

# Mary tyler moore show and feminism essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The year was 1962 when Moore met Grant Tinker, an executive at 20th Century Fox; the couple was married the same year in Las Vegas. In the late 1960's, they merged their creative capital and formed MTM Enterprises. Her and Tinker pitched a show to CBS about a recently divorced woman living on her own who found a job in order to secure her independence. And the network took to it well. Network researchers had one reservation, however, about the lead female's divorce, which was not yet allowed on network television. In 1970's America, researchers agreed, there were four things that mainstream viewers could and would not welcome into their living rooms — New Yorkers, Jews, divorced women and men with mustaches (Kovalchik).

Producers settled that the lead would be newly single, but not divorced, having recently broken off an engagement. And so The Mary Tyler Moore Show and Mary Richards were born. The show was broadcast from 1970 to 1977 and is one of the most popular shows in television history (Heffernan). Mary Tyler Moore was cast as Mary Richards, an “ incomparably spunky [woman] who.... xpressed both the exuberance and the melancholy of the single career woman who could plot her own course without reference to cultural archetypes” (Heffernan). Mary was an associate news producer at WJM in Minneapolis.

At the time, single, workingwomen were either portrayed as ineffective aged maids or “ just too pathetic to show on-screen” (Lindsay & Heffernan). It was revolutionary enough for her to effectively exist outside of her home in the 1970's. Even more, Mary was beautiful. She had a cozy, enviable apartment in the city. She was expressive and vulnerable, and more valuable for it, not

weak or hysterical. She was sexual in ways that pushed men out of their allocated comfort zones for single women.

Mary was funny, offering a source of ironic ingenuity and humor in a male dominated workforce. She was dynamic and she was gracious. She was, on the whole, respected and needed for more than her domestic capabilities. She had fun in her relationships; they were real and honest in ways that women (and men) in the 1970's had never before seen on television.



Moore as Mary was a "feminist icon". At a time when the women's movement was taking hold in America and transforming traditional womanhood, Mary was a representative voice and role model. Moore's show was the first to legitimately claim that a woman's work was not merely "a prelude to marriage, or a substitute for it, but could form the center of a satisfying life for a woman in the way that it presumably did for men" (Dow). She was living out Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that encouraged female housewives' imaginations to wander to the workplace.

In 1972, the Pill first became available to all women, regardless of marital status, and Moore's show was the first television show to ever mention it. She expressed outrage over unfair treatment of women in the workplace. She, through irony particularly, demanded equality. She owned her sexuality. In a poignant space in American history, Mary was championing women's rights by realistically living out its tenants.

It truly was the first time that a woman's perspective was not only important and highly regarded, but also entirely integral to a show's success. Women had someone representing them in the popular culture they consumed who

did not limit their aspirations, but fostered them. In Mary, “ a balm to widespread anxieties about women in the work force” (Heffernan) instead humbly pushed them into the mold of a newer era of female empowerment that they could follow. In the first episode of season 3, *The Good-Time News*, for example, Mary discovers, while going over old budgets in preparation for a meeting, that a former associate producer earned \$50 more a week for her job solely due to the fact that he was a man with a family to provide for. Mary and her male colleagues asserts with confidence that she is doing a better job than he ever did. She marches right into Mr.

Grant’s office to discuss the measure with him. “ I’m upset and you’re just ignoring it.... No Mr. Grant, it’s not just one of those women things” (Brooks) Mary proclaims. Her humor and sincerity, along with naive confusion, point out the absolute and apparent injustice this situation possessed.

It is empowering and strikingly realistic.” Financial need has nothing to do with it” (Brooks) Mary reasons.   Aside from Mary herself, there were four other repeating female characters. Rhoda Morgenstern, Mary’s self-depreciative, single neighbor who broke two of the four unforgivable rules of television seeing as she was a Jewish New Yorker. In *The Good-Time News*, Rhoda is dating an airline steward, and the comedy is not lost on Mary and her that it is assumed he is a pilot. Phyllis Lindstrom was Mary’s landlady.

Georgette Franklin and Sue Ann Nivens (Betty White,) also played significant roles. The supporting female characters were as well constructed as the male supporting characters, in some episodes far outrunning the men for

total screen time. They were all unique from Mary and, though arguably less dynamic, collaged together into the patchwork quilt of womanhood. The men of The Mary Tyler Moore Show also defied traditional gender stereotypes.

