada Reads' implicates a moral social imperative (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2006; Lang 2006), 'Richard & Judy's Book Club' appears to be more of a 'Mr. And Mrs. Normal Middle Class's' celebration of books. Rather than promoting reading as a way to learn something, reading is represented as a joyful, pleasurable activity. For example, posters and bookmarks sport bright colours and contemporary type face on glossy paper. One poster even highlights the advertising tie in with a national candy company with the tagline, 'Unwind with a good book and Galaxy chocolate'. In this way, producer Amanda Ross sees the point of the Book Club as a way 'to get real people reading' (personal communication with Fuller, 29 June 2006).

Both programs have a game element to them, but the book talk is different. Very infrequently is anything negative said about a book during the televised book club segment. The on air radio discussions of 'Canada Reads', on the other hand, frequently favours interpretive practices shaped by canonical aesthetics and formalist hermeneutics (Fuller 2007), even if the producers try to highlight the playful, competitive nature of the debates.

Potential book titles and panel members for 'Canada Reads' are identified by CBC insiders and ultimately chosen by the show's producer, who said she looks for balance in cultural authority, and regional, gender and ethnic representation. In 2006, she seemed to strike a balance in both books and panellists:

- *Deafening*, Frances Itani (HarperCollins) was championed by feminist lawyer and author Maureen McTeer;
- *Cocksure*, Mordecai Richler (McClelland & Stewart) by comedian and novelist Scott Thompson;
- *Three Day Road*, Joseph Boyden (Penguin Canada) by filmmaker Nelofer Pazira;
- *Rooms for Rent in the Outer Planets: Selected Poems, 1962–1996*, Al Purdy (Harbour Publishing) by poet Susan Musgrave;
- *A Complicated Kindness*, Miriam Toews (Knopf Canada) by musician and publisher John K. Samson.

Table 1 illustrates the 2007 picks for 'Richard & Judy's Book Club'. Amanda Ross, the producer of the show, has to choose titles that will

TABLE 1 Richard & Judy's 2007 Book Club picks.

<i>title</i>	<i>author</i>	<i>publisher</i>
<i>The Interpretation of Murder</i>	Jed Rubenfeld	Headline Review
<i>The Girls</i>	Lori Lansens	Virago Press; New edition
<i>Restless</i>	William Boyd	Bloomsbury Publishing; New edition
<i>Love in the Present Tense</i>	Catherine Ryan Hyde	Black Swan
<i>Semi Detached</i>	Griff Rhys Jones	Michael Joseph
<i>This Book Will Save Your Life</i>	A. M. Homes	Granta Books; New edition
<i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	HarperPerennial
<i>The Testament of Gideon Mack</i>	James Robertson	Penguin Books

ensure that the book talk can fill eight minutes of airtime. Some of the books have won critical acclaim and some might be considered mass market bestseller material; some might be considered products of 'high culture' and some 'popular culture'. In any case, 'professional readers' (Fuller 2007) those who teach, read and/or critique literature for a living would probably not consider any of these books particularly stylistically challenging or innovative.

Research methods

My analysis is based on data collected through mixed methods. We used an online survey, focus groups and personal interviews, discourse analysis of media reports of the two programs, and close analysis of the programs themselves, readers' responses on the programs' websites and blogger's accounts of the programs or the book selections.

Online survey

Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit for the online survey, so the study cannot be generalized to the general population. The intention was not to study a random sample but to investigate people who identified as *readers*. We promoted the questionnaire through national and regional newspaper advertising in Canada, and through GoogleAds and 'Richard & Judy's' website in the UK. The research team also used their

professional, personal and social networks to encourage survey participation. The 56 question surveys were active on the project website for a period of six weeks during the airing of 'Canada Reads' in the spring of 2006, and also during the winter edition of Richard & Judy's Book Club in early 2007.

The survey sought both quantitative and qualitative responses. It asked readers to report on their reading habits, including their genre preferences, their purchasing processes, their reasons for reading, and their participation in face to face and broadcast book programming and reading groups. The questions specifically relevant to the uses and gratifications model and to the research question, 'how do broadcast reading programs influence readers' book choice selection', included the following:

