

Viewing the 'Lower Class' Through *Today*
Tonight: An Analysis of *Housos* Re-
Representation

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Abstract

There is an extensive body of academic research into media representation highlighting and analysing the nature of racial or gendered representations. Comparatively there has been little recent research done into depictions of the 'lower class'. This study aims to build upon the work on this disadvantaged group by focusing on Australian current affairs programme *Today Tonight*. In doing so, this thesis will be building upon the limited amount of work that has been done on the Australian media in regard to class representation. As there has been little research specifically into *Today Tonight's* approach to 'lower-class' people it also helps fill a notable gap.

It is imperative to look at the link between representations of this group alongside the hegemony of the mainstream media. The utilisation of Antoni Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used in this thesis to attempt to offer a conceptual perspective of media representation concerning the 'lower class'. This research deliberately chooses to apply the term, 'lower class', as opposed to 'working class' as it defines both the self and external representations of this group. The thesis argues that the group is presented as unsocial, threatening and consequently deviant by *Today Tonight*. As a case study, this thesis uses the programme's coverage of the filming of the movie *Housos vs Authority* which highlights how the programme draws upon the representations on offer in the satirical show to contribute to a common sense understanding of the group. To add substance to an analysis of this representation, the thesis highlights a typical report on the real-life 'lower class' by *Today Tonight* as well as an episode of *Housos* to compare and (where possible) contrast the approaches taken by these texts with the *Housos* movie report.

The research identifies a dichotomy between representations of this group with that of the 'middle class' in the programme and that this ultimately furthers a negative depiction of the lower socio-economic group by emphasising their anti-social behaviours in contrast to the middle class's more favourable representation. The thesis argues that the media contributes to inequality by treating a disadvantaged group unfavourably, effectively disparaging people who are in abject or 'lower' situations chiefly due to processes out of their control.

Introduction

The issue of representation of 'lower-class' people through the media has not been explored in academic research to the same extent as other groups, such as those defined by race or gender. The media's portrayal and characterisation of class is a subject that warrants a discussion in its own right. It has been accused of having a narrow approach to portrayals of the 'lower class' similar to its approach to race and gender. This thesis aims to broaden research on the issue of class representation by focusing on the current affairs programme *Today Tonight*. The aim is to explore the depictions the show offers with an attempt to define the characteristics that tend to embody this group. A central question of whether or not the portrayals on *Today Tonight* are narrow and negative and are perpetuated by the discourse of the show will be the crux of the argument. As there has not been an in depth study on the approach *Today Tonight* or indeed any Australian current affairs programmes take towards 'lower-class' representation, this thesis will make a minor contribution towards filling an academic gap on an important social issue. To attempt a determination of this, there will be a focus on the style of the depictions. This will be gleaned from highlighting the use of language and the way that the programme presents this group of people via the mechanism of framing.

The case study of the thesis is to analyse the way the 'lower class' are represented in *Today Tonight* within the report on the making of the *Housos vs Authority* movie. This will allow discussion concerning the approach the current affairs programme takes towards the group on a general basis. In order to do this more effectively this thesis employs a framing analysis that focuses on three texts, comparing and contrasting them. The texts include two *Today Tonight* reports and an episode of the SBS satirical television program, *Housos*. The first is the

current affairs programme's October 25, 2012 report of the making of the *Housos* movie. The way in which *Today Tonight* draws on the exaggerated performances of the 'lower-class' characters within the fictional public housing commission community of Sunnyvale deserves particular attention. Of most importance is the way in which the framing of the fictional characters in the report share similarities to the positioning in the other *Today Tonight* text; *Housing Horror* which focuses on a real life 'lower-class' community.

In order to better qualify this re-representation of *Housos* it must be compared to *Housing Horror*. This is to gain some understanding into the ideological processes in play behind the representations seen on the *Housos* movie report. As *Housing Horror* focuses on a real life 'lower-class' community, it is able to offer evidence into how narrow constructions of the 'lower class' are embedded within *Today Tonight's* discourse. It can show how the programme generalises the group across the two texts. The *Housos* report is not able to offer this degree of certainty if singularly analysed. The third text involves examining a typical episode of *Housos*. Entitled *Junkie*, analysis of the episode provides insight into what distinctions can be made in the framing of the characters of *Housos* when compared to *Today Tonight's* approach towards them.

In order to offer a theoretically effective articulation of the approach *Today Tonight* takes towards the 'lower-class', it is appropriate to view the programme through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. At the heart of this thesis is an assessment of the journalistic practices at play in terms of the framing of the 'lower class'. Hegemony is of use due its effectiveness in offering a theoretical analysis concerning the media's structures and how they may impact on portrayals of 'lower-class' people. In relation to this, hegemony will be

used to assess the ability of the media in reinforcing a common sense understanding about this group. The theory will form the viewpoint for this thesis as reconceptualised by subsequent theorists. The concept will be used to highlight certain arguments surrounding the discourse of the media in relation to class representation through *Today Tonight*.

The term ‘lower class’ is employed by this thesis to refer to the group of people unified by their disadvantaged situation in society. They are disadvantaged in that they have little if any disposable income, are usually characterised by a reliance on government welfare as opposed to earning a salary through work as well as a relative lack of skills or education. Although this term is predominantly used in this thesis the interchangeable terms ‘working class’ and the poor are also used, albeit to a lesser degree. As shown in the literature review, there is scholarship which tends to group ‘lower-class’ and ‘working class’ people together; however the thesis approaches this group of people as being best defined by the former term. The ‘working class’, which refers to, “People composed chiefly of manual workers and labourers” (Bernard and Blair 1989 :1195) and who have, “On average... lower incomes...more unemployment, a greater likelihood of poverty...more boring jobs...higher rates of morbidity and an earlier age of mortality [as well as] less chance of success within the educational system than the ‘intermediate’ and ‘upper classes’” (Abercrombie, et al 2006: 426), is treated as a distinct, although in many ways comparable section of society, due to similar depictions in the media. The key difference is treated as the fact that when appearing on *Today Tonight* the ‘lower-class’ group are inevitably presented as unemployed and the ‘working class’ are shown to have a job.

Literature Review

Much of the research on hegemony highlighted in this literature review shows that it tends to be employed by media personnel often unconsciously in order to establish and then attempt to retain a dominant ideology of a particular society. This is not to say that views which dissent with this ideology are not given a chance to make their positions known through the media, but findings in the literature review show that these views are generally subjugated to those of the sanctioned ideology, whatever that may be. The highlighted Research finds that media practices tend to reinforce common sense understandings concerning 'lower-class' people. Much of this highlighted scholarship finds that this is achieved by presenting negative portrayals of this group by focusing on consistently negative portrayals. As shown below, the media's representation of the 'lower class' is important as it shapes understanding of social roles and can consequently create narrow understandings of the group.

A general acceptance of a dominant ideology is realised through the cultivation of class distinctions through the media. Mike Wayne (2003) looks at the way the media offers negative portrayals of 'lower-class' people in a story about striking airport staff in Britain's *The Daily Mail*. According to Wayne, the story positions the workers as a threat to the wealthier airline customers as their refusal to work until their demands are met is said to directly target the holidays of the suggested 'middle and upper-class' people. Despite the portrayal of the strikers as irrational, it is only towards the close of the story that the paper offers a tenuous attempt at journalistic objectivity. This is because the fact that the workers were only offered a 1.5% pay rise by their employers and happen to live in the most expensive part of the country is disclosed. Wayne uses this example to show how hegemony is never in a fixed state but is rather fluid as it allows for dialogic struggle and contestation

for legitimacy. However, Wayne believes that this is not to say that every opinion gets an equal opportunity to prove its worth as the struggle for meaning through the media is played out within certain parameters and boundaries that tend to be in line with the dominant ideology. Wayne's research would be more pertinent to the topic of the thesis if it was a study of the framing of 'lower-class' people via hegemony as the 'working class' group are a distinct section of society.

Hegemony is an apparatus geared towards emphasising some ideas and positions while subjugating others. Alistair Davidson (2008) defines hegemony as a social process that involves attempting to construct the world through a limited lens. Davidson argues that language particular to hegemony is used to create an artificial common sense. This common sense constructing function of hegemony calls attention to the media's ability to instill a dominant ideology about particular aspects of society. Congruous to this theory of hegemony is James Lull's (2010) concept of the term. Lull states that hegemony ultimately acts as a tool by the media to 'inform' the people to accept the social and political order of the world. Lull summarises the impact of media hegemony as the ability to influence audiences to perceive social roles. This acceptance is only achieved when ideological assertions become embedded as to make them cultural assumptions. Davidson's concept of a constructed reality through language is apt for a discussion surrounding the way in which the media represents the 'lower-class' group, using *Today Tonight* as a case study of this. Lull's similar concept can be used to look at how social roles are constructed on the programme within the stereotype of 'lower-class' people.

Not all views on media hegemony follow the rigid belief that it allows for a view to absolutely dominate an issue. David Croteau, et al (1992) argue in contrast to Davidson and Lull that the fact that dominant ideologies have to be constantly defended when challenged through the media belies the fundamental existence of hegemony and is in fact more indicative of a weakened form of democracy. To exemplify this they refer to a study done by Ryan (1991) which showed how an anti-interventionist group in Central America in the 1980s was able to get views adverse to a dominant ideology heard through the media. Though they may not have radically changed the direction of the debate they did succeed in offering a challenge to the discourse as framed by the news. Although Croteau et al do take a more optimistic tone of the ability of views that contrast with the established ideologies of a society to be heard through the media, they ultimately conclude that this is generally futile. The study highlights the theory that hegemony does not ignore positions which are adverse to the established media discourse; but that antithetical viewpoints are merely subjugated to the dominant media ideology. This will be useful in an analysis of *Today Tonight's* discourse of the 'lower class' as the theories of Croteau, et al show how a dominant ideology can be challenged but ultimately subsumes a differing perspective.

The concept of hegemony is incomplete if the instruments and reasons for its utilisation are not highlighted. Todd Gitlin (1980) identifies schools and the news media as constituting these ideological apparatuses. Despite the fact that hegemony can be utilised by 'ruling class' people to retain the legitimacy of their authority, Gitlin argues that the elites do not directly influence the public through the media. This is fulfilled by the journalists and producers who are a group less powerful than the media owners. Gitlin (1980: 254) summarises the purpose of these hegemonic institutions as, "To formulate the terms of their own unity". So for the powerful to be able to function as a loose alliance with common aspirations and values the

media must create an ideological field within which a dichotomy between the subordinate classes and the powerful is made manifest. Contrary to Gitlin's assertion that the media is used as a tool to retain the status quo favourable to the elites, is the theory of David L. Altheide (1984). Altheide is opposed to the view that the media can be used to assist the elites in retaining their power. Instead he postulates that many journalists are proponents of social change and that the media is a site where power structures are routinely challenged and forced to assert legitimacy because of this. Although he references studies that allegedly show that the media is active in fostering progress, he does not highlight any of these in detail. And though his theory that many journalists have progressive ideologies may be very true, he fails to explicitly show how this translates into activism through the news.

Gitlin highlights how journalistic activism is ultimately restricted by the practices which perpetuate the legitimacy of the media system. In highlighting this, he asserts that top media managers inevitably hire reporters and editors who are generally 'upper middle class' in origin and thus tend to share a similar world view. He offers the view that this is an implicit mechanism that allows for the preservation of a dominant ideology as the repeated formula of recruitment retains the dominant ideology as legitimised by the media. As the media wants to appear objective, the owners tend to allow their news operations to have a fair amount of autonomy over reporting. Similar to the findings of Croteau, et al, Gitlin states this leads to an environment where opposition to the common sense understanding of a society is not rendered non-existent but merely contained within a broader value system. Thus Gitlin's theorem that the tone of the debate and contestation for legitimacy is largely set by a somewhat fragmented alliance of the 'ruling class' is more convincing than Altheide's research which finds that the media should be seen as a site for social activism. To look at

this in detail the thesis will approach *Today Tonight* to examine how ‘lower-class’ people are positioned as a possible challenge to the media’s dominant value system.

The media tends to frame the ‘lower class’ in limited and negative ways, with an emphasis on being social failures. Research on portrayal of the poor by Diana Kendall (2011) and Shirley V. Truong (2012) shows that they are invariably represented as blameworthy for the destitute situation they find themselves in. This is because they are routinely stigmatised as criminals (welfare cheats or greedy panhandlers) or substance abusers. By that same token Jo Owen (2011) finds that the media positions ‘lower-class’ people as non-aspirational or as failures. A parallel can be drawn between these examples and the illustration of framing offered earlier by Wayne, which shows that there is a common trend in the positioning of powerless people as a threat to societal values. Kendall asserts that this is achieved through predominantly focusing on exceptional cases of ‘the poor’. She exemplifies this by stating that there are suggestions that they are routinely accused of creating disorder on the streets and are a drain on taxpayers. Kendall states that because news stories on the homeless and poverty stricken tend to be told in an episodic format the end result is that they do not focus on the wider structural issues that lead to impoverishment. This can be immediately related to *Today Tonight*’s positioning of the ‘lower class’ in characterising them negatively. In order to gain a more complete understanding of the framing of these people through the media than what is offered by Kendall and Truong, this thesis bases its analysis on the more specific lifestyle presentation of the group.

Lifestyle representations of ‘lower-class’ people tend to be characterised by an emphasis on conflict, acting irrationally or engaging in unsocial behaviour. This is the object of research

done by Joseph C. Harry (2004). Harry analyses the discourse of many American newspapers to show that the term 'trailer park trash' is used as a textual marker for negative class stereotyping. Harry's research shows that there are two chief differentiated characteristics of the 'lower-class' group. These are personal characteristics (such as someone's general appearance and fashion choices) and cultural choices (which are linked to somebody's lifestyle and behaviour practices as well as their generalised cultural environment). For 'lower class' people this usually consists of violence markers (such as engaging in domestic violence) or being jailed, being on welfare or being prone to alcohol and drug abuse. Harry concludes that through humour and irony the term 'trailer park trash' provides journalists with a socially sanctioned way of sustaining a form of ideological domination which operates as an indicator of class difference. Unlike Kendall and Truong, Harry only makes an allusion to the wider societal structures that influence class representation. His argument would have been strengthened if he had made mention of hegemony in regard to the media as opposed to the (perhaps unintended) implication that it is the journalists who are the primary decision makers and beneficiaries of 'lower-class' framing, with carte blanche from media structures to do so. However his research is useful due to its specificity of the traits constituting characterisation of the group through the semiotics analysis of the term 'trailer park trash'.

Harry's summary of 'trailer park trash' is a derogative paralleled with the Australian notion of the 'bogan'. The characteristics which constitute these two terms are both utilised to disparage 'lower-class' people. While research has found that this notion of unemployed or 'working-class' Australians is mostly shaped negatively by the media (Anon: 2010), research done by Kay Frances Bartolo (2008: 8) finds that there are common characteristics that shape this stereotype in Australia. She defines the 'bogan' stereotype as established through a combination of, "Drinking alcohol...a lack of education, dirty personal hygiene

habits; and low dress standards... a lack of money...petty crime, free loading [and] reckless behaviour”. Bartolo ultimately concludes that this stereotype is negative as it is meant to cause offence amongst ‘lower-class’ people. This summary of the stereotype is important for an effective analysis of *Today Tonight*’s positioning of the group. Although like ‘trailer park trash’ the term ‘bogan’ is not used in the *Housos* movie report, the general negative characteristics which establish the epithet tend to be employed by *Today Tonight* constantly in regard to framing of the group.

The utilisation of stereotypes to define the ‘lower class’ shows that they can be used as a sense of satire and mockery. Research done by Matt Adams and Jayne Raisborough (2008) finds that ‘disparagement humour’ serves to distance the middle-class group from ‘working-class’ people. Because a stark expression of disgust directed at perceived ‘working-class’ attributes by the ‘middle class’ would be seen as morally insensitive, the researchers argue that humour aims to temper the classist message of the media. They write that despite the humorous and apolitical façade, class distinctions are ultimately fostered by mockery of ‘lower-class’ people in this way. Negative stereotyping is used to create a sense of difference according to Debra L. Merskin (2011) and Richard Dyer (2006). In this way the framing of the poor, Merskin argues should be viewed as an attempt to perpetuate a ‘them and us mentality’ between this group and the rest of society. Dyer calls attention to the ability of the media to employ stereotypes that make distinctions between groups apparent through exaggeration. From this they draw the conclusion that the social practices of the media use hegemony through implicit means to make certain ‘other’ groups appear inferior. Chris Chamberlain (1983) affirms that class ‘imagery’ is generally approached in this same way by Australian hegemonic institutions. He believes like many Marxist critics that this is caused by “the perpetration of ruling or dominant ideas” to create a societal view that benefits them

economically, politically and socially (1983: 2). In order to synthesise these three arguments the thesis will ground them in an analysis of *Today Tonight*. It will attempt to show the theory of difference in action and how this may be a symptom of hegemonic practices through repetitive representations of class imagery.

The main operation of media framing is to offer a truncated perspective of an issue. This is usually done so as to emphasise particular elements while devoting little or no attention to other points. As Gitlin (1980: 6, 254) writes, “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters...[and whose role is to] to certify the limits within which all competing definitions of reality will contend”. Framing then can be viewed as a process where the media is able to assign importance to particular issues while ignoring others. In this way frames are an organisational structure which can assist in creating meaning for audiences through the media on issues. With this ability to make meaning, framing is able to act as a tool of social constructivism. Through the media framing constructs social reality as it, “actively set[s] the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events” (Scheufele 1999: 105). Ghanem and McCombs (2008) draw on the work of Walter Lippmann in the 1920s and state that media images create an imagined pseudo-environment acting as if it were a representation of reality.

Research in this literature review has uncovered a number of dominant themes concerning the issue of ‘lower class’ depictions. It shows that there is a tendency for the media to represent the group in consistently negative ways. These characterisations inevitably emphasise an anti-social and uneducated demeanour. This disparagement is often achieved through humour or

by focusing on individual cases of the 'lower class' as opposed to the structural causes of poverty. The media utilises stereotypes such as these to create a common sense understanding about the poor, and much of the research in the literature review shows that hegemony is culpable in creating these cultural assumptions. As this is specifically achieved through the framing of the group as a deviant section of society; they tend to be constructed as somehow 'different' to the rest of the community. Despite this, the literature review does show that the dominant ideologies that govern the media are not necessarily impenetrable and are able to be challenged. Views adverse to the status quo are not completely neglected when it comes to the framing of particular issues. They are however, confined within the boundaries of the dominant ideology tending to make it difficult to offer an alternative point of view that is presented credibly by the media.

Despite the comprehensive coverage of how 'lower-class' people are represented in the media and the hegemonic processes in play behind depictions of the group, recent research is wanting in an address of a key issue. There are few direct links made between the functioning of hegemony and representations of the group in question. Although there are many sources that look at the common attributes that are assigned to this section of society through the media, it is not referenced in regard to hegemony. The argument put forward by Wayne (2003) comes close to exploring this subject; however he is concerned with representations of 'working-class' people and not the 'lower-class' group. He also does not look at the characterisation of this group in detail and merely focuses on how their union actions are presented. In looking at this issue through *Today Tonight*, this thesis hopes to identify the specific tone of the programme and thus contribute to an understanding of how hegemony may operate to characterise 'lower-class' people.

Approach and Methods

In order to assess presentation of the ‘lower class’ on *Today Tonight*, this thesis aims to highlight three primary issues. The first of these concerns media representation. This thesis aims to analyse and then articulate the ‘lower-class’ characterisations offered by *Today Tonight* primarily from the programme’s broadcast covering the making of the *Housos* vs. *Authority* movie and from another report of the programme called *Housing Horror*. By doing this it will attempt to emphasise what particular features of the group are shown via a comparison and contrast of the two reports. The thesis will glean evidence from these reports to offer keen insight into whether ‘lower-class’ representation on *Today Tonight* is narrow and negative. By the definitions of narrow and negative it is meant that the group may be presented in a limited and consistently one-dimensional way which ultimately portrays them as morally and socially deficient.

This table is used to differentiate the three analysed texts:

Key Texts	Broadcast Date	Length	Primary Characters	Synopsis
<i>Today Tonight</i> Report on Making of <i>Housos</i> Movie	25 October, 2012	5 m: 30 sec	James Thomas: <i>Today Tonight</i> on scene reporter. Beryl (played by Maret Archer): Matriarch of Sunnyvale. Jimmy the Junkie (played by Alex Romano): Primary ‘junkie character’. Unnamed Bold woman:	<i>Today Tonight</i> does a report on the making of the <i>Housos</i> movie. While doing so, reporter James Thomas is frequently confronted by the ‘lower class’ residents. Location: the fictional ‘lower class’

			<p>Inappropriately complains to reporter Thomas that she has not had sex with her partner for a while.</p> <p>Matt White: <i>Today Tonight</i> presenter.</p>	<p>suburb of Sunnyvale in Western Sydney.</p>
<p><i>Today Tonight</i> Report: <i>Housing Horror</i></p>	<p>September 10, 2013</p>	<p>5 min: 22 sec</p>	<p>Bridget Williams: Main subject of the report; is said to be constantly harassed by Kyle.</p> <p>Laura Sparkes: <i>Today Tonight</i> on scene reporter.</p> <p>Kyle Lyons: Antagonist.</p> <p>Accused of harassing Kyle and Bryce.</p> <p>Bryce: Son of Bridget.</p> <p>Helen Kapalos: <i>Today Tonight</i> presenter.</p>	<p>A report that focuses on the harassment Bridget endures from neighbour Kyle.</p> <p>Location: An unspecified lower socio-economic community in NSW.</p>
<p><i>Housos</i> Episode: <i>Junkie</i></p>	<p>22 September, 2013</p>	<p>24 min: 47 sec.</p>	<p>Frankie (played by Paul Fenech): Protagonist.</p> <p>Shazza (played by Elle Dawe)</p> <p>Renzo (played by Renzo Renalto): Centrelink employee.</p> <p>Jimmy the Junkie</p> <p>Cops Mark (played by Mark Duncan) and Richard (played</p>	<p>The 'Junkie' characters go on a robbery spree around Sunnyvale to pay for their drugs.</p> <p>Victims of this, Frankie and Shazza engage in a scam on Centrelink to recoup their stolen losses.</p>

			by Murray Harman): Primary police officers.	Location: Sunnyvale, a fictional public housing commission estate set in Western Sydney.
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The second issue relies on contrasting the report's approach to the 'lower-class' characters that are featured within a typical episode of *Housos*. This will be done through studying the framing of the respective program's representation of the group. It is an attempt to raise the question of how *Today Tonight* approaches the group in a general sense through highlighting the distinctions of the two television shows. The final issue is more theoretically based than the other two and relates to hegemony. Hegemony will be used both implicitly and more directly to look at how stereotypes are presented in line with an attitudinal and common sense understanding of the 'lower class'. The point is to emphasise the functioning of the depictions through the media.

While the primary concern in this thesis is how *Today Tonight* approaches 'lower-class' people through particular forms of characterisation, it is appropriate to contrast it with the subject of its movie report. As *Housos* is a program which offers stereotypes of 'lower-class' people and their environment in a satirical sense, it is important to view how *Today Tonight* draws upon this parody. The important themes in a single episode of *Housos* will be highlighted to raise questions as to how *Today Tonight* uses the characterisations already on offer through the show. It will highlight what elements may be ignored or differ in the programme's coverage of the making of the movie. This contrast will be undertaken by

focusing on key elements of the respective shows. The dissimilarities evident between the approaches of the two shows towards representations of 'lower-class' people are important as they may raise questions as to the underlying differences in discourse.

The text analysis involves drawing attention to language utilisation as well as images and context of importance. Two reports and the episode were watched in their entirety and particular quotes or scenes that add an evidential basis to the argument are then analysed and discussed. This approach contrasts to a more formulaic course of action that would have seen all the texts quantitatively studied (for instance, counting the number of 'negative' words that appear) or a scene-by-scene study. This is desirable as this allows for deeper description and assessment of the way 'lower-class' environments are presented by *Today Tonight*. Claire Anderson (2010: 1) writes that qualitative research is more effective than a quantitative approach as issues can be examined in detail and depth and as a result subtleties about the subject of research can be discovered.

In order to ascertain discourse there needs to be a questioning of the possible hegemonic practices in play behind stereotyping on *Today Tonight*. As Davidson (2008) shows, hegemony is effective in creating an artificial common sense understanding of the world through the media. As hegemony allows for a dominant ideology to pervade media discourse concerning particular issues, it is appropriate to view *Today Tonight* from this standpoint. When representing 'lower-class' people there tends to be a dominant characterisation present on the programme. Therefore there would seem to be a manufactured common sense view of the 'lower-class' group within the overriding discourse of *Today Tonight*. Of course this has to be explored in more detail to gain a better understanding of the possible ideological

assertions in play behind *Today Tonight's* characterisations. That is where an analysis of the specific traits highlighted in the programme must be utilised through the device of a framing analysis.

A framing analysis is useful as it offers a way to look behind the superficial elements of a text. By focusing upon language and tone, an understanding can be made of the approach a text makes to particular subjects. The analysis can also identify key and salient issues within the discourse of a text (Weaver 2007: 143). These are usually ascertained through the assessment of words used, how images are placed within the framework of a text and by looking at the use of context. Although a framing analysis seems like an effective tool in assessing the overall tone of a text, it does possess some weaknesses. The dominant flaw seems to be in the vagueness and ambivalence of what constitutes a frame in the first place. As Deacon et al (2007: 163) writes, "For some, the concept of framing is simply employed in a loose, metaphorical sense with little or no reference to its theoretical or substantive implications". This is clearly a problem as the potency of a framing analysis may be reduced due to an inability in defining what subject is being observed. This is where an analysis grounded in hegemony would be useful to shine a light on the common sense understanding of 'lower-class' people in *Today Tonight*.

In order to assess the characteristics within *Today Tonight* via framing there will be particular emphasis attached to word utilisation. A text analysis is a simple method to take as it allows for a flexible and generalised approach, as Alan McKee (2005: 1) states "When we perform textual analysis...we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text". While emphasising this not quite so methodical approach, the

thesis will point to sentences and words of particular interest within both *Today Tonight* texts which are mostly spoken by the commentators, the reporters of the show or the characters in the report themselves. This is done to try to offer a basis as to the ideological underpinnings of *Today Tonight*. Ruth Wodak (2007: 1) makes a connection between language and ideology, writing that it reflects power structures as it, “is intricately related to beliefs, opinions and ideologies”. Not just satisfied with highlighting the conventions of language on the report as used both by the commentators and the subjects of the reports, it is also integral to look at the utilisation of images and settings in the broadcast. The framing analysis of *Today Tonight* is directed towards attempting to reveal how the programme uses language and highlighting the ideological processes in play.

In analysing the texts there will be particular attention paid to how class is treated as a demarcation point for ‘lower-class’ people in their differentiation from ‘middle-class’ individuals. As seeking to examine the discourse of *Today Tonight* is important in assessing the style of representation, it is doubly imperative to view its relationship with those constructed as being above them in social rank in the programme. This involves examining how the reporters themselves approach the subjects of the *Today Tonight* reports, but is also important in an analysis of *Junkie* when ‘middle-class’ individuals are prominent. In doing so, the expectation is that the *Today Tonight* reports would distinguish between the two classes in the same way and that the approach of *Junkie* would be to present class divisions differently. Of course this will be attended to in more detail in the following section, but it is notable that even if the intrinsic characteristics that make up the ‘lower class’ in all three texts are similar, there can be vast approaches taken to how they deal with and are made distinct to the ‘middle class’ via framing interactions.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

The selected texts provide two key themes related to 'lower-class' representation. All themes show a portrayal of the group as negative and they are all examples of narrow framing. The most common theme characterises the group as fiercely confrontational and aggressive towards other people. In negatively presenting them like this, it is their perceived inferiority which is utilised. More evident in the *Today Tonight* texts, the other primary theme sees the 'lower class' presented as distinct and separate from their 'middle-class' counterparts. Through framing certain negative behaviours they are made to look starkly differentiated against their constructed 'superiors'. The traits found in each text did all differ slightly even when the characteristics were largely similar. It tends to be in the presentation or the angling of the portrayals of the group that allows for some differentiation between the approaches taken to characterisations.

The uniform nature of their demeanour highlights a key silence of the literature review; the antagonistic nature of much 'lower-class' portrayals. While a number of studies highlighted the negative depictions of the group, with Harry (2004) vaguely pointing to descriptions of violent behaviour, they did not specifically stress the presence of confrontational actions carried out verbally. Confrontational and expletive-laden language pervades much of the conduct of the main characters in all three of the texts. The environments they inhabit emphasise a realm which is dominated by hostile behaviour. That the various character relationships are generally portrayed as dysfunctional and fiercely oppositional in demeanour is an element exploited by *Today Tonight* in the *Housos* report. Their anger is usually shown to be irrational as a result of a skewed logic or values. This is inevitably accompanied by an incredible lack of self-awareness as to the unreasonable nature of their anger.

In the report on the *Housos* movie there is clearly an emphasis on this code of conduct. The first aggressive exchange that takes place sees Beryl the matriarch of Sunnyvale confront *Today Tonight* reporter James Thomas. It highlights the aggressive nature of ‘lower-class’ representation. The exchange sees reporter Thomas question Beryl as to why her son and his de facto partner have been arrested by the federal police. Instead of responding in a calm and non-confrontational way, Beryl is immediately angered with this slight provocation. She answers Thomas by yelling “Look! They were just trying to sprinkle Sharon’s mother’s ashes at Ayres Rock. What’s wrong with that?” The ludicrousness of this statement is typified by Beryl’s inability to understand the ridiculousness of her statement. The final statement asking what is wrong with her son and his partner’s actions is indicative of the incapability of ‘lower-class’ people in *Today Tonight* to understand and or to even be cognisant of the fact that their actions should be considered nonconforming or even unlawful. It is generally through this taken for granted approach that *Today Tonight* is able to construct a sense of what is considered correct behaviour and what is incorrect conduct; usually through subtle means. This is achieved by representing the ‘lower-class’ group as a constitution of bad behaviour and the *Today Tonight* reporter as a representative of decent or normal conduct.

Of course, it could be argued that *Today Tonight* is merely showing its audience what to expect from the program *Housos*. In *Junkie* there is an interminable degree of aggressive anti-social behaviour of the characters is highlighted in the report. Depictions of fits of rage are commonplace in much of *Today Tonight*’s positioning of ‘lower-class’ people analysed here. In *Housing Horror*, for example a majority of the exchanges between neighbouring belligerents Bridget Williams and Kyle Lyons are overly aggressive and distinctly

threatening. Both people are shown to be verbally belligerent towards each other and like in the *Housos* report swearing as opposed to effective articulation of language is a constant. This is how the first exchange between the two is carried out: Lyons: “Your brother wound the window down and abused...” Williams: “Control your kids. Stop doing it in front of my [expletive bleeped out]. You’re a [expletive bleeped out] stalker”. Lyons: “Youse are the [expletive bleeped out] problem”. It appears that *Today Tonight* has taken the satirical characterisations of the show and used them in a way that adheres to its constructed understanding of the ‘lower class’. The approach of *Today Tonight* is to narrowly represent the ‘lower class’ and to couch them in negative terms as a result.

Evident within this opening scene to the *Housing Horror* story is an immediate attempt to characterise these people within a negative stereotype. Behind presenter Helen Kapalos as she introduces the story is an image which shows the two belligerents standing oppositional to each other in an evidently confrontational stance. They are positioned as anti-social as their loud and highly hostile argument is taking place on the side of the road in broad daylight. This type of characterisation is evidently on display in all three texts. An aggressive and confrontational demeanour is the dominant character trait of the ‘lower class’ as evidenced within both *Today Tonight* texts but also largely in *Junkie*. Although there are other recurring marks of the group such as poor grammatical skills, a tendency to dress in shabby clothes and a lack of initiative or common sense all of which will be the subject of study later in the thesis, the most negative and manifest is the emphasis on their aggressiveness and conflict prone behaviour.

The tendency of *Today Tonight* to represent the 'lower-class' group in this way on a routine basis could be seen as merely an attempt to 'entertain' its audience and thus achieve success within the commercial realm; however, there seems to be something more at play here. As discussed in the literature review, hegemony enables a universal common sense to be instilled upon members of a particular society as to attempt to retain the current social structure (Davidson 2008). Within *Today Tonight* there seems to be a manufactured common sense concerning the 'lower class'. The characteristics prescribed to them are generally one-dimensional and paint them as nothing more than anti-social and fiercely confrontational. As there is a consistently repetitive nature to these depictions, it perpetuates an artificial understanding of this group on the programme. Although *Today Tonight*'s utilisation of stereotypes seems to have wider ideological implications as evidenced by its re-representation of *Housos* and the *Housing Horror* report, *Housos* must be analysed to understand how *Today Tonight* draws upon it in this way.

The trend to stereotype the 'lower class' 'way of life' is replicated on the actual series, *Housos*. However, the manner in which these stereotypes are deployed differ. On *Housos* there is evidently humorous intent with a satiric bent. The exaggerated actions of the characters and the farcical nature of the situations they find themselves in is more indicative of an attempt at parody than a serious ideological position on 'lower-class' conduct. The differences in the framing of characterisations are subtle but visible enough to warrant a serious analysis. In the episode *Junkie* the residents of Sunnyvale are terrorised by drug addicted neighbours. They continually steal other character's possessions throughout the episode in order to pay their drug dealers off and most scenes end with a prized possession of the main characters' being stolen at random. These include such trivial items as a toaster, a microwave and a baby pram. Although there may be some reinforcement of a common sense

understanding within *Housos* it is generally played for its humorous and entertaining aspects as opposed to its perpetuation of ideological beliefs. This lies in the fact that *Housos* is evidently presenting itself as a parody first and foremost due to its construction of ludicrous storylines which all exaggerate some traits of the 'lower class' while *Today Tonight* presents itself as a window into a real world in line with the current affairs genre.

While *Today Tonight* is definitely geared towards entertaining its audience like *Housos*, the programme's consistently narrow characterisations within a real life sphere create an impression that these depictions are an actuality. This is typified by the first minute and forty three seconds of the *Housos* report where the implication is that the neighbourhood of Sunnyvale is a real public housing commission. On first viewing this report; the viewer is left with the impression that the outrageous behaviour of Sunnyvale denizens is carried out by real people. Although to any discerning eye it would seem that the 'lower-class' people captured on film by *Today Tonight* are exhibiting a degree of exhibitionism and are merely exaggerating their behaviour for the cameras, it is not immediately clear that they are paid actors on the set of the *Housos* movie. This is telling of the approach *Today Tonight* takes towards the 'lower-class' group and communities in general. The programme tends to only frame aspects of their lives that adhere to a narrow conceptualisation of the group's conduct. Through framing, there is a construction of a common sense concerning the 'lower-class' persona which ultimately creates an artificial understanding of the group within *Today Tonight* discourse. As Lull (2010) has stated; media hegemony can act to create an understanding of social roles, which over time become embedded and then a cultural assumption; in the case of the 'lower class' on *Today Tonight*, the group is tightly framed within a derogatory and highly negative role.

The utilisation of satirical characterisations on *Housos* as used by *Today Tonight* is directed towards creating a window that treats an artificial public housing commission as legitimate. Although the viewer is eventually informed that these characterisations are constructed, they are not emphatically told that they are exaggerated performances. Naturally this could be assumed to be common sense and that the audience should realise the satirical elements of the show. As reporter Thomas says two minutes and five seconds into the report, “If you missed the TV series on SBS, think of an unapologetically crass, politically incorrect, but funny satire of life in Australia’s housing estates”. However, the major limitation to this view is that through watching *Today Tonight*’s typical framing of life as a member of the ‘lower class’, the depictions that are emphasised are in many respects analogous to those highlighted in the *Housos* report.

This is evidenced in *Housing Horror*. For example, at the start of *Housing Horror* Williams and Lyons confront each other on the sidewalk in the middle of the street and seem unconcerned about how their vociferousness may impact upon those in the public. Similar disinterest is exhibited by Beryl in the *Housos* report as she aggressively and loudly attacks reporter Thomas while standing over her front fence as he stands beside her on the sidewalk, in full public view. An anti-social and aggressive demeanour is the dominant way ‘lower-class’ people are represented in much of *Today Tonight*’s framing, but there is also another, ostensibly more sympathetic way that must be highlighted in order to show the multi-faceted way that character construction operates.

The practices employed by *Today Tonight* usually paint the ‘lower-class’ as aggressive abusers, but they are less commonly shown to be victims. When they are presented like this it is usually in a more vulnerable light. They are commonly shown to be victimised by fellow members of their group. It mostly paints the subjects as living in an abject situation that they are unable to escape for either monetary reasons or a lack of initiative. This is not particularly apparent in the *Housos* movie report as it is mostly utilised for its facetiousness and does not offer much substantial character interactions or commentary. It is, however, a major component of *Housing Horror* which is presented as a real life window into the lives of ‘lower-class’ people. Williams is clearly under duress from the ongoing harassment that Lyons and his family direct at her. *Today Tonight* does not frame Williams as the vulnerable character directly, instead opting to highlight how the situation is impacting upon her six-year-old son, Bryce. As Williams says: “He [Bryce] doesn’t know what’s happening. He doesn’t know why these people are coming after us all the time and why we have to live like this”. Interestingly, although the programme does make mention of how adverse the circumstances are for Bryce, it is only through his mother that the effects are made most apparent.

Today Tonight tends to position Williams as a protective mother who has to undergo an evening ritual of locking the doors and windows of her house to ensure no harm is done to her son. As Williams speaks to reporter Sparkes, there is a photo placed conspicuously over her right shoulder showing Bryce and herself. To further strengthen the positioning of Williams as the sympathetic mother, at fifty one seconds into the report footage is shown of her reading a story book to Bryce. It is only while in this role, that Williams is shown to be vulnerable; when separated from her son she is shown to be intensely aggressive. As she says: “If Bryce wasn’t there I probably would do something”, implying that she would

physically or at least verbally assault Lyons if Bryce was somewhere else. This adheres more strongly to the predominant characterisation of the 'lower-class' group seen on *Today Tonight* as opposed to the framing of individuals as victims of the world they live within.

Bringing Williams back to the anti-social and aggressive persona which defined her at the onset of the report from the image behind presenter Kapalos further establishes the shaping of her character. This is effectively more in line with the common approach taken to the 'lower class' by the programme. That the decidedly more negative representation of Williams is what dominates the tenor of the report is no accident and ultimately presents somebody who should not be viewed sympathetically at all. It should be noted that although *Today Tonight* did present her as a victim for a short period of time, this was not at all a positive portrayal. This is because she was shown to be unable to effectively use initiative to get herself out of this predicament by either seeking the assistance of other family members or government services such as the police or housing department in order to assist her. This corresponds to Owen's (2011) theory that the 'lower class' are shown to be failures supposedly due to a lack of aspiration to get themselves out of their abject situation. Although it is subtler than the more obviously negative and narrow characterisations of aggressive conduct, it appears that the inability to seek help aims to highlight her lack of common sense or initiative and is effectively used to stereotype the woman negatively.

This shows that the positioning of Williams (and by extension Bryce) as victims has its limits. They may be presented as vulnerable but that does not mean they are to be sympathetically viewed by the audience. The prevalence of Williams as a threatening presence far outweighs her presentation as a victim. There are seven prominent scenes where

she is shown to be starkly aggressive and only four that are starkly vulnerable. Most prominent of these would be in the introduction to the report where presenter Kapalos speaks from in front of a screen which shows Williams matching Lyons in terms of aggressive confrontation. This negates any sympathy the audience may feel for her as a concerned mother.

This more victimised presentation also highlights the negative representation of the environment Williams lives in. Not merely satisfied with depicting 'lower-class' people in a narrow manner, *Today Tonight* has effectively shown the entire neighbourhood which Williams and Lyons resides in to be dysfunctional and unsafe. The creation of environments via framing has been referenced by Ghanem and McCombs (2008) and is said to be a consequence of the media giving priority to particular issues. The highly stressful environment Williams inhabits, calls attention to another aspect of *Today Tonight's* representation of this group, the out-of-control nature of the realm they reside in. *Today Tonight* positions 'lower-class' people as inhabiting an alternative and dangerous world where dysfunctional behaviour is pervasive. As presenter Kapalos says at the opening of *Housing Horror*, "We begin tonight in a neighbourhood that is anything but fun. In fact many residents who there are afraid to step outside their front door day or night". This emphasises the threatening nature of the environment to the rest of society and is further underlined by Kapaloses final line, "Laura Sparkes ventured in". This would seem to imply that the reporter is entering a place unknown to her and markedly different from the 'middle-class' world she usually inhabits. This is articulated by a scene three minutes and thirty five seconds into the story when Sparkes, who is dressed in an obviously 'middle-class' reporter's suit, speaks from in front of a brick fence covered in graffiti.

Today Tonight has a tendency to present its reporters as starkly conventional to the 'lower-class' people who happen to be the objects of their stories on societal dysfunction. As well as highlighting the divide between the actions or behaviours of these two groups, the programme is proficient at emphasising the more superficial differences between the classes. Referenced earlier in regard to reporter Sparkes' appearance relative to the dilapidated lower socio-economic environment, it is also obvious that there are distinctions in appearance when compared with the personal appearances of the main focus of *Housing Horror*, Bridget Williams. At the beginning of the report, for instance, Sparkes is dressed in a dark blue suit jacket, pink shirt and black leather skirt with stockings. She also dons a liberal amount of cosmetic product. In contrast, Williams is dressed in a much more simplistic fashion. Throughout the report she tends to wear a baggy blouse, with tight leggings, wears little to no make-up and has her hair tied into a loose, quite often messy ponytail.

Similar observations can be made about reporter Thomas and his appearance relative to the *Housos* characters in the report on the making of the movie. While Thomas is presented neatly with a precise haircut, black suit jacket and pants with a light blue shirt the characters around him are not presented in such a clean-cut way. Jimmy the Junkie who confronts Thomas is shirtless which not only highlights this inappropriate code of 'dress' but more importantly the plurality of tattoos spread across his torso. When compared to the more conventional appearance of Thomas, this radical style of dress is made more apparent. Jimmy the Junkie also wears a white cap and baggy parachute pants which, like Williams, falls into the category of dressing down. As Jimmy the Junkie is a fictional character, the analysis of his appearance with that of reporter Thomas's has its limits. But when compared to the look

of Williams and the contrast drawn to reporter Sparkes there are definitely similarities in the distinctions to be made between the two texts. As all of the 'lower-class' characters across the two texts are invariably made to look poorly dressed relative to the 'middle-class' reporters, it seems that there is a subtle statement being made. It shows that *Today Tonight* presents this group as dressing in a narrowly poor way when emphatically compared to the show's 'middle-class' reporters. This ultimately builds upon and furthers the construction of the group which frames their behaviour as lazy as they are positioned as not even attempting to dress 'well' despite being showcased on national television.

The introduction to *Housing Horror* has notable parallels with the *Housos* movie report. Although this take on the 'lower class' is decidedly more satirical than *Housing Horror* there are similarities that show the approach of *Today Tonight*. The introduction to the story exhibits the same tone as presenter Kapalos's introduction. Read by presenter Matt White, he says: "The suburban nightmare that is Sunnyvale, where it appears there's no respect for authority, for neighbours or for decency and certainly not for television reporters". Both introductions signify a dismal environment with more than a hint of danger. More subtly they both imply a threat or at least an opposition to the 'middle class'.

The 'middle class' is shown to be almost alien to the residence of the 'lower-class' characters in the *Today Tonight* reports. This may be related to the dominance of individuals with a comparatively higher socio-economic status having control over this media form, and thus viewing the 'lower class' from a position that is far removed from the world the poor actually reside in. Gitlin (1980) called attention to the fact that editors and news reporters tend to be hired because they come from similar 'middle-class' backgrounds to their bosses. A tendency

to represent the group like this could also be related to the position put forward by Harry (2004) that negative characterisation acts as a form of ideological domination by the ‘upper classes’ to create class markers. An example of the ‘middle class’ being shown more positively than their ‘lower-class’ counterparts is when Sparkes is shown to be attempting to speak calmly and sensibly to Lyons forty one seconds into *Housing Horror* in order to ‘attempt’ to calm him down, he is so enraged that he continues screaming at Williams in an unbridled fashion. This calm, more sensible approach is replicated by reporter Thomas, and is how he deals with the intense behaviours of the characters in the *Housos* report.

Although there is generally a uniform depiction of ‘lower-class’ belligerence across the analysed texts, the targets of this antagonism vary depending upon the respective study. While in both *Junkie* and *Housing Horror* the bulk of this conflict concerns two or more sparring members of the ‘lower class’; in the *Today Tonight* report it seems to be reporter Thomas and the media itself that is confronted. The contrast between ‘lower-class’ and ‘middle-class’ environments must be addressed here to get a better understanding of how ‘lower-class’ people are shown to be different from the rest of society. Throughout the report Thomas appears calm, detached and nuanced in his condescending attitude towards the *Housos* characters. This contrasts markedly with the conduct of the *Housos* characters. Thomas is portrayed as reasonable and consequently is acting in an opposed manner to the nonsensical and combative behaviour of those around him. The first exchange between Thomas and a *Housos* character sees a particularly bold woman played by an unidentified actor tell him that her partner has been absent for some time and is wondering when he’ll get home as she wants a, “root”. She then lifts her shirt and shows Thomas her breasts to explain that, “These aren’t going to touch themselves”. Throughout this exchange Thomas ‘appears’ mildly perplexed and uncomfortable when faced with behaviour perceived to be outside the

modus operandi of 'normal' behaviour. However, he retains his air of superiority. The framing of conventional behaviour seems to be subtly constructed by *Today Tonight* as essentially opposed to everything the *Housos* characters do.

As discussed earlier reporter Thomas is presented as out of place with the Sunnyvale environment and its inhabitants. He appears to look down on the characters as a result of their apparently perceived inferiority due to anti-social and abnormal behaviour. His comfortably patronising attitude towards them is best exemplified by a scene one minute and twenty seconds into the report which takes place between Thomas and Beryl. Thomas 'accidentally' calls her 'feral' and then states, "Thankfully Beryl appreciated irony". This condescendingly implies that Beryl should fail to grasp irony as her 'presumed' lack of education would hinder any understanding of this basic human property. Thomas does not appear embarrassed or even apologetic for his remark and progresses to laughing loudly as Beryl states almost subserviently, "I can live with feral". The use of derogatory terms such as this to depict the group is well established by Anon (2010) and Bartolo (2008) in the literature review and shows that the programme is not above utilising explicitly negative words to stigmatise them.

The common tenor throughout reporter Thomas's attitude towards these 'lower-class' characters is that they are beneath his social station and are not to be taken seriously. Their views and practices are presented as so far removed from what is considered conforming behaviour that they are generally shown to be completely opposed to the 'normal' and calm actions of Thomas. This relates to the proposition put forward by Adams and Raisborough (2008) that disparagement humour serves to distance the 'lower class' from the 'middle class' in a manner which obscures the ideological structure in play behind such a process. As a

representative of *Today Tonight*, Thomas inhabits not only the role of a reporter but as an obviously ‘middle-class’ persona following the norms of society. He seems to be ultimately symbolic of what *Today Tonight* considers to be an accepted section of society.

The apparent distinctions between reporters Thomas in the *Housos* report and Sparkes in *Housing Horror* with the ‘lower-class’ subjects of their stories seems to create a class divide between the groups. An initial viewing of these reports shows that there is certainly a difference between the representations of the ‘middle-class’ reporters when compared to the report subjects. As Dyer (2008) and Merskin (2011) have shown in the literature review, the framing of class by the media is quite often utilised to create a sense of difference with the specific intention to make certain groups appear inferior to others. Chamberlain (1983) has opined that the domination of class imagery such as this ultimately benefits the powerful in society. This offers a theoretical understanding of the usage behind the more negative portrayals of ‘lower-class’ people on *Today Tonight* compared to the more conventional depictions of their middle-class counterparts.

The conventional personas of both reporters Thomas and Sparkes border on the banal. It could even be argued that the two are not so obviously defined by the nature of their bourgeois exclusivity towards those of a lower social station, but are more evidently separated by their carefully constructed ‘normality’. Of course that raises the issue that *Today Tonight* paints the ‘middle class’ as ‘normal’ or at the very least conforming to accepted social modes of behaviour. This is particularly prominent when contrasted with the animated performances of the subjects of their reports which would be best described as anti-social and threatening. As mentioned earlier in the thesis the interactions of both reporters with their

‘lower-class’ counterparts results in the reporters acting as voice of calm ‘common sense’ against the dysfunctional, uncontrolled emotions of their foils. Whether it be Beryl yelling at Thomas about the actions of her law breaking son, or Lyons failing to adhere to Sparkes calls for calm as he loudly harangues Williams, these are the scenes which best capture the essence of *Today Tonight*’s approach to ‘lower-class’ representation when contrasted with the ‘middle class’.

Perhaps the most interesting scene in the *Housos* report is when the media is challenged by a ‘lower-class’ character. Research in the literature review has shown that media hegemony is not impenetrable and that views adverse to a constructed common sense view of society as facilitated by ideological apparatuses (Gitlin 1980) can receive attention through the news (Altheide 1984) but are ultimately restricted by power structures (Croteau, et al 1992, Wayne 2003). The challenging of hegemony is on display to a limited degree fifty one seconds into the report. Jimmy the Junkie confronts reporter Thomas and shouts, “You guys film everything and then like fuck it up on TV and make us look like we’re fucking gay”. By referring to ‘you guys’ the character is evidently referring to the narrow approach *Today Tonight* takes when filming stories focusing on the ‘lower class’. This statement references a core approach taken by *Today Tonight*; that of selective framing. As Kendall (2011) has already highlighted, the media tends to create an understanding of this group by chiefly focusing on what can be described as ‘exceptional cases of the poor’. The fact that Jimmy the Junkie is indirectly emphasising this through his almost incoherent monologue shows a direct opposition through exposition of *Today Tonight*’s practices. This is not usually on display in *Today Tonight* discourse and there is no challenge mounted to the programme’s reporter in *Housing Horror* by the ‘lower-class’ subjects of the report. Despite the fact that Jimmy the Junkie is making a vaguely astute observation about *Today Tonight*’s discourse, his

aggressive demeanour, drug addicted persona and inability to effectively articulate his point detracts from the incisiveness of his statement. This adheres to the common tenor of *Today Tonight*'s focus on 'lower-class' people of affixing them with narrow characterisations which ultimately delegitimises their conduct and perceived values.

The representation of Jimmy the Junkie's challenge to authority as ultimately laughable detracts from the legitimacy of the point he is attempting to make. Challenging of authority in *Housos*, however, is not so futile. In *Junkie* there are two main institutions challenged by the program's characters which tend to be successful. These are the police and perhaps more importantly Centrelink. The reason the latter is more important is because it tends to be occupied by more white collar, more 'middle-class' people as opposed to the police who tend to be presented by *Housos* as closer in class relation to the main 'lower-class' characters of the show.

To be more specific in detailing the different approaches taken by *Housos* and *Today Tonight* towards 'middle-class' 'authority figures' it is appropriate to look at the negative ways in which the police officers and Centrelink employees are represented in *Junkie*. While the resident police officers Cop Mark and Cop Richard spend a majority of their time sitting in their patrol car eating fast food, they are also shown to possess similar grammar to the 'lower-class' characters they routinely pursue for committing crimes. For example, ten minutes and thirty seconds into the episode, while watching the main character of the show Frankie, and Jimmy the Junkie tussle over the latter's theft of a flat screen television the exchange between the officers is as follows: "Which one do you want, the wog or the junkie?" "I've always wanted to see what would happen to a junkie if I lit them up with a

fucking taser”. The officers then proceed to chase the two men (despite the fact they have not committed any crimes apparent to the officers) and are easily evaded by them. The conduct of the officers throughout the episode is constantly shown to be corrupt.

Their attitude towards the residents of Sunnyvale is marred with contempt which is countered by the subjects of their malice. At eleven minutes into the episode Cop Mark shouts at Frankie as he jumps over a backyard fence ultimately escaping capture, “Go fuck yourself! Go fuck yourself!” Frankie responds by sticking both of his middle fingers up. The difference between the portrayal of middle-class authority in *Junkie* and the *Housos* movie report is striking. The police are portrayed as little more intelligent and as morally bankrupt as the ‘lower-class’ characters they routinely come into conflict with. This is completely different to the characterisation of reporter Thomas who is largely in control and significantly more rational than the *Housos* characters.

