

Television and culture essay sample

[Media](#), [Television](#)



Television is the most popular mass entertainment and information medium; it can be seen as a potentially powerful source of socialization that is capable of promoting its own view and ideas about society. Television programming is a very powerful mode of communication. With millions of people watching its messages and propaganda, one show on a single channel can reach a massive amount of viewers and change their perception of society. By 1990 in the developed world 98 percent cent of homes had come to possess a television. With its ability to influence people of all ages, it changes the way of thinking and views of a person. Although the television has improved its representation of gender, men are still portrayed as the dominant figures over women who are portrayed as dependent and emotional. The inventors of television from the 1890s until the 1950s thought of it as an additional means for delivering information and entertainment, as an extension of telephone, radio, theatre, and cinema: but it has now gathered to itself a range of functions beyond the entertaining and informing the audiences. What the inventor's never quite realized was that television would become a normative, that so much of what we see on the screen would contrive to suggest how things ought or ought not to be.

We see a television program containing a representation of family life and we have used it as a guide or as a gauge of what a typical family should represent. Of the many influences on how we view men and women, media is the most pervasive and one of the most powerful. It is woven throughout our daily lives; television insinuates their messages into our consciousness at every viewing. All forms of media communicate images of the sexes, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical and limiting perceptions.

Women are underrepresented, which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and that women are unimportant and or invisible. Men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that replicate and sustain socially endorsed views of their gender. The representation of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women.

The primary manner that television shows a distorted reality is in under representing women. Prime-time television shows three times as many white men as women or in children's programming, in which males outnumber females by two to one or newscasts, in which women make up 16% of newscasters and in which stories about men are included 10 times more often than ones about women. This media portrayal misrepresents the actual proportions of men and women in our population. This constant distortion makes us believe that there are really more men than women and that men are the cultural standard. Television has represented the American women as a "stupid, unattractive, insecure little household drudge who spends her martyred, mindless, boring days dreaming of love and plotting nasty revenge against her husband". The media portrays both men and women in stereotyped ways that limit our perceptions of human possibilities.

Men are typically represented as active, adventurous, powerful, sexually aggressive and largely uninvolved in human relationships. Women are seen as sex objects who are usually young, thin beautiful passive, dependent and often incompetent and dumb. Female characters devote their energy to improving their appearances and taking care of homes and family. Because

we let media encompass our lives, this misrepresentations of the genders distort how we see ourselves and what we perceive as normal and desirable for men and women.

Television and the media has created two categories images of women: good and bad. Good women are pretty, deferential and focused on home, family and caring for others. They are subordinate to men; they are usually casted as victims, angels, martyrs, loyal wives or house keepers. Even though I Love Lucy had the obvious traditional gender roles, it was a ground breaking show for its time. Lucille Ball was the first woman to have the starring role in a sitcom. Additionally, Ricky was one of the first immigrant actors to also have a starring role. While the show was innovative for its time in many ways, it is obviously still reinforcing the traditional gender roles that society was expecting. In classic episode " Job Switching", Lucy and Ethel are housewives, who when they try and get a job in the mainstream work force, are either not qualified for many positions or (as the episode shows) fail at the positions they are given. Similarly, Ricky and Fred are shown as incapable of doing " women's work". The show is warning us, that if we do not follow our specific gender roles (men supporting the household while women keep the house clean), then severe chaos and destruction will ensue.

The comedy of this show reinforces the absurdity of thinking women are capable of doing men's jobs and men are not fit to do women's' jobs.

Television in the 1970's responded to the second wave of feminism, the female characters were more independent, without being hard, embittered or without close relationships. During this period, prime time shows like "

Maude” and “ The Mary Tyler Moore Show” starred women who were able and achieving in their own rights and living their lives on their own terms. The Mary Tyler Moore Show debuted in 1970, when the world was flourishing with the social, economic and cultural change. The Women’s Movement was calling for equal rights, equal opportunities and equal pay in the work place. In the pilot episode, Mary Richards, a thirtyish, single career-woman is relocating to Minneapolis, MN following a difficult break-up with her long-time fiancée. She was the new modern woman, on her own, working to support herself without a man. A full decade after “ The Mary Tyler Moore Show” went off the air; it’s truest successor “ Murphy Brown” was on prime time television.

The title character was an investigative journalist and news anchor that was fresh from rehab after suffering from alcoholism. Murphy was a single, fortyish woman who became unwed and pregnant. It was so controversial for that time period, that the then Vice-President Dan Quayle infamously spoke out against the show’s disrespect of family values when Murphy chose to raise the child alone. “ It doesn’t help matters when primetime TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice”. The media throughout America spent the next several months debating family philosophy and national policy priorities via a fictional sitcom persona. Women that departed from the traditional roles were starting to be portrayed more positively, but this was done by making their career lives invisible. This was the circumstance with Claire Huxtable from The Cosby Show.

Claire was around a little too much for a working attorney and a mother of five. She was free from the tensions of a demanding career vs. motherhood, which lead her to be labeled “ post-feminist”. The working woman was “ softened” to make them more consistent with the traditional view of femininity. “ Having it all” was the new phrase for the contemporary women. The new American women could have a demanding career, a loving marriage that was a true partnership, perfect kids and a house that was never a mess even though she did not have hired help and she looked better than anyone else at the PTA meeting. Motherhood was no longer perceived as a full time, lifelong occupation. Stay-at-home Moms began disappearing from TV screens. Television families of the mid-1980s were operating on the assumption that Mom had a career and a life separate from the household. But despite the great gains in the work force, women were still the primarily gender-segregated in lower paying jobs earning about two thirds as much as men. The sitcoms Murphy Brown and Roseanne showed the opposite representation of motherhood in the “ non-traditional” ways. In 1988, the debut of Rosanne gave American viewers an entirely different view on the tribulations of the working mother.

Money problems were constant, Rosanne was laid off from her job, and Dan’s construction job was often idle due to the recession. The distressed condition of the American family, on TV and off, was seen by many as a dangerous element in the future of television. Roseanne put the working class life and non-standard body shapes into prime time sitcoms. The world of television continues to evolve and progress. The images have undergone numerous changes over the past 40 years and it will continue to grow and change.

While television can be said to reflect the changing roles of women, it seems to represent them in a positive or negative according to the roles that the patriarchy favors. Common female stereotypes that are found in the media have a powerful influence over how society views women and how women view themselves.

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