ABSTRACT
          Two studies used multidimensional scaling to uncover
viewers' spontaneous, largely implicit interpretations of Dallas
(American) and Coronation Street (British), two soap operas in a
genre of social realism that explicitly aims to parallel or directly
contribute to the symbolic world of the viewer. The results bear upon
the discipline of social psychology and cultural studies, and reveal
the importance of gender, power, and morality in viewers'
interpretations of the programs. The findings for the two programs
were very different in that femininity was seen to be conventional in
Dallas, but matriarchal in Coronation Street, and morality and power
were seen to play different roles in the two programs. The study was
particularly concerned with three categories of people--academic
psychologists, researchers in cultural studies, and the general
public--who watch and variously interpret television programs. The
differences between, and problems within, the disciplines of social
psychology and cultural studies, insofar as they deal with the mass
media, illustrate how television contributes to the social reality of
the viewer. Further research is necessary in this area. (3 tables, 7
figures, and 43 references). (CGD)

ED293530

Viewers' Interpretations of Soap Opera:

The Role of Gender, Power, and Morality

Sonia Livingstone
Department of Experimental Psychology
University of Oxford

PAPER PRESENTED TO THE 1986 INTERNATIONAL
TELEVISION STUDIES CONFERENCE

R013055

2

Social Psychology examines the effects of television, but neglects the structure and viewers' interpretations of programmes. Cultural studies examines the structure but not the interpretation of programmes. There is no theoretical integration between these enterprises.

Two studies are reported which use multidimensional scaling to uncover viewers' spontaneous, largely implicit interpretations of characters in Coronation Street and Dallas. The results bear upon both research enterprises and reveal the importance of gender, power and morality in viewers' interpretations. Femininity in Dallas is conventional, in Coronation Street it is matriarchal. Morality and power play different roles in the two programmes.

Of all the people who enjoy, discuss, monitor, and for different reasons, watch and variously interpret in various ways television programmes, I am concerned with three categories of people. These three categories are the academic psychologist, researchers in cultural studies, and the general public. The issue I wish to address is that of how television contributes to the social reality of the viewer. I shall approach this issue by discussing the differences between and problems within the disciplines of social psychology and cultural studies insofar as they deal with the mass media, and suggest some potential areas of integration, both theoretical and empirical, for research on the relation between television programmes and the viewers' social understanding.

Academic psychologists' "readings" of programmes are largely implicit, detectable only from close examination of the assumptions underlying their experiments on the effects of television. Psychologists rarely spend time analysing or even describing the programmes or genres with whose effects they are concerned, partly because of their largely implicit behaviourist semantics. From references to 'incorrect comprehension', 'biased recall', and 'developmental deficits', one can detect the assumption that programmes, indeed social stimuli in general, are so transparent, unambiguous, and unitary in meaning as to require no analysis. In other words, the transmission of a programme is held to lay bare a simple and obvious meaning such that viewers can be judged right or wrong in their interpretations. While the dual assumptions or a passive viewer and a transparent text have earned psychologists some scorn from other disciplines, they have also caused problems within psychological research, and have contributed to the general disillusion with the 'effects' enterprise (e.g. Roberts & Bachen, 1981). Indeed, if

then their communication with viewers will be misconstrued. It seems fair to say that psychologists tend to study the closed and denotational aspects of programmes and miss those more open, rhetorical or connotational aspects with which the viewer is most involved and where their own opinions and knowledge have the greatest role to play. In other words, psychologists often study a different programme from that experienced by the viewers, for psychologists and viewers make different readings.

Rather than steaming ahead with 'effects' research on an ever-larger scale (Noelle-Neumann, 1983) I believe we should slow down and think again. Let us now take seriously what is taken for granted in other domains:

(1) Cognitive and socio-cognitive psychology take for granted the constructive and schematic nature of perception and representation, as well as the concept of levels of preconscious and conscious processing (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979). While the latter point complicates our research methodologies, the former challenges all notions of uptake, miscomprehension or inaccurate perception, and representation devoid of other social knowledge. So, within mainstream psychology there exists a much more complex and active conception of the perceiving subject, standing in a different relation to the 'stimulus'. However, the 'stimulus' has not been reconceptualise in complementary fashiond.

(2) Literary criticism, semiotics and cultural studies take for granted the complexity of textual semantics, with their concepts of unlimited semiosis, rhetoric, closure, levels of meaning, presupposition, and communicative aim (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). This stands in direct contrast to the text as stimulus view of psychology.

The first point is gradually being recognised by psychologists

5

studying the media. In interpreting a programme, it is argued that viewers draw upon the information presented by the program, their past experiences with the program and its genre, and their own personal experiences with the social phenomena (institutions, relationships, personalities, and explanations) referred to by the program. So, before television can have behavioral, attitudinal or cognitive effects, a program must first be perceived and comprehended by viewers (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and Roberts, 1978, Reeves, Chaffee, and Tims, 1982). To the extent that viewers' representations of a program are a distortion, selection, or transformation of the original, the program's consequences will also be affected. However, the latter point, concerning textual semantics, still is largely ignored by psychologists. Those media researchers who recognise textual complexity tend not to be those concerned with the psychology of the viewer or, with some exceptions, with the interface between the two. Yet for the study of televisions' effects on viewers, we need to be conceptually clear about exactly what we think may effect what, and with what causal power.

The second set of programme readers then are those in the area of cultural studies, semiotics of the media, etc. They apply the analytic tools gained from the study of 'high' culture, namely literature, to that of popular culture (Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson, & Stewart, 1981, Newcomb, 1982, Masterman, 1984). Such analyses are often illuminating about both the programmes themselves and, for Marxist-oriented researchers, the culture and organisation which produced them (Hall, Hobson, Lowe, & Willis, 1980).

More recently, however, this area has also come to recognise certain inherent problems in its aims and assumptions. Specifically, the attempt to discover the true, hidden meaning of texts has led to: a crystallisation or reification of the text (Eco, 1979); a neglect of the interface with the reader; a failure to discover a touchstone of truth,

6

i.e. a relativism in text readings by different researchers, and last

but not least, a wealth of impenetrable jargon. The concern now is to

determine the ways in which texts mean, engage or anticipate their

reader, open up or close down possibilities, and so forth. Thus any

analyses of television programmes must embrace rather than ignore the

interpretative role of the viewer, for this is anticipated in the

creation of programmes. Let me quote from Jonathon Culler:

> "Instead of taking the proliferation of interpretations as
> an obstacle to knowledge, can one attempt to make it an
> object of knowledge, asking how it is that literary works
> have the meaning they do for readers? ... A semiotics of
> literature is thus based on two assuptions, both of which
> can be questioned: first, that literature should be treated
> as a mode of signification and communication, in that a
> proper description of a literary work must refer to the
> meanings it has for readers; second, that one can identify
> the effects of signification one wants to account for. ...
> Such a semiotics would be a theory of reading and its object
> would not be literary works themselves but their
> intelligibility: the ways in which they make sense, the ways
> in which readers have made sense of them." (Culler, 1981, p.
> 48-50).

This is now a project closer to that of psychologists: often

recent writers in the two domains use similar concepts, for example the

Gestalt schemata of both Receptions theorists and social cognition, or

have similar aims, for example to study the realised text (Eco, 1979),

namely that which results from the interaction of text and reader,

instead of the virtual text (of interest to structuralists) or the

effects on the reader (of interest to psychologists). This shift in

focus, from the meaning of the text to the intelligibility of the text

parallels a shift in focus within psychology from the effects of

television towards how television can have effects: in all a shift from

asking what to asking how.

I do not wish to minimise the differences between the two

enterprises, for each is embedded in a very different intellectual

tradition and each is hostile to what is often seen as the naive

empiricism or ideological waffle of the other! However, there are

certain ways forward, one of which I shall pursue. The real reason for this project, however, concerns the third category of person, the viewer.

Ultimately, of course, the viewers are the focus of all this theorising. Their readings, the choices or interpretations which they make and the importance of television programmes to them have been very much neglected, although there are some notable exceptions to the neglect of viewers' experience of television (Hobson, 1981, Morley, 1980). Literary critics generally, and often those in cultural studies argue against the empirical investigation of the role of the reader or viewer in contributing to the meaning of the text, despite their own arguments which suggest text analysis is incomplete without this. They argue that such investigation is unrewarding: the results can easily be anticipated and often contribute little to the understanding of literary texts. While these arguments are justly motivated by the desire to avoid the psychological reductionism or individualism of experimentation, there are social psychologists engaged in empirical research with similar motivations (e.g. Moscovici, 1984). Moreover, neither of the above excuses is acceptable: even foreseeable results need demonstration, and furthermore, what is forseeable is often only so in retrospect. Results are harder to foresee when the readers are the general public, as they are for the media, and not one's students or collegues, as when reading literature. But more importantly, as a social psychologist, my concern is not so much with the role viewers may play in illuminating the meaning of texts, but instead is with the role that television texts may play in illuminating the symbolic world of the viewers.

My aim, then, is to conduct research into viewers' interpretations of television programmes which goes some way towards effecting an integration between the above two domains of media research, psychology and cultural studies. This research draws upon those theories and assumptions of the two domains which I have indicated above show certain compatibilities or overlap in terms of the interaction between text and viewer, and it should provide results which make sense to both domains. Naturally, any research can only deal with one small aspect of a problem, and I shall briefly justify two restrictions I have placed upon my research. The first is that I have only investigated interpretations of soap opera, in particular _Dallas_ and _Coronation Street_.

Soap opera is a genre of social realism (Dyer et al, 1981), and therefore it explicitly aims to parallel or directly contribute to the symbolic world of the viewer. It comprises relatively open texts (Allen, 1985), texts which maximise the interpretative role of the viewer by inviting application of the viewers' personal and social knowledge. It presents a wide range of characters and issues, particularly it includes as many female as male characters, and it is viewed for a wide range of motivations (Cantor & Pingree, 1983). Finally, it is, of course, one of the most popular genres of television programming.

Secondly, I selected one, major aspect of soap opera, that of characterisation. This was because this has aroused the interest of various media researchers (e.g. Buckman, 1984, Allen, 1985, Dyer et al, 1981), because it relates clearly to various psychological theories (e.g. person perception (Schneider et al, 1979), stereotyping (Bem, 1981, Markus, 1977)), and because it is a prerequisite for various important theories of media effect (e.g. role-modelling (Tuchman, Daniels, & Benet, 1978), identification (Eisenstock, 1984), para-social interaction (Noble, 1975)).

9

The first and most simple justification is that of describing a very common experience: how do viewers experience soap opera characters and according to what basic themes? However, having such a description, and also important, methods for obtaining such descriptions, has value in relation to the proposals and problems of both social psychological and cultural studies research.

Let me give some examples of typical psychological research, and indicate how a knowledge of viewers' interpretations of characters could be valuable. Firstly, consider the correlational research exemplified by Gerbner and his coworkers. Some of this research finds significant correlations between, say, stereotyped attitudes and amount of television viewing, and some does not (Hawkins & Pingree, 1983). This research has been refined by correlating endorsements of particular attitudes with the frequency of viewing programmes believed to encourage those attitudes (Alexander, 1985), but still with mixed results. The problem lies in knowing what to correlate with what. I suggest that the programme themes which viewers find most salient, or around which they construct their own interpretations might be the locus for any attitude/viewing correlations.

Secondly, researchers have attempted to demonstrate children's comprehension of, and therefore potential influence by, programmes by examining whether they can correctly or incorrectly recall the narrative. The potential for such paradigms (Collins, Wellman, Keniston, & Westby, 1978) might be extended if one knew which themes viewers considered irrelevant and which they used as the basis for organising their understanding, as it is in relation to the latter would one expect to find most 'effects'.

both place increased emphasis upon the role of the viewer in actively making sense of television programmes. Both examples also emphasise the importance of relevance: as Grice has made clear, in a communicative process, the concept of psychological concept of relevance is central in clarifying which, of a set of possibilities, was in fact selected.

My interest is how to study the ways and extent to which the media reinforce or alter people's cognitive world view, to study the media's contribution to the symbolic construction of reality. Other researchers have been more concerned with the role of the media in relation to behavioural or personality issues, specifically research on role-modelling, imitation and identification. This research is concerned precisely with television characters, but the mediational role of interpretation and representation of these characters has received little attention.

While there has been a very just concern with the distribution of television role models - few women, violent men, incompetent elderly people - the cognitive representational aspect is also important: of the characters presented, viewers select particular models, and their criteria, interpretations, and constructions are important mediating factors additional to the importance of the set agenda provided.

Finally, for research on parasocial interaction (Noble, 1975) - the way in which people appear to treat television characters as they do real-life aquaintances - the way in which people interpret the characters and the relation of this to their interpretation of real-life people, is an open issue.

Let me turn now to the viewpoint of semiotics and cultural studies, with its increasing interest in psychological issues. This research domain makes two types of claim regarding the ways in which viewers interpret or represent television characters: (1) viewers

11

identify in programmes the same themes or basic codes which textual analyses suggest they must? (2) these themes fit the formal structure frequently proposed by such researchers, namely that of binary oppositions.

The concept of oppositions is sometimes used rigorously (Silverstone, 1981, Patte, 1975, Berger, 1931) and sometimes loosely (Coward, 1984). For example, in drawing parallels between the Royal Family and the Ewings, Coward writes: 'These conflicts and problems are expressed through a series of oppositions in the narrative. It is the function of the characters to carry one or other of the terms in the opposition' (1984, p. 165). Thus texts are frequently analysed by identifying the basic oppositions around which the text is structured, thereby going beyond the manifest level typically of concern to psychologists to the deeper, connotative meanings. The concept of oppositions is often incorporated within a more complex semiotic theory of the text, and therefore of text reading, whereby the oppositions describe the paradigmatic, rather than the syntagmatic aspect of meaning, namely the similarities and contrasts created at any moment in the narrative (Allen, 1985). The openness in the text, Allen argues, lies in the paradigmatic aspect of the programme, in the meanings created by the contrast with what might have happened, with the alternatives which were possible but not selected. The text of a soap opera cannot be identified as any particular episode, but instead consists of the sum total of all previous episodes. This is because the paradigmatic aspect is established through the characters' interrelations over time and is often present not 'in' the text itself so much as in the text's reference to its own past, to the viewer's memory. Thus perceptions are framed and informed by past conflict, contrasts, and judgments, and actions - gossip, advice, sarcasm, gain their meaning by reference both backwards in the history of the

12

general wealth of social and moral knowledge. If one accepts such an analysis, and I think it has much to offer, then an investigation of whether binary oppositions underlie viewers representations- of characters, and of what those oppositions are, will also give us a handle on plot development: scene-setting, disruption, tension and resolution may be understood in part as the playing out of the various central oppositions of the text.

I have now introduced the notion of testing out cultural studies notions of character representation in terms of the oppositions that viewers 'should' identify as central if the text is to be made meaningful. Let me now reintroduce the psychology versus cultural studies theme and claim that psychological theories about the basic themes which underlie person, and presumably, character perception can also be tested in relation to television characters. And to pursue the notion of oppositions, it is convenient that the main theories of person perception also propose bipolar dimensions as the interpretative tools for making sense of the complex texts presented, whether they be television or the social world. Thus of all the possible ways in which links might have been created between psychology and cultural studies (e.g. via story grammar research, or schema theory), I have capitolised on the parallel concepts of oppositions and dimensions in the two domains to pursue one possible area of integration.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON CHARACTER REPRESENTATION

Turning now to my empirical research, I shall report two studies of character representation, one of Dallas and the other of Coronation Street. These programmes were selected as prototypical American and British soap operas and they differ on many dimensions. The research falls into two phases.

The first phase asks whether viewers have a stable and consensual representation of the characters in these soap operas. Clearly if they do not, then the research possibilities I have outlined will not be possible. Multidimensional scaling (Kruskal & Wish, 1978) was selected as the appropriate method because an exploratory rather than a hypothesis-testing procedure was required initially to determine which underlying dimensions of character representation emerge spontaneously from subjects' judgments. The task requires subjects to sort the characters in terms of their similarity of personality, a deliberately general criterion, and the analysis makes explicit the criteria implicitly underlying their judgments. This is achieved by generating a spatial model which positions the characters according to the most explanatory or basic dimensions which underlie judgment. Conceptual similarity or dissimilarity between characters is represented by proximity or distance in multidimensional space. The advantage of this method is that subjects' judgments are not affected or constrained either by the theoretical assumptions of the researcher or by the task of making their underlying criteria explicit.

The second phase involves the interpretation of the space. This is achieved by operationalising various theoretical predictions of the oppositions or dimensions. Rated attributes of the characters are fitted statistically onto the character representation: those which do not fit, or only fit poorly, are considered irrelevant to the viewers' representation, while those which fit closely are taken to be those themes, or semantically close to those themes, which implicitly underlie the viewers' character representation.

For reasons of space, the studies for the two programmes will be described simultaneously and unless otherwise indicated the procedure for the two studies was identical. Both studies are reported more fully elsewhere (Livingstone, 1986, a & b). In order to test the

14

Dallas study was replicated using both a separate subject sample and a different method of data collection. There are two widely-used methods of obtaining implicit similarity data for MDS analysts (Jones, 1983): pair-wise similarity judgments (not reported here) and free sorting of characters into similar groups. A high degree of similarity between the solutions produced by the two methods provides evidence of a robust and general solution (Kruskal and Wish, 1978). For Coronation Street, only the sorting method was used.

PHASE 1

THE CHARACTER REPRESENTATION FOR DALLAS AND FOR CORONATION STREET

Method

Questionnaire and Procedure

(a)   The 13 central characters in Dallas at the time (December to February 1984-5) were as follows:. J.R. Ewing, Bobby Ewing, Pam Ewing, Jenna Wade, Sue Ellen Ewing, Miss Ellie Ewing, Ray Krebbs, Donna Krebbs, Lucy Cooper-Ewing, Cliff Barnes, Katherine Wentworth, Clayton Farlow, and Sly (surname unknown - J.R.'s secretary).

(b)   Twenty one characters in Coronation Street, eleven women and ten men, were considered to be both longstanding and central to the programme: Ken Barlow, Deidre Barlow, Vera Duckworth, Jack Duckworth, Terry Duckworth, Kevin Webster, Mike Baldwin, Curly Watts, Sally Waterman, Ivy Tilsley, Brian Tilsley, Gail Tilsley, Billy Walker, Emily Bishop, Mavis Riley, Rita Fairclough, Bet Lynch, Betty Turpin, Percy Sugden, Hilda Ogden, and Alf Roberts.

The character names were typed onto separate slips of paper. Each subject received the slips, several paper clips, and the following instructions:

"Each of the slips of paper in this envelope has the

15

name of a Dallas/Coronation Street character typed on it. You are asked to sort the 13/21 characters into piles according to how they appear to you in the program. You may make as many piles as you want, and you can put any number of characters in each pile. If you don't think a particular character 'goes with' any other (or if you don't know who a character is), then put it on its own. Characters put into the same pile should be perceived by you as having similar personalities to each another, and as having different personalities from the characters you have put into other piles. Feel free to rearrange your piles until you are satisfied."

Subjects for Dallas

The 45 subjects (36 women and 7 men) were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for their participation. Demographic data on 2 subjects were missing. Subjects came from a wide range of occupations and ages. Thirty three of the subjects viewed Dallas 'regularly', 7 'fairly often', and 3 'sometimes'. Most had been watching Dallas for three years or more (n=30), 10 had watched for two years, and 3 for one year. The subjects knew all the characters, with the exception of three subjects who did not know Sly.

Subjects for Coronation Street

The 58 subjects were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for participating. There were 47 women and 11 men. This imbalance was due to the difficulty of obtaining men who viewed the programme, despite efforts made to obtain male subjects. Otherwise, efforts were made to obtain a varied group of regular viewers, so as to approximate the actual viewing population. Twenty two subjects were under 30 years old, 30 were between 31 and 60, and 6 were over 60. There were 14 homemakers, 18 white collar workers, 9 professionals, 4 unskilled workers, 2 unemployed and 11 students. Fourteen subjects had watched Coronation Street for between 2

between 10 and 20 years, and 18 had watched for longer than 20 years. Thirty one subjects claimed to watch the programme twice a week (i.e. every episode), 22 watched once or twice a week, and 5 watched less than once a week. Finally, all subjects knew all the characters with the exception of 6 subjects who did not know Sally Waterman, and one each who did not know Billy Walker, Percy Sugden, and Kevin Webster.

Results

Subjects' character sorts were converted into a similarity matrix where each cell (i,j) in the matrix was the number of subjects who placed objects i and j together. These data were then entered into the MRSCAL program (Roskam, 1981). The coefficients of alienation for the MRSCAL solutions for all dimensions from 5 to 1 were: 0.052, 0.061, 0.093, 0.172, 0.369 (Dallas) and 0.086, 0.102, 0.142, 0.261, 0.459 (Coronation Street). Plotting these against dimensionality revealed an 'elbow' at three dimensions for both solutions, so the three-dimensional solution was chosen for interpretation. These spatial solutions are shown in figures 1-4. For each programme, two faces of the three dimensional solution are presented in the figures.

To determine whether the Dallas solution replicates that obtained using the similarity rating method (not reported here), the stimulus coordinates from both solutions were entered into a canonical correlation analysis (Schiffman, Reynolds, and Young, 1981). The results of the canonical correlation analysis are presented in Table 1. This shows that the 'sorting' space successfully replicated that from similarity ratings. The first two canonical correlations are highly significant, and the third one is moderately significant.

PHASE 2

The above studies set out to discover viewers' implicit representation of the characters in <u>Dallas</u> and <u>Coronation Street</u>. Converging operations point to a robust and generalizable three-dimensional solution. The low stress obtained for both spaces indicates a high degree of consensus among subjects. Replication of the <u>Dallas</u> space corroborates the high degree of consensus in subjects' implicit character representation. Multidimensional scaling methods have uncovered a stable, consensual representation of television characters. The solutions can be interpreted in either or both of two ways, namely intuitive labelling of the dimensions by the researcher or the projection of property ratings for the set of stimuli onto the solution to determine which of a set of properties actually fit the space (Kruskal and Wish, 1978). The second method overcomes the subjectivity of the first method, but interpretation is restricted to the particular set of properties measured, normally those of <u>a priori</u> theoretical interest. .. To maximize both the flexibility of the interpretation and the explanatory or hypothesis-testing potential of the emergent space, both methods will be used.

Any selection of properties to be tested as dimensions for the space must be limited on practical grounds. For the two programmes, the following dimensions were selected as being representative of the theoretical sources which 'should' explain the space. Implicit Personality Theory (Schneider et al, 1979, Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979) and Gender Stereotyping Theories (Bem, 1981, Markus, 1977) are both social psychological theories of person perception and would be expected to predict the major dimensions underlying people's cognitive

people. The oppositions listed below as predictions from cultural studies are culled from the following sources: morality in soap opera in general is suggested by refs; Mander (1983) suggests the oppositions for Dallas, Dyer et al (1981) suggest those for Coronation Street. The remaining predictions were based upon an interpretation of the emergent spaces.

Source	Dallas	Both	Coronation Street
Implicit Personality Theory		Intelligent/Unintelligent	
		Rational/Irrational	
		Sociable/Unsociable	
		Warm/Cold	
		Active/Passive	
		Excitable/Calm	
		Hard/Soft	
		Dominant/Submissive	
Gender Stereotyping Theories		Masculine/Not masculine	
		Feminine/Not feminine	
Cultural Studies		Moral/Immoral	
	Does/not value Family		Central/Peripheral to Community
	Does/not value Organisational Power		Middle/Working Class
Interpretation of Spaces	Pleasure/Business-oriented		Sexy/Not sexy
	Complex/Not complex		Approach to Life (Modern/Traditional)
			Mature/Immature
			Roguish/Not roguish
			Staid/Not staid

20

Questionnaire and Procedure

The ratings were presented to subjects in the form of a grid consisting of 13/21 columns, labeled with the names of the characters, and with 15/18 rows, labeled with the rating scales, as defined above. For each rating scale, one pole corresponded to a '1' and the other corresponded to a '7'. The following instructions were given to subjects:

> "This questionnaire asks about your views of the characters in Dallas/Coronation Street. Over the page you will see a grid which has the names of the main Dallas/Coronation Street characters across the top and a list of personality traits down the side. You are asked to describe each of the characters in terms of each of the personality traits. Use the scale from 1 to 7 at the top of the page to make your judgment and base your judgment on your impression of each character in general as they appear in the programme."

An example was given of how to fill out the grid.

Subjects for Dallas

The twenty subjects were all viewers of Dallas who volunteered to complete the questionnaire. Most of the 13 women and 7 men were students. Most (11) had been viewing Dallas for three years or more; 5 for two years, 3 for about one year, and one did not answer. Regarding the frequency of viewing, 7 viewed 'regularly', 6, 'fairly often', 5 'sometimes', and two subjects omitted to answer. The subjects knew all of the characters except for four who did not know Sly or Katherine.

Subjects for Coronation Street

The 21 subjects were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for participating. There were 15 women and 6 men. This imbalance was due to the difficulty of obtaining men who viewed the programme, despite efforts made to obtain male subjects. Otherwise, efforts were made to obtain a varied group of regular viewers, so as to approximate the actual viewing

between 31 and 60. There was one homemaker, 6 white collar workers, 5 professionals, 5 unemployed people and 4 students. Six subjects had watched <u>Coronation Street</u> for between 2 and 5 years; 8 had watched between 6 and 10 years, 4 had watched for between 10 and 20 years, and 3 had watched for longer than 20 years. Five subjects claimed to watch the programme twice a week (i.e. every episode), 14 watched once or twice a week, and 2 watched less than once a week. Finally, all subjects knew all the characters with the exception of 2 subjects who did not know Sally Waterman, and one who did not know Billy Walker.

Results

The mean property ratings were calculated for each character by collapsing over subjects. This data was then entered into the PROFIT program (Roskam, 1981), together with each of two stimulus configurations. The configurations used were those of the first study in (a) three dimensions and (b) two dimensions. This made it possible to identify the interpretative gains made by the addition of the third dimension.

PROFIT (Chang & Carroll, 1968) is a method of fitting externally rated properties for a set of stimuli to a MDS space for those same stimuli through the use of multiple linear regression. If the space was constructed through an implicit method, such as similarity judgments or a sorting task, then PROFIT can be used to relate the implicit or emergent dimensions to the explicit or theoretically derived properties. It outputs each property in the form of a vector projected onto the space whose direction describes the direction in which the property increases through the space.

Tables 2 and 3 shows the degree of fit between the fifteen rated properties and the character space. The R-squared values for the properties projected onto the first two, and onto all three, dimensions

of the space show the gain in information by including the third

dimension. Table 5 also shows the significance of the R-squared values.

Kruskal and Wish (1978) recommend interpretation only those properties

whose R-squared is significant beyond the 0.01 level. The character

representations with the significantly fitting properties are shown in

figures 5 - 7. As no properties increased in significance for the Dallas

representation, only the two-dimensional space is shown, but for

Coronation Street two faces of the three-dimensional representation are

shown with the fitted properties.

DISCUSSION

(1) Relevant and Irrelevant Oppositions

From the emergent character representations and the fitted

properties, a number of conclusions can be drawn about both the nature

of viewers' interpretations of the programmes and about the theories

which aim to account for these interpretations. The spatial

representations show two things: the relations between the rated

attributes and the characters, and the inter-relations between the

attributes themselves.

Person perception theories suggest variants on a basic scheme in

which evaluation (social and intellectual); potency; and activity

comprise the basic, orthogonal dimensions which organise people's

representations of others.

In Dallas, activity (active/passive and excitable/calm) was only

weakly relevant; in Coronation Street, it did not appear at all in the

space. In both programmes, intellectual evaluation

(intelligent/unintelligent and rational/irrational) was irrelevant.

Social evaluation (sociable/unsociable and warm/cold) was strong in

Coronation Street and partially present for Dallas. In both programmes,

potency (dominant/submissive and hard/soft) was very important as a

23

basic theme of representation. As predicted, potency and evaluation were fairly orthogonal to each other.

In all, the predictions of Implicit Personality Theory were only partially supported. In relation to soap opera characters, viewers do not find relevant certain themes which psychologists have considered basic, but the concept of power is clearly relevant. In these respects, the results for the two programmes were very similar, suggesting both problems and strengths for the theory. ...

Gender stereotyping theories make two basic predictions. Firstly, in order to allow for androgynous interpretations (in which masculine and feminine qualities are compatible), masculinity and femininity should be orthogonal. Secondly, if masculinity and femininity are negatively correlated, as suggested by earlier stereotyping theories, then masculinity should be semantically related to concepts such as power, activity, rationality, intelligence, while femininity should be related to their opposites.

The findings for the two programmes were very different. For Dallas, although more women than men occupy the weaker and softer half of the space, viewers do not perceive the characters in terms of the attributes of masculinity and femininity. The programme thus is seen to present mainly stereotypic women and men, in line with much else on television, but it also includes a few counterstereotypic female characters. These characters do fit lower-level stereotypes: Miss Ellie as matriarch, Katherine as the wicked witch. These counterexamples were sufficient to prevent a fit for the gender attributes in the representation.

For Coronation Street, masculinity and femininity fit the space very well, and are highly negatively correlated. This supports the strong emphasis placed on gender by both cultural studies (Dyer et al, 1981) and social psychological theories (Bem, 1981), although these

viewers make a clear distinction between the male and female characters when thinking about their personalities. However, femininity in Coronation Street is not of the traditional variety which is related to irrationality, softness, or weakness, as social psychologists propose, but is more matriarchal in character. Femininity is related to maturity, warmth, centrality to the community and sociability, in contrast to the rather cold and childish masculinity of the male characters. This was anticipated by cultural studies: "Coronation Street is amply supplied with the strong, middle-aged women characters which the conventions of soap opera seem to require [and who] must remain independent". (Lovell, 1981, p. 50). Lovell goes on to suggest the subversive significance of such portrayals, in contrast, say, to that of Dallas: "Coronation Street offers its women viewers certain 'structures of feeling' which are prevalent in our society, and which are only partially recognised in the normative patriarchal order" (ibid, p.50). Interestingly, the female characters are not perceived as more powerful than the men for gender was orthogonal to potency.

Considering the predictions of literary/semiotic approaches, Mander's interpretation of Dallas is strongly supported. The major theme of morality emerged. From its relation to the other two properties that she proposed, it can be seen as a conflict between traditional family values and the power of organisations to destroy or undermine those values. Viewers are clearly sensitive to the opposition of good and bad, for the same dimension emerged strongly in Coronation Street as well. This connects with the interest of recent researchers (e.g. see Masterman, 1984) in soap opera as a form of contemporary myth: characters are consensually perceived according to moral themes. These themes are not, however, those of individual quest or the vindication of truth (Silverstone, 1981), but instead concern the tangle of human

relationships and their dynamics as they face everyday minor and major personal dilemmas. Notice that in Dallas morality and power are independent of each other, whereas in Coronation Street they are related such that good means weak and bad means strong. This suggests that the programme is presenting a rather negative view of morality, and the suggestion that dominance must be bad and submission good. In both programmes morality is unrelated to gender, so women are presented as neither more nor less moral than men, which rather detracts from the cosy warmth of the matriarchal theme (in Dallas, gender is instead related to power).

Jordan (1981) also emphasises the importance of characters being central or peripheral to the community and that this is related to being working or middle class respectively. Centrality was only marginally significant and class was irrelevant, the viewers did not discriminate among characters implicitly in terms of their class. As with the other attributes which did not explain the representations, the absence of class as a relevant opposition can be explained in one of several ways. One could reject the theory which proposes a particular opposition: Implicit Personality Theory is thus partly wrong, gender stereotyping theories are even more wrong, Mander is right about Dallas, and Dyer et. al are rather less perceptive about class than they are about gender. Or, one could say, particularly in relation to the readings made by cultural studies, that theorists and viewers simply have different knowledge and interests and therefore make divergent readings. A stronger claim argues that these attributes may indeed be central to viewers' interpretations of characters, and their absence in the representations indicates false consciousness on the part of the viewer. Of course, one could instead blame the methodology, for although the sorting task was fairly natural and implicit, the operationalisations of theories into rating scales was relatively crude, and the method as a

whole cannot capture the complexity of Dyer et al's analysis. The question is whether it can capture its essence.

In relation to the analyses of cultural studies, the picture is also mixed. But there is, I believe, sufficient support for their insights into soap opera as interpreted by viewers. In all, the present data suggest that both social psychological theories and textual analyses are needed to understand viewers' intepretations of soap opera characters. For cultural studies, the results suggest that theorising should not proceed too far and presume too much in ignorance of the actual viewers. For social psychology I would say the opposite: important themes such as morality, sexuality, and family values are neglected by theorists overconcerned to reduce the complexity of everyday understanding to a few, fundamental dimensions.

Let me now summarise the results from the two programmes by translating statistical findings into the formal oppositional structure familiar to semioticians. Each set of concepts below is more or less independent of the other, and each is internally related.

(1) <u>Coronation Street</u>

MORAL	IMMORAL	
Staid	Roguish	
Soft	Hard	
Submissive	Dominant	

27

FEMININE	MASCULINE
Mature	Immature
Warm	Cold
Central	Peripheral.
(Sociable)	(Unsociable)

(3) Coronation Street

MODERN	TRADITIONAL
Sexy	Not Sexy

(1) Dallas

MORAL	IMMORAL
Warm	Cold
For Family Values	Not For Family Values

(2) Dallas

FEMALE	MALE
Submissive	Dominant
Soft	Hard
Pleasure-oriented	Business-oriented
Doesn't Value Power	Values Power
Passive	Active

So, for Dallas, we have a representation which presents the contrast between a (mainly female) world of pleasure, weakness, and femininity and a (mainly male) world of organisational power and hard-headed business. The programme does not portray the former,

hedonistic world as either more or less moral than the latter, business
world, and with the power split equally between the 'goodies' and the
'baddies', the fight between them will be equal and endless.

For Coronation Street, the representation centres on three
distinct themes. Fortunately the stakes are not so high as in Dallas;
for the first theme aligns morality and power so that the immoral
characters are seen as more powerful than the moral. Secondly, the
matriachal women are opposed to the more cold and peripheral men with no
real exceptions although there is an area of overlap. This theme is
unrelated to morality and power, again in contrast to Dallas, so the
roles of men and women are equal in these respects. The final theme is
that of approach to life and sexuality, and suggests a conflict between
traditional, even nostalgic, domestic stability in the face of the
exciting and new challenges of the future.

(2) The Status of the Character Representation

There are several points to be made about the status of the
representations produced by the present research: One could regard the
representations in at least three ways.

(a) As a picture in the head. Regarding the representation in its
most literal form, this is what it appears to be. This is, however, the
least useful way to regard it. Easy as it is to imagine people 'having'
character representations which they carry about in their heads and
match up to television characters, noting discrepancies and so forth,
such a view is unacceptable for several reasons. It is psychologically
reductionist. It reifies knowledge, creating the problem of its relation
to interpretation. It brings with it all the limitations of semantic
memory theories in cognitive psychology. It is also philosophically
incoherent.

(b) As a model of interpretative processes. The representation can

interpretative response to the characters in the programme. of the many diverse resources and strategies with which viewers approach a programme, and of the many themes, narratives, and judgments which the programme presents to viewers, this is a summary representation of the emergent product of their interaction over time. This is a more dynamic approach with more theoretical potential. it is still, however, open to the charge of psychological reductionism, allowing for a very private viewer/programme interaction.

(c) As a 'Social Representation'. This concept, taken up and developed recently by Moscovici (1984) and colleagues is an attempt to further 'socialise' social psychology by integrating psychological processes of perceiving and interpreting social phenomena with the socia context of knowledge, prejudices, consensual images and myths, political atmosphere etc. within which individuals are constituted. As an idea, it is most in common with (b), although it is also compatible with (a): the representations could be taken as cultural pictures in the group mind, generally available representations of social origin of which individuals each 'have' a version. But the combination of (b) and (c) is the most interesting, and avoids the problem of reification. I suggest that the character representations obtained in the present research should be regarded as a researcher's handle upon the consensual, conventional, historically-contexted intepretations and interpretative processes which relate to, in this case, soap opera characters. Neither 'in' the programmes nore simply the knowledge and biases of people ignorant of television, these interpretations emerge from the communication between the two. This more dynamic view of character representations, which emphasises relations between rather than features of the characters, relates also to the understanding of plot. One can describe a structured set of interrelations between the

through a plot may be located. Any particular plot may be understood in terms of this character space, by describing the movement of characters along the dimensions or oppositions of the space, with the consequent changes in character positions setting up narrative tension for the re-establishment of the original arrangement.

AND FINALLY...

Comment should be made on the methodology adopted to gain a 'handle' on viewers' interpretations. I do not wish to claim that this is the only way interpretations could be represented, or that these representations capture every aspect of interpretations. My strategy was to see how far we can go by representing interpretations as spatial models with bipolar dimensions. However, if the methodology was truly inappropriate, the space could not statistically have been produced, and no attributes could have been fitted to it. The success of the method therefore justifies these initial assumptions. It also opens the way forward for futher research on viewers' interpretations of television, whether this is research on different programmes or genres, or on the comparison between the representations of different categories of different viewer, or on the testing of predictions from different theories.

The following quotation from Foucault illustrates the central position which this spatial metaphor plays in semantic and semiotic theory. This quotation also illustrates the neat fit between the sorting task carried out by the subjects and the theoretical work which I have expected of the resultant representations.

> "a tabula, that enables thought to operate upon the entities
> of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into
> classes, to group them according to names that designate
> their similarities and their differences - the table upon
> which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected

space ....a homogeneous and neutral space in which things
could be placed so as to display at the same time the
continuous order of their identities or differences as well
as the semantic field of their denomination ... On what
'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes,
analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many
different and similar things? What is this coherence -
which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by
an a prior and necessary concatenation, not imposed on us by
immediately perceptible contents? ... A 'system of elements'
- a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and
differences can be shown ... ... is indispensable for the
establishment of even the simplest form of order."
(Foucault, 1970, preface, xvii- xx)."

Foucault makes no mention here of the origin of the 'tabula',
except to maintain that it is neither necessary nor phenomenal.
Throughout this paper I have deliberately fudged the issue of the
determination of the character representations. Clearly representations
derive from both the structure of the television text and the motives,
schemata, and knowledge of the viewer, as well as from their mutual
cultural background. Viewers' representations of characters must be an
interactive product of all three: they are 'realised' texts of complex
origin. Yet I cannot see how to separate these empirically if, with an
interactionist perspective and a rejection of the ideas of independantly
existing texts, one can have no independent access to texts prior to
being read or to viewers ignorant of television texts. The relative
power of the text to impose upon or direct the viewer and the power of
the viewer to interpret or select from or transcend the text is an
important question to which there is no simple answer. We still need to
find ways of studying, say the 'preferred' readings or hidden meanings
of the text, and, say the interpretative strategies of the viewer. In
other words, we need to study the means by which both text and viewers
attempt to exert power, before we can see who 'wins'. Are viewers more
receptive or constructive? Are texts more indeterminate or directive?
This is one research project which I see for the future. Yet uncertainty
regarding the origins of the representations does not prevent study of

32

their nature and consequences. If we treat them as Moscovici's social representations - existing social phenomena - then another question for psychologists is that of how they the representations connect with and contribute to people's world view.

	Canonical Correl.	Squared Can. Corr.	Eigenvalue	Proportion	Approx. F	Probability
1	0.98712	0.97451	38.231	0.8650	22.034	0.0001
2	0.91212	0.83194	4.9503	0.1120	9.8563	0.0003
3	0.71002	0.50413	1.0167	0.0230	9.1499	0.0144

34

Property	R^2 (2 dimensions)	R^2 (3 dimensions)
Sociable	0.384	0.377
Warm	0.769 ***	0.799 **
Intelligent	0.439	0.407
Rational	0.406	0.410
Dominant	0.779 ***	0.766 **
Hard	0.807 ***	0.765 **
Active	0.511 *	0.635 *
Excitable	0.219	0.190
Masculine	0.312	0.557
Feminine	0.361	0.550
Moral	0.876 ***	0.897 ***
Family values	0.554 *	0.573 *
Organis. power	0.708 **	0.819 **
Pleasure/Business	0.550 *	0.665 *
Complicated	0.267	0.323

*	$p < 0.05$
**	$p < 0.01$
***	$p < 0.001$

35

Coronation Street

Property	R^2 (2 dimensions)	R^2 (3 dimensions)
Intelligent	0.269	0.276
Rational	0.213	0.273
Sociable	0.407**	0.479**
Warm	0.436**	0.437*
Active	0.157	0.125
Excitable	0.183	0.262
Hard	0.706***	0.804***
Dominant	0.485**	0.582**
Feminine	0.548***	0.664***
Masculine	0.724***	0.698***
Central to community	0.276	0.375*
Working Class	0.351*	0.314
Modern approach	0.370*	0.740***
Mature	0.408**	0.463*
Sexy	0.140	0.628***
Roguish	0.823***	0.888***
Staid	0.500***	0.721***
Moral	0.755***	0.850***

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Allen, R. C. (1985). Speaking of Soap Operas. Chapel-Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Alexander, A. (1985). Adolescents' soap opera viewing and relational perceptions. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 29(3), 295-308.

Ashmore, R. D., & Del Boca, F. K. (1979). Sex stereotypes and implicit personality theory: toward a cognitive-social psychological conceptualisation. Sex Roles, 5(2), 219-247.

Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender Schema Theory: a cognitive account of sextyping. Psychological Review, 88(4), 354-364.

Berger, A. A. (1981). Semiotics and TV. In Adler, R. P. (Ed), Understanding Television: Essays on Television as a Social and Cultural Force. New York: Praeger.

Buckman, P. (1984). All for love: a study in soap opera. London: Secker & Warburg.

Cantor, M., & Pingree, S. (1983). The Soap Opera. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage.

Chang, J. J., & Carroll, J. D. (1968). How to use PROFIT, a computer program for property fitting by optimising nonlinear or linear correlation. Bell Laboratories, Murray Hill, New Jersey 07974.

Collins, W. A., Wellman, H., Keniston, A. H. & Westby, S. D. (1978). Age-related Aspects of Comprehension and Inference from a Televised Dramatic Narrative. Child Development, 49, 389-399.

Comstock, G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M. & Roberts, D. (1978). Television and Human Behaviour. New York: Columbia.

Coward, R. (1984). Female Desire.

Culler, J. (1981). The Pursuit of Signs. London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul.

Dyer, R., Geraghty, C., Jordan, M., Lovell, T., Paterson, R., Stewart, J. (1981). Coronation Street. British Film Institute Television Monograph no. 13.

Eco, U. (1979). The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of

Texts. Indiana University Press.

Eisenstock, B. (1984). Sex-role differences in children's identification
with counterstereotypical televised portrayals. Sex Roles, 10(5/6),
417-430.

Fiske, J., & Hartley, J. (1978). Reading Television. Methuen.

Foucault, M. (1970). The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human
Sciences. London: Tavistock.

Hall, S., Hobson D., Lowe A., & Willis, P (Eds). (1980). Culture, Media,
Language. Hutchinson.

Hawkins, R. P., & Pingree, S. (1983). Television's influence on social
reality. In Wartella, E., & Whitney, D. C. (Eds), Mass Communication
Review Yearbook, 4.

Hobson, D. (1981). Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera.

Jones, L. E. (1983). Multidimensional models of social perception, cognition
and behavior. Applied Psychological Measurement, 7(4), 451-472.

Jordan, M. (1981). Realism and convention. In Dyer, R., Geraghty, C.,
Jordan, M., Lovell, T., Paterson, R., Stewart, J. (1981). Coronation
Street. British Film Institute Television Monograph no. 13.

Kruskal, J. B. & Wish, M. (1978). Multidimensional Scaling. Sage University.
Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, series
no. 07-001. Beverly Hills and London: Sage.

Livingstone, S. M. (a) The Implicit Space for Dallas Characters: A
multidimensional scaling approach. Unpublished paper.

Livingstone, S. M. (b) The Implicit Space for Coronation Street Characters.
Unpublished paper.

Lovell, T. (1981). Ideology and Coronation Street. In Dyer, R., Geraghty,
C., Jordan, M., Lovell, T., Paterson, R., Stewart, J. (1981). Coronation
Street. British Film Institute Television Monograph no. 13.

Masterman, L. (ed.) (1984). Television Mythologies: Stars, Shows, and Signs.
London: Comedia/MK Media Press.

Mander, M. S. (1983). Dallas: The Mythology of Crime and the Moral Occult.
Journal of Popular Culture, 17(2), 44-50.

Markus, H. (1977). Self-Schemata & Processing Information about the Self.
Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 35, 63-78.

Morley, D. (1980). The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding. British
Film Institute Television Monograph No. 11.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M.
Farr & S. Moscovici, (Eds), Social Representations. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Newcomb, H. (Ed.), (1982). Television: the critical view. Oxford: Oxford
University Press.

Noble, G. (1975). Children in Front of the Small Screen. Sage.

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1983). The effect of media on media effects research.
Journal of Communication, 33(3), 157-165

Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1957). The Measurement of
Meaning. University of Illinois Press.

Patte, D. (1975). Structural network in narrative: the Good Samaritan. In S.
Wittig (Ed.), Structuralism: An Interdisciplinary Study. Pickwick.

Reeves, B., Chaffee, S. H., & Tims, A. (1982). Social Cognition and Mass
Communication Research. In M. E. Roloff and C. R. Berger (Eds), Social
Cognition and Communication. Sage.

Roberts, D. F., & Bachen, C. M. (1981). Mass Communication Effects. Annual
Review of Psychology, 32, 307-356.

Roskam, E. E. (1981). The MDS(X) Series of Multidimensional Scaling
Programs. Program Library Unit, University of Edinburgh.

Schiffman, S. S., Reynolds, M. L., & Young, F. W. (1981). Introduction to
Multidimensional Scaling: Theory, Methods, Applications. Academic Press.

Schneider, D. J., Hastorf, A. H., & Ellsworth, P. C. (1979). Person
Perception. Addison-Wesley Publ.

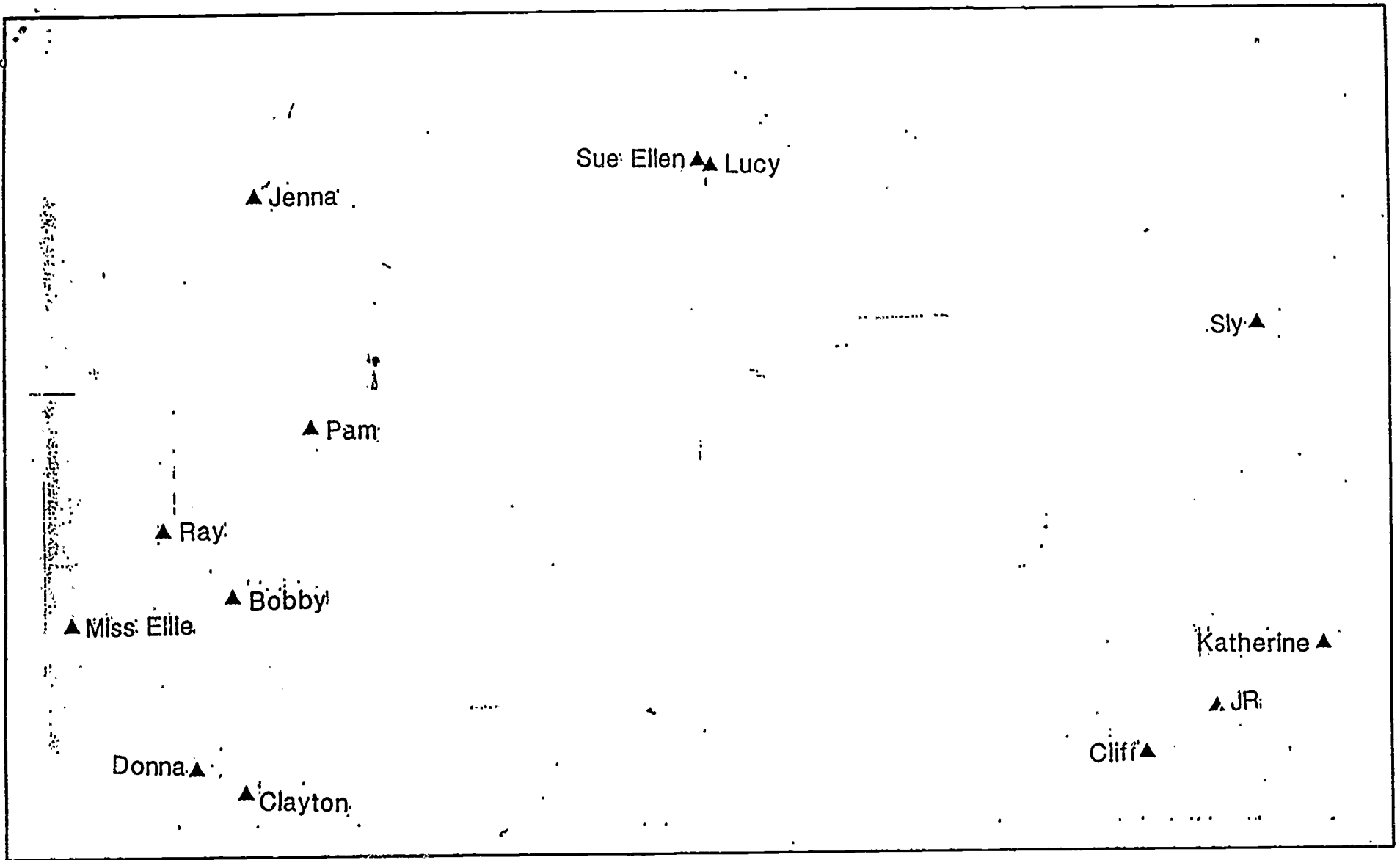Silverstone, R., (1981). The Message of television: Myth and narrative in

contemporary culture. Heinemann.

Tuchman, G., Daniels, A. K., & Benet, J. (1978). Hearth and Home: Images of

Women in the Mass Media. New York: Oxford University Press.

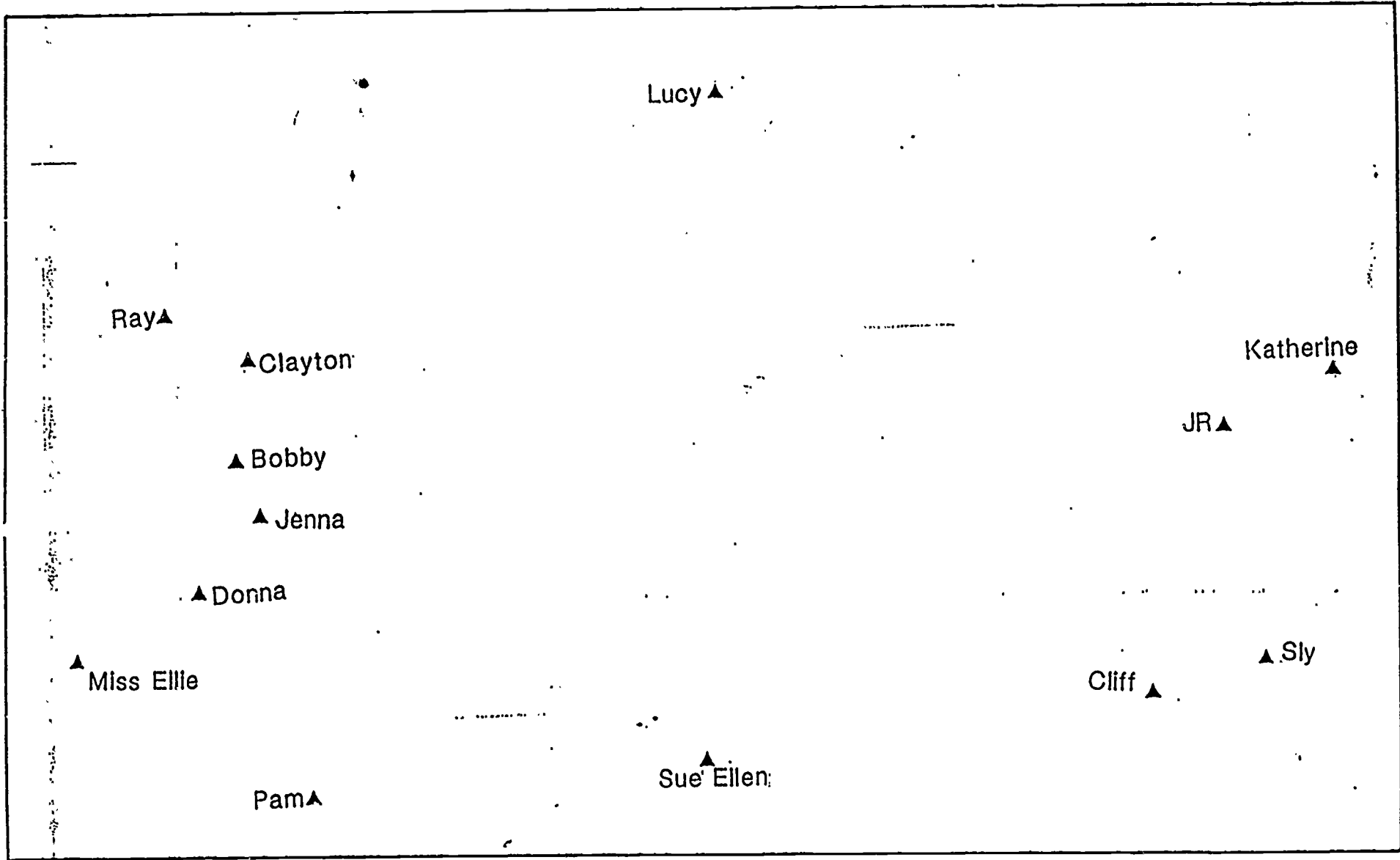FIGURE 1: MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING SPACE FOR DALLAS CHARACTERS

DIMENSION 2

DIMENSION 1

41

42

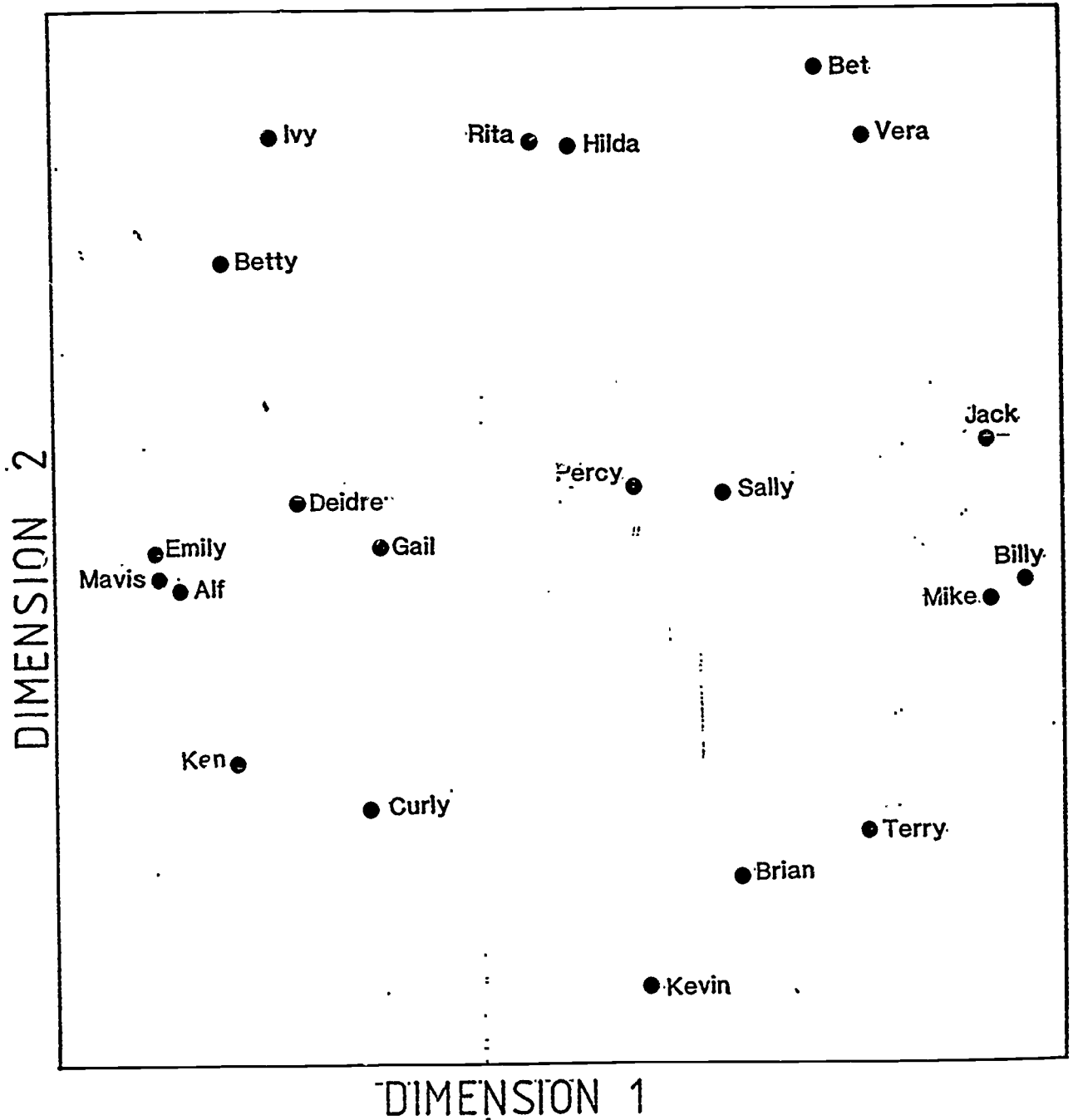**FIGURE 2: MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING SPACE FOR DALLAS CHARACTERS**

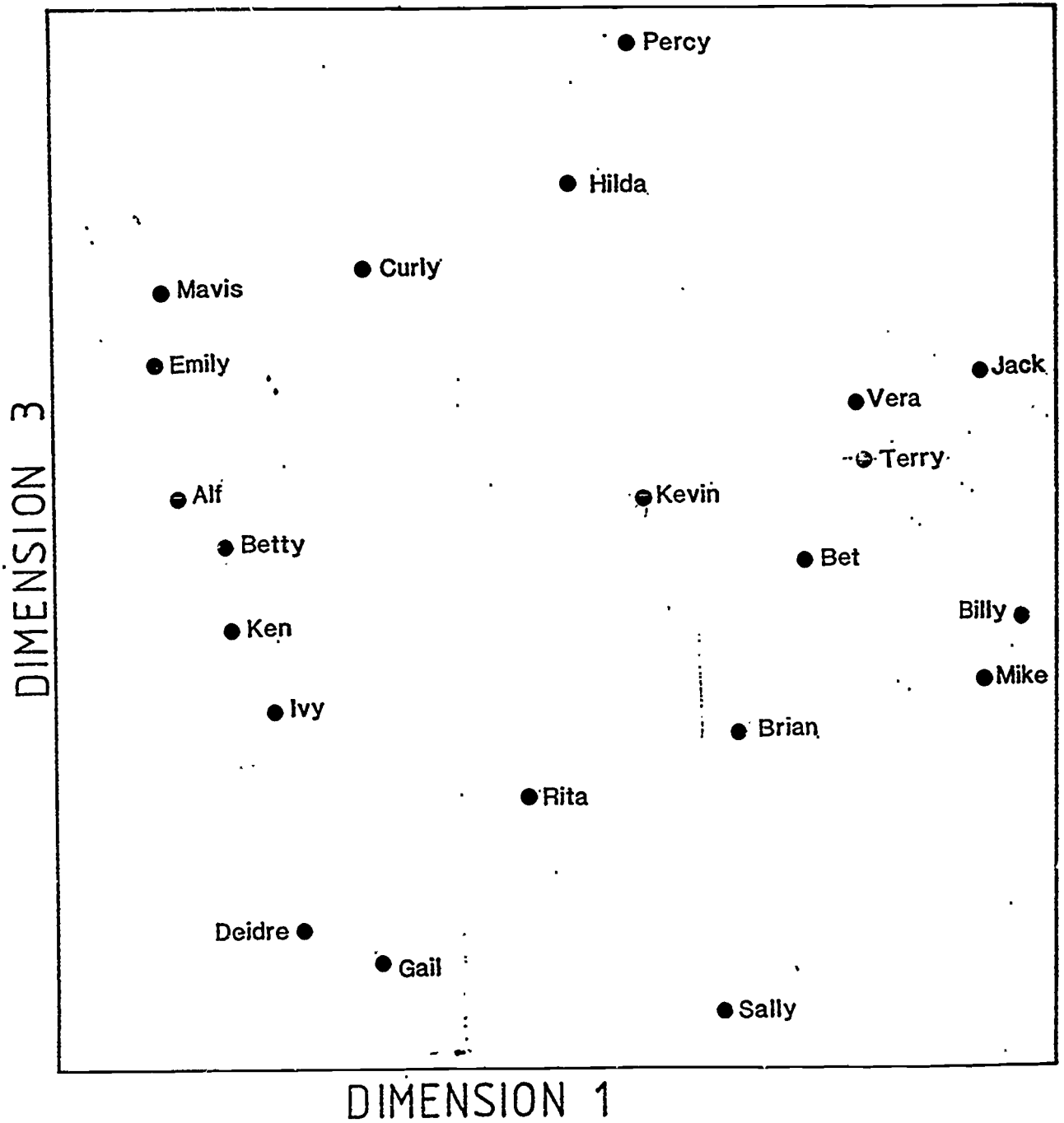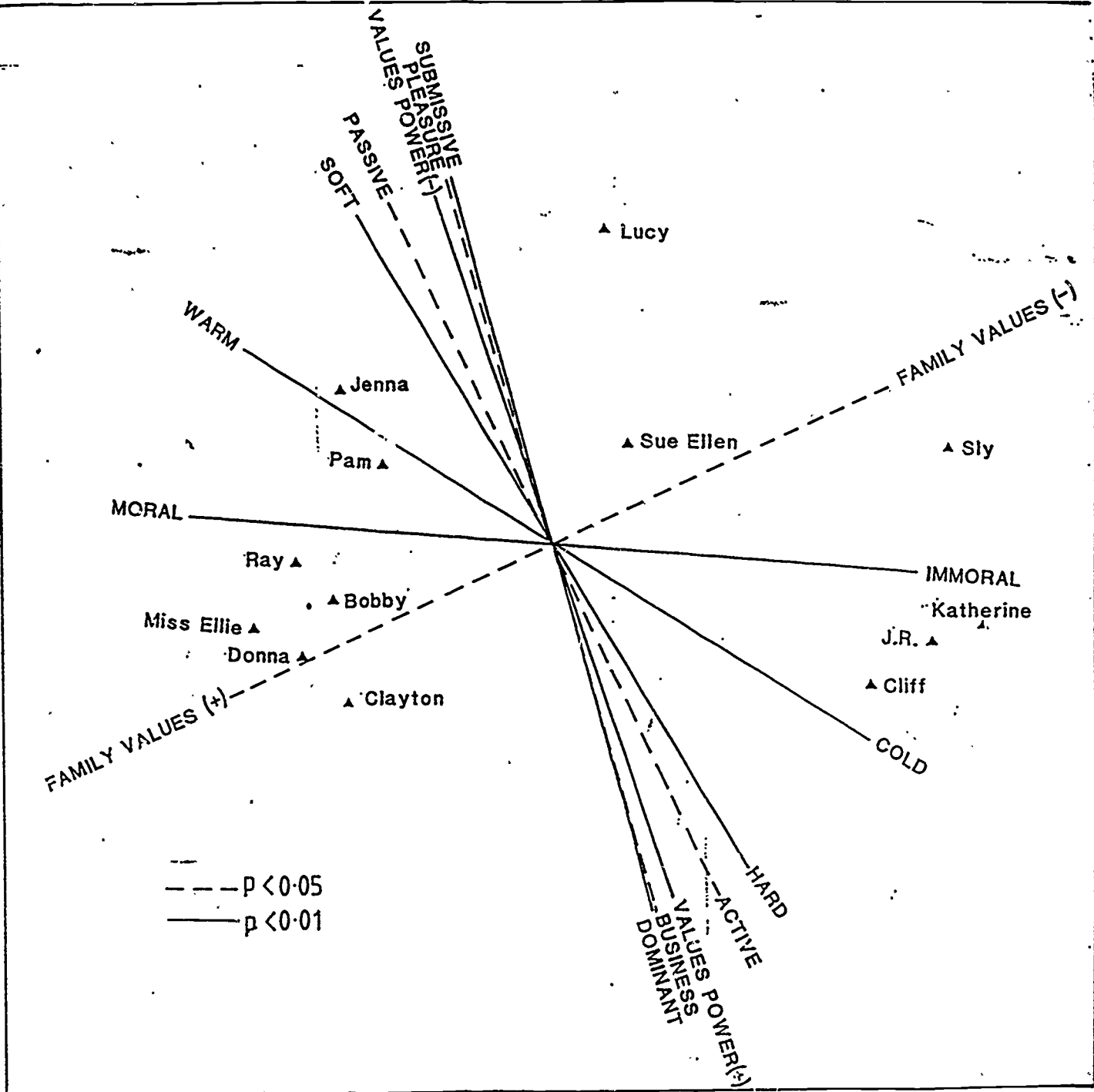FIGURE 3: MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING SPACE FOR CORONATION STREET CHARACTERS

FIGURE 4: MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING SPACE FOR
CORONATION STREET CHARACTERS
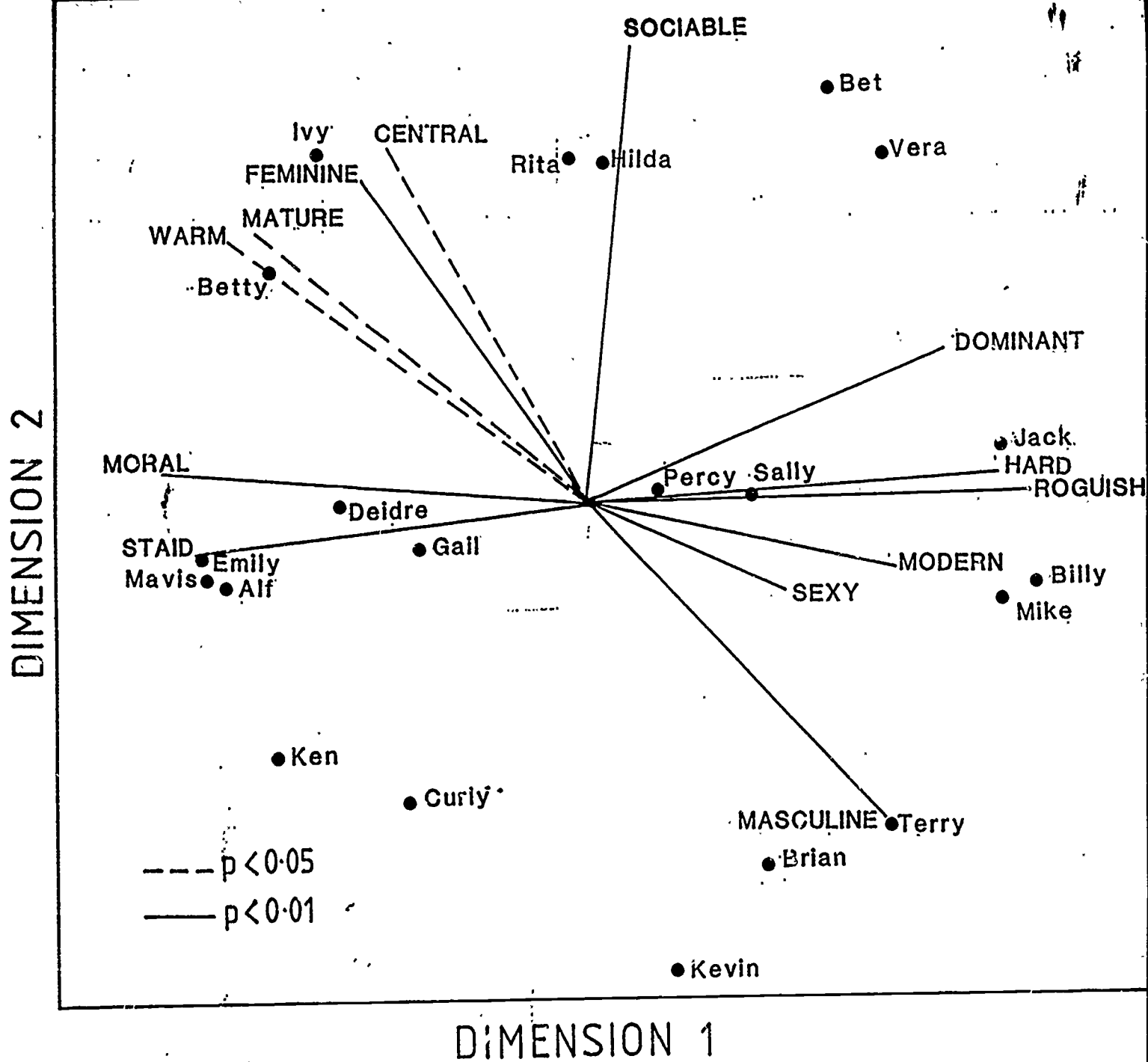
FIGURE 5: SPACE FOR DALLAS CHARACTERS WITH PROJECTED PROPERTIES

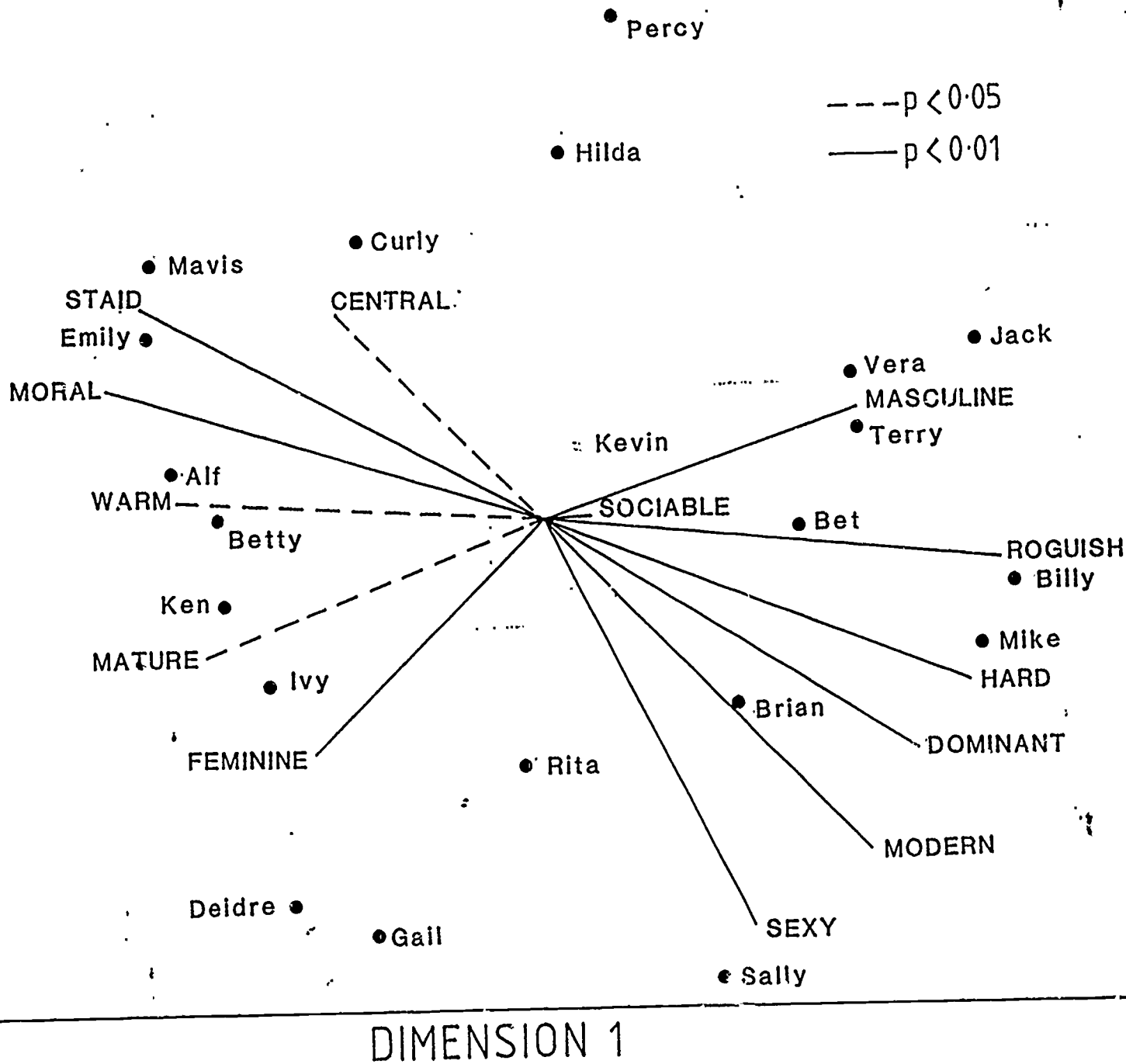FIGURE 6: SPACE FOR CORONATION STREET CHARACTERS WITH PROJECTED PROPERTIES

FIGURE 7: SPACE FOR CORONATION STREET CHARACTERS WITH PROJECTED PROPERTIES