- How do you usually choose the books you want to read? (Both Canada and UK survey).
- This year's CBC's 'Canada Reads' selections are... Have you read any of these books as a result of their inclusion in 'Canada Reads'? (Canada survey only)
- Do you read Richard & Judy's featured book each week? (UK survey only)
- Have you this year or in past years, participated in, viewed or listened to local CBC 'Canada Reads' programs or events? (Canada survey only)
- Do you watch Richard & Judy's Book Club on Channel 4? (UK survey only)
- Are you a member of Richard & Judy's Book Club? (UK survey only)
- Have you visited the 'Canada Reads' website? If yes, what features of the website do you use? (Canada survey only)
- Have you visited the website for 'Richard & Judy's Book Club'? If yes, what were you seeking? (UK survey only)
- List the main reason you participate or participated in 'Canada Reads'. (Canada survey only)
- List the main reason you watch 'Richard & Judy's Book Club'. (UK survey only)
- Why did you choose *not* to participate in Richard & Judy's Book Club this year? (UK survey only)
- Why did you choose *not* to participate in 'Canada Reads' this year? (Canada survey only)

Data were collected from 2,490 online survey respondents: in the UK, we had 1,549 respondents and in Canada, we had 941. Sixty four per cent (731) of the Canadian respondents identified as participants in 'Canada Reads.' Participation in 'Canada Reads' includes listening or watching the program, participating in local events, going to the website and reading at least one of the 'Canada Reads' picks. (It may also include watching the televised version that ran in 2004-2005.) See Table 2 for participation percentages.

TABLE 2 Participating in 'Canada Reads'.

<i>how they participate</i>	<i>per cent</i>
listened to or watched 'Canada Reads'	34
read 'Canada Reads' Books	19
participated in local 'Canada Reads' events	28
visited website	21
listen to/read transcripts of broadcast program	0.4

Variables not mutually exclusive.

Eighty one per cent (564) of the UK respondents identified as participants in Richard & Judy's book club. For 'Richard & Judy's Book Club', participation includes watching the book club segment on the afternoon television program, registering in the discussion forum, going to the website, and reading at least one of the picks.

The participants in 'Richard & Judy's Book Club' tend to be younger than those in 'Canada Reads', and the Canadian participants have slightly more education. Ninety one per cent have at least some university, and 46 per cent have a graduate degree. Sixty seven per cent of the 'Richard & Judy' participants have completed A levels and above, with 10 per cent reporting that they have a graduate degree. We did not ask for income levels, but we did ask participants to self identify their class positions. More than half of the 'Canada Reads' participants identified as middle class, whereas the range of class among the 'Richard & Judy' participants was more varied: 37 per cent identified as lower class; 14 per cent as lower middle class; and 35 per cent as middle class. Respondent ethnicity was an opened ended question on the survey. Most of the respondents (64 per cent in the Canadian study and 90 per cent in the UK study) identified as 'white' or 'Canadian' or as 'white' or 'British'. As in most general readership studies (e.g. Reading and Buying Books), women participate in the programs more so than do men (88 per cent in 'Canada Reads'; 90 per cent in 'Richard & Judy'). Table 3 illustrates how readers participate in Richard & Judy's Book club, while Table 4 provides the age distribution of participants in the two programs.

TABLE 3 Participating in Richard & Judy's Book Club.

<i>how they participate</i>	<i>per cent</i>
watch 'Richard and Judy's Book Club'	16
registered on Richard and Judy's website	4
read Richard and Judy's Book at least 'sometimes'	26
visited the 'Richard and Judy Book Club' website	21

Variables not mutually exclusive.

TABLE 4 Participant ages.

age	'Canada Reads' participants (%)	Richard & Judy participants (%)
10-17	1	2
18-24	5	12
25-34	24	27
35-44	22	24
45-64	45	34
65-98	3	1
	100%	100%

Focus groups

We also conducted face to face focus group interviews with readers in the two nation states. The interviewees were recruited through snowball, convenience and purposive sampling procedures. In Canada, we talked with eight groups of readers: four groups screened as participants in 'Canada Reads'; three who claimed to not participate in any way; and one group of mixed participants and non participants. Because of cost and time constraints, the focus groups were limited to three different locations in Atlantic Canada. In the UK, the focus groups were limited to the Birmingham area. There, we talked with five groups who were screened as participants in 'Richard & Judy's Book Club' and also with three groups of readers who identified as non participants. All participants were asked about their reading history, habits and preferences, and their knowledge of and attitudes towards the particular broadcast book program. We concentrated on reader involvement with the book program in those groups that were made up of what we called participants.

In total, we spoke with 51 readers in Canada and 31 in the UK. We worked towards recruiting a mix of age, gender, ethnicity and social class backgrounds in the recruitment process, but in both locations garnered a relatively homogeneous representation. Most (38 per cent in Canada; 48 per cent in the UK) fell into the 45-64 age range. Like the online surveys, the majority of readers were women: 86 per cent in Canada, and 97 per cent in the UK, and most identified as middle class (62 per cent in Canada; 52 per cent in the UK). Only two readers – one man and one woman in the UK – identified as a member of an under represented ethnic group.

Other methods

In addition to interviews with people involved in the production, reception and distribution of the broadcast book programs, we monitored and analysed

blog entries tracked by the software Newsfire, and discussions/letters on both programs' websites. We participated in and analysed the broadcast programming, and have tracked and analysed news reports of the events.

Findings

Media uses and gratifications in process and content

The process of choosing books. The influential two step flow of communication theory tells us that people get their information from the media and then turn to opinion leaders to interpret the information. However, as Weimann (1982) has argued, in cases where the news or innovation is not well known, the flow of information flows interpersonally. Information does not come from an opinion leader, but rather from a person who is connected to specific groups associated with the person's query. In other work (Rehberg Sedo 2004), I have termed this person the 'trusted other'. 'The trusted other' for people who are looking for what to read next is consistently someone who has proved in the past to have similar tastes to the information seeker.

The readers across the entire sample use interpersonal ties as a primary source for choosing their books. When forced to choose the *one* method they use most, both sets of respondents use their friends most often as their primary source of information: 'Canada Reads' 16 per cent and Richard & Judy 16 per cent. If the readers use reviews found in the mass media as a way to choose their books, they turn most often to newspaper reviews ('Canada Reads' 38 per cent; 'Richard & Judy' 30 per cent). The percentage results are also similar across the datasets in how often readers turn to the internet for choosing their books: 16 per cent in Canada and 17 per cent in the UK. Kayahara and Wellman (2007, p. 831) found that while readers go to online bookstores to read reviews or purchase books recommended by friends and family, none seeks out new author or book information online. Instead, like the readers in the online surveys, readers will first turn to their 'trusted other' and then they seek out information on the internet. See Table 5. However, the responses from the focus groups in both sites illustrate that the process is not as neat as the numbers suggest. When asked face to face, readers report using a variety of different ways of choosing books, and concentrate efforts on choosing books through a method that has in the past been successful. For example, Helen (43) from Warwickshire (UK) illustrates:

How I choose books? I don't tend to look at reviews because I like to make up my own mind; recommendations from friends, because I have friends

TABLE 5 How readers choose the books they read.

<i>how books are selected</i>	<i>'Canada Reads' (%)</i>	<i>Richard & Judy (%)</i>
friend	84	76
favourite author	85	77
family	53	52
work	52	38
prize winner	46	33
like cover	43	41
gift	41	41
newspaper	38	30
bestseller	38	35
magazine	34	22
book store recommendation	29	33
school requirement	18	10
web	16	17
face to face book club	13	10
Oprah	10	37
TV	7	9
online book club	6	9
mentioned in other books	3	1
browse second hand sources	3	1
browse library	2	1
browse bookstore	2	2
library recommendations	2	1
search or browse the internet	1	1
other responses	8	5

Question: How do you usually choose the books you want to read?

that we do a lot of reading in the same genres and so we trade back and forth that way.

Similarly, Mary (52) from Wolfville (Nova Scotia, Canada) demonstrates that the process of choosing books is not straightforward. She also illustrates that readers move through face to face social sites to online environments to fill their reading lists:

I read a lot of different things, mostly modern novels: um, everything from fantasy to mystery to escape literature to . . . the modern literature, novels that we often read in the group. Um . . . sometimes I just go to the

library and browse, but I also I think since we started the book club, in particular, I . . . I will go looking. I will read book lists to see what people are reading and I'll read in the newspaper book reviews, and I'm trying to think of the name of a site on the internet it's for book clubs and readers and I don't know

The process of choosing books is also varied for Harvey (30) from Birmingham (UK):

Most of the books that I read I tend to find on the internet or if I've heard through television or I've seen a trailer or whatever, it's literally a case of just picking up the book and reading the cover and being intrigued by it and thinking I'd quite like to read that. And then word of mouth, my friends or friends' friends as it were, so it's a number of different ways.

How then do the internet and radio and television interact to influence a reader's book choice? Of those who were considered participants in the programs, 27 per cent of the Canadian respondents used the program's website. Fifty one per cent of the UK readers used the 'Richard & Judy' website.

The Canadians used the website most often (22 per cent) for book recommendations, and the readers in the UK used the 'Richard & Judy' website to learn about the books (43 per cent). The data suggest that readers could use the book programs to get ideas about books and then turn to the internet or interpersonal sources to seek out more information about the programs' picks. The television and radio personalities in this way can act as a sort of 'trusted other', much like a friend or family member who has proven to provide satisfactory book recommendations. But this would only be the case if the reader places significant cultural value on the program, and/or the hosts or celebrities involved, and/or the books that are highlighted.

Uses and gratifications of program content

When asked why they participated in the particular program, the response given most often across both data sets was 'to read books that they wouldn't normally read' ('Canada Reads' 22 per cent; 'Richard & Judy' 28 per cent).⁴ Only one per cent of the 'Richard & Judy' respondents report participating because the program offers intellectual enrichment, while 14 per cent of the 'Canada Reads' readers chose this response. This finding suggests that the cultural value attributed to 'Canada Reads' 'It's sort of like American Idol for literate people' (Wooby 2007), as one Canadian blogger puts it is different from that given to 'Richard & Judy'.

Every reader we talked with in the UK focus groups knew about ‘Richard & Judy’s Book Club’, and many of the comments before probing settled on how many books they ‘shift’. The readers we spoke with in Canada, on the other hand, were concerned with ‘game’ structure of ‘Canada Reads’ before moving to discussion of the books themselves. This Canadian focus group participant illustrates not only the problem some readers have with reconciling the desire to choose the books highlighted in the program with the format of the program, she also articulates the many questions we heard about ‘Canada Reads’ idealizing the role of the program.

But I don’t know I find I enjoy seeing the list of books and getting some information, but I don’t regard their opinions any more highly than some other sources. And I find it the whole premise a bit artificial, to say the least. I I agree with Mary about the idea that ‘this is a book everybody every Canadian should read,’ I think is a bit far fetched. And it’s almost the discussion, the voting off it’s just, it’s, you know, the literary version of reality show. . .

(Karen, 50)

The differences in readers’ responses to the programs are explicit, but both represent the anxiety readers exhibit when the cultural value ascribed to books and book programming do not fit neatly into their expected or historical roles. The CBC is state sponsored, and is perceived as the keeper of Canadian high culture, and Channel 4’s ‘Richard & Judy’ is a private enterprise attempting to delve into the cultural arena of literature. The focus group readers question not only the motivation of the producers and the formats of the programs, but also the imposed cultural authority represented by the celebrity panel in the case of ‘Canada Reads’ and of ‘Richard & Judy’. The anxiety expressed by the UK readers points directly to the book club as part of a daytime television program, and the popularity of ‘Richard & Judy’.

The cultural taste dilemma is tied to the populist label daytime television has, and is articulated by a generation of people who believe in a Protestant work ethic that assumes people work during the day. Many of the readers we interviewed in the Birmingham area were women in their late fifties and sixties, and frequently we heard narratives linking daytime television watching with laziness. This cultural conundrum is evident in the focus group exchange below:

Janet (63): Some people have the television on in the daytimes. We don’t.

Lesley (50): I will watch the television and iron. I actually, you know, I find I don’t feel quite as guilty. . . (cut off)

Wendy (60): You see I would say, I've grown up with 'Richard & Judy' always there in the background on daytime TV because when I was a young mum it was lunchtime they would be on so they were always quite an interesting topical couple, anything that was going on and then to lead into, because they always did it on wine as well, I think was that just before the book... (cut off)

If these readers do watch the afternoon show, they admit only to watching it in much the same way that viewers of 1940s American soap operas stereotypically participated in the radio serials while doing other household chores (Butsch 2000, p. 201).

Many of the UK focus group participants expressed surprise that the books they had already read were actually on Richard & Judy's list. The readers we talked with generally admit neither to watching 'Richard & Judy Book Club' nor to reading the book picks *because* they were recommended by the couple. And, if they had read a particular title, they said that had done so before the book appeared on the list. The survey participants were also asked if they read any of the picks in the specific programming. A larger percentage of these readers (26 per cent) at least sometimes read the 'Richard & Judy' picks than did readers who participated in the Canada Read survey (20 per cent).

Conclusions

I do not propose that this study creates a complete picture of the uses and gratifications of broadcast book programming, but the model allows us to begin to understand readers' interaction with the different media through the book programs. As Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) have argued, uses and gratifications serves well as a complement to other factors such as access to the medium, work schedules, broadcast times and social constraints of the audience members. When asked why they did not participate in the book programs, those readers whom we classified as non participants gave the same three responses most often across the two datasets: they had not heard of it (41 per cent in Canada and 13 per cent in the UK); they had no time (31 per cent in Canada and 19 per cent in the UK); and they did not like it (4 per cent in Canada; and 2 per cent in the UK). The Canada-UK gap in the first two comparisons reflects both the lesser prevalence of radio than television as a foreground medium as well as the CBC's more focused audience among the culturally elite. However, the last 'didn't like it' comparison suggests that those who have participated in the past have found the programs to satisfy some need.

Returning to the assumptions of the uses and gratifications model as identified by Katz *et al.* (1974), the readers in this study are active audiences. While

some participants might tune in to the book programming accidentally or casually, others use the programs in a ritualistic or instrumental manner. As Rubin (1984) noted, ritualized and instrumental media use are not necessarily separate, but interrelated. The participants will use the programs for book choice at different times depending on their own personal situations. These readers have learned that the programs offer book recommendations and reviews that can lead them to their reading choices. They have heard about the programs and the books, and will seek out information about both on the programs' websites. These recommendations for reading, however, are not as important as recommendations from friends who have proved to have similar reading tastes. When readers have read books highlighted by the programs, and they have enjoyed the books, the program hosts or celebrities can act as a 'trusted other' for book recommendations.

Like Oprah's Book Club, 'Canada Reads' and 'Richard & Judy's Book Club' are broadcast book programs that attempt to borrow some aspects of the millions of book clubs in the United States, Canada and the UK. The producers of these programs have the demands of making good radio and television, respectively, for different reasons, but in the end, their role in contemporary print culture echoes historical debates over high and popular culture. This is where two assumptions of the uses and gratifications model assumption become problematic. The model assumes that people will self report in sufficient ways and that 'value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended' (Katz *et al.* 1974, p. 22).

The comments we heard from interviews can be considered problematic in that they are informed by the society and culture in which they are made, and are tied up in cultural taste values that inform a reader's identity and place in society. But it is these problematic statements that can begin to inform us about the role of the broadcast media in literary print culture. In these statements we learn that the public broadcaster in Canada, the CBC, is still perceived as a culturally elite broadcaster. For some, this role does not neatly support popular game type programming and yet, 'Canada Reads' does function as a type of book reviewer, from which readers gain ideas on what to read. The same is true for readers in the UK who may be troubled by the popular program, and yet read the same books that they choose.

In an era of an abundance of reading choices, and a lack of available leisure time, broadcast book programming reflects a shift in the review and recommendation function of mass media and literary cultural authority. But in no way is it a smooth shift. The readers in this study are participants in cultures of reading who use media to negotiate their reading choices. The producers of the two programs help readers negotiate choice. How they do this, how readers respond and which books they end up reading illustrates the complexity of contemporary reading practices.

Notes

- 1 The findings presented in this article are part of *Beyond the Book*, an interdisciplinary, transnational analysis of mass reading events and the contemporary meanings of reading in the UK, USA and Canada. The study's focal point is the city and nation wide reading groups inspired by Oprah's Book Club and the proliferation of shared reading programs. The reading events we are interested in include those that fit into the 'One Book, One Community' model, such as 'One Book, One Chicago', 'One Book, One Vancouver', or 'Liverpool Reads'. However, any analysis of contemporary reading culture must extend into the everyday of readers' lives. Television, radio and, at the turn of this century, the internet, should be considered an analytical 'site' for the production, distribution, consumption and reception of books. Please see <http://www.beyondthebookproject.org> for more information on the project.
- 2 The author would like to thank her colleagues Danielle Fuller and Anouk Lang for their intellectual assistance in working through ideas for this article, and to thank Danielle Fuller especially for her comments on an earlier version of the piece. She would also like to acknowledge the financial support for this project from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), and Mount Saint Vincent University and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation for providing funding for the Atlantic Canada Communications Issues Research Lab.
- 3 As I put the finishing touches on this article in early November 2007, Richard & Judy have announced that they will discontinue their afternoon program next year. What form, if any, the successful book club will take is still unknown.
- 4 In 2004 and 2005, the program was also televised. For more discussion on why the translation of the series across media failed due to under funding and crucial differences in communicative strategies between radio and television, see Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2006). The article also includes a discussion of Société Radio Canada's 'Le Combat des Livres' and its place in Canadian broadcast book programming.
- 5 The question for the Richard & Judy survey was slightly different from the question on the Canada Reads survey: 'List the main reason you participate or participated in Canada Reads', as opposed to 'List the main reason you watch Richard & Judy's Book Club'.

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