The Centrelink employees tend to be treated differently than the police officers by the episode. Slightly more articulate and intelligent in their interactions with the main characters, case worker Renzo lacks the aggressiveness needed to counter the primary character’s domination over the two. For example, when Frankie’s best friend’s de facto partner Shazza is in the process of attempting to scam Centrelink by falsely claiming the new twin allowance offered by the government, she informs Renzo that she now has nine biological children to take care of (due to being on a new IVF system), he questions this by stating, “Well, I need to see the children to prove that allowance, are they here?” Shazza violently responds by shouting, “Oh yeah, as though I’m going to bring all those kids down here to ya fucking germ infested Centrelink office!” Instead of continuing the argument Renzo appears cowed and

remains quiet. This is similar in a satirical sense to the inability for middle-class reporter Thomas to successfully integrate with the 'lower-class' people he has been planted in with in the *Housos* report. It is comparable to the subtly threatening nature of the characters reporters Thomas and Sparkes encounter in their respective reports.

In the *Housos* movie report, *Today Tonight* tends to treat 'middle class' authority in a less parodic fashion and tends to legitimise it as a result. Although the only individual to appear in the report who could be considered an 'authority figure' due to their perceived professionalism is the reporter Thomas, his conduct sets him apart from the portrayal of the 'middle class' in *Junkie*. While Thomas is constantly shown to be sensible, articulate and generally unflappable when confronted by the strange and often threatening behaviours of the *Housos* characters, the middle class in *Junkie* do not possess all of these attributes. Renzo possesses a degree of awareness about the ridiculous situation that Frankie, his family and friends have gotten them into, but he does not have the assertiveness to openly question the intentions of the characters. He is also not presented as necessarily above breaking rules himself as it is suggested that he eats exorbitant amounts of fast food in his work car despite it being against Centrelink protocol. Unlike reporter Thomas, who is openly patronising and projects an apparently superior front towards the Sunnyvale residents, Renzo is constantly shown to be inferior to the *Housos* characters due to his inability to project a more assertive persona. Although, he is shown to be more articulate and possess more etiquette in his interactions with people than that of Frankie and cohort (unlike the police officers), this is actually presented negatively as it allows domination by the 'lower class' who are shown not to be constrained by the social conventions of good manners.

Interestingly although there is almost a complete opposition of roles between the *Housos* movie report and *Junkie* in terms of 'lower' and 'middle class' representations, they both act to negatively present the former class. In *Junkie* this is obvious as the group's domination and abuse of Renzo shows a complete disregard for the man's wellbeing and thus characterises the 'lower class' as threatening. However, in the *Housos* movie report, although they appear extremely belligerent for even the most trivial of provocations, they fail to get the upper hand in their exchanges with reporter Thomas. The reporter's snide remarks and condescending attitude shows that he is constantly in control of the situation and though occasionally bemused by the behaviour of those around him, is able to calmly counter any of their confrontations. Though the framing of the two programmes effectively emphasise the negative and generally one dimensional behaviour of the 'lower class', *Today Tonight* is clearly more derogatory in their framing. In *Junkie* there is no strong representative of the 'middle class' to effectively act as a critic and to channel the ideological values underpinning an opposition to the conduct of the lower socio-economic characters. As discussed earlier when considering the influence of the 'middle class' on the media, the positioning of reporter Thomas as a clear adherent to this section of society allows him to be a direct embodiment of opposition to the 'dangerous and strange' world of the 'lower class'.

Conclusion

The thesis has highlighted how the 'lower class' is presented within tight, narrow frames by *Today Tonight*. It has found that there is a consistent approach to the way the current affairs programme depicts this group. The findings show that the group are invariably shown to be aggressive and threatening and as a result anti-social towards other people. They are also routinely shown to inhabit dysfunctional environments which are marred by disorderly and untenable behaviour. When *Today Tonight* tends to focus on 'lower-class' individuals those people are painted as possessing these negative qualities. This is particularly evident in the *Housos* report, with all of the characters exemplifying these traits to some degree or another. While this could be said to say more about *Housos* than it does *Today Tonight*, the argument of this thesis is that in fact the opposite is true. In order to give evidential substance to this argument an analysis of *Housing Horror* was undertaken, which showed that the framing of Bridget Williams and Kyle Lyons as members of the programme's constructed 'lower class' are similar to Beryl and Jimmy the Junkie in the *Housos* report. They all fall within the confrontational, irrational and (usually) downright indefensibly aggressive positioning of the group in the discourse of the two reports.

This negative trend is particularly emphasised when the 'lower class' are depicted in opposition to those constructed as being above them in social status. The superiority of the 'middle class' in both the *Housos* report and *Housing Horror* allows for the clearest differentiation between these reports with that of *Housos* itself. In *Junkie*, the upper hand is invariably given to the main 'lower-class' characters. Although it could hardly be said that Frankie or Shazza and their cohort are presented positively or even substantially in the episode, those who represent the 'middle class' realm of society, Cops Mark and Richard and

Centrelink employee Renzo are also negatively depicted for separate reasons. While the latter embodiment of the group is shown to be subtly more intelligent by virtue of better articulation than Shazza and Frankie (the characters he primarily interacts with), he is constantly cowed by and fails to have effective skills in dealing with the group. This may be seen as more indicative of a negative approach taken to the 'lower class' as their failure to adhere to the system is exemplified by opportunistic attempts to scam Centrelink. However, it should be noted that throughout *Junkie*, Renzo is never shown to be explicitly 'above' the group. In relation to making correct decisions, Renzo is little better presented than the 'lower class' in the episode due to his questionable decisions involving breaking Centrelink rules and failing to call Shazza out for her obvious scam. Cops Mark and Richard are presented even more negatively as their behaviour towards Frankie and Jimmy the Junkie is as aggressive and threatening as these people they pursue.

The reason why these findings are important is because it shows that through *Today Tonight's* contrastingly different presentation of 'lower to middle class' interactions, there are much different ideological processes in play. The 'middle class' as represented by reporters James Thomas and Laura Sparkes in the programme are not at all intimidated by or engage in the anti-social behaviour of the subjects of their reports. Instead they are shown to be either indifferent (Thomas) or more sensibly and socially responsible (Sparkes) than their represented 'inferiors'. The implication here is that through drawing on the characterisations already on offer in *Housos*, *Today Tonight* not only focuses on the stereotyped depictions already on offer, but through emphasising a more positive angle of the 'middle class' makes these negative depictions seem more adverse by comparison. This has been shown to adhere to the programme's created common sense understanding of the 'lower class'

Despite finding substantial evidence of narrow and negative ‘lower-class’ depictions on *Today Tonight*, the methods employed for the thesis have their limitations. There is a weakness in assessing only one report of *Today Tonight* to give substance to an analysis of the *Housos* report. This makes it more difficult to argue with certainty that the characterisations on offer in *Housing Horror* are indicative of the programme as a general rule. By focusing on only one other report, it is more difficult and potentially specious to make claims about the discourse of the show. Almost contradictorily, however, the limited nature of the thesis is also the main strength of the examination. It has allowed for a more detailed analysis than would be offered by a summary of several or more *Today Tonight* reports. Because of this, the thesis has been able to explore the various language utilisation, character framing and comparison and contrast of the two reports with enough detail to offer an argument that highlights specific evidence which shows something about *Today Tonight*’s approach towards ‘lower-class’ people.

In the first sentence of this thesis, it was noted that representation of the ‘lower class’ through the media had not been explored to the extent of the depiction of other groups in society. The point of this thesis was to bridge that small gap. It has only done so in a minor way as the focus was on isolated stories aired by *Today Tonight* and not the media in general. However the research was able to contribute via its analysis of how *Today Tonight* tackles ‘lower-class’ people by drawing on *Housos*. It has drawn attention to narrow framing and negative representations. This is an important social issue as by further stigmatising these already vulnerable people, the media is contributing to the disadvantage of the group. Ultimately this thesis has attempted to show that the media allows for individuals who do not usually possess

satisfactory life chances to be further downtrodden by an institution dominated by people who do.

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