Aside from the fact that the show was the first to explicitly label a man gay, it is apparent that the men of the show's dominance in culture was a source of irony more so than power and control. Lou Grant was typically masculine. He was a tough-skinned, traditional boss. But the show revealed a more tenderhearted side of him that respected and needed Mary to operate the news station. He ultimately pays Mary the \$50 salary deficit and does not hide from sexism in the work place, bluntly acknowledging she was paid less because of her gender.

Murray Slaughter was a very plain news writer. And Ted Baxter was a vain, schmuck of a man. Often his lack of intelligence grabbed the most laughs from viewers. No longer was a woman's flightiness and, frankly, stupidity the only source of humor in a sitcom.

In The Good-Time News, for example, Ted Baxter earnestly hypothesizes on whether or not the Pope is, in fact Catholic and obsesses over his outfit for a major meeting (Mary, on the contrary, cares little if her clothing choices are anything extraordinary for this meeting. ) Between the men and women of the show, The Mary Tyler Moore Show had more character-driven humor than the average situational comedy of the time. Women were not flat, one-dimensional figures objectified as the only source of humor. Their lack of freedom and dignity was not something to be laughed at.

Even more so, all of the characters truly relied on Mary for more than her ability to cook or clean, a concept entirely unrecognized by other television program at the time. The plot revolved around her, as did the dynamics of the office. Mary's "enthusiasm supplied a generous assist for the others' eccentricities" (Heffernan). The Mary Tyler Moore Show's writing crew was also uniquely revolutionary. In 1973, 25 out of 75 writers were female, which was entirely unprecedented (Reese). Treva Silverman was the paradigm of this.

She navigated up the ranks of the show from freelance writer to the first female with an executive title on a network sitcom. As the only female writer for the show without a male partner, her real life experience molded the characters on the show with relatable accuracy. Through piercingly accurate irony, Mary highlights this in *The Good-Time News* when she points out that the station manager forces her to "represent women everywhere... trotting in groups of people saying 'This is our woman executive!'" Hollywood and America at large existed the oppressive stereotype that women were not funny, and Silverman fully proved them wrong. Silverman eventually won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing in a Comedy Series and Writer of the Year in 1974. Moore and Tinker made the executive decision to end their show in 1977 while it was still performing well instead of risking a drop in ratings (and, ultimately, cancellation. ) As a result, the finale revolutionarily (and atypically) featured Moore introducing each of her cast mates to the audience for the final curtain call.

She was permanently etched in history as the first female central figure of a popular television show. [pic 3][pic 4][pic 5]Mary Tyler Moore was born in the <https://assignbuster.com/mary-tyler-moore-show-feminism-essay/>

last days of 1936 to Margery Hackett and George Tyler Moore in Brooklyn Heights, New York. At eight years old, a young Moore, her parents and her two younger siblings moved out west to California. Her parents were both alcoholics, and soon after their move, Moore moved out of her family's home and into her aunt's, only seeing her parents on special occasions (Heffernan). She married her first husband Richard Meeker and married him in 1955; she had his child the same year. They were divorced by 1961.

It was not just the young Moore who was famously acquainted with suffering. Her son died in a freak accident with a gun. Mary struggled herself with alcoholism and also with Type I Diabetes. She outlived both of her siblings, tragically, as the oldest child in her family.

In 1997, Moore's sister Elizabeth died of drug and alcohol overdose and in 1992 her brother died of cancer, after Moore had assisted him in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In 2011, she underwent surgery to remove a benign tumor from her brain. (Heffernan) Her less-than-perfect life was a testament to the complexity, the resolve, the strength and the resilience that characterized both Mary Richards and Moore so iconically to American women. In 2012, Moore received a Lifetime Achievement award from the Screen Actors Guild.

Moore died January 25th, 2017 at Greenwich Hospital of cardiopulmonary arrest after she contracted pneumonia. Her death instigated mass acknowledgments of her eternal significance to women in television and in America. Mary Tyler Moore won four of her seven Emmy Awards as Mary Richards. It is clear that The Mary Tyler Moore Show rests fairly and firmly at

the beginning of the canon of modern American womanhood. And though extremely early in the creation of the road to female empowerment, it was The Mary Tyler Moore Show that broke the ground and forged the path.

“ It is true that the female characters on The Mary Tyler Moore Show were not represented as equals to men. They were in lesser positions than men at work, some held onto the traditional homemaker role, and they fretted over their weight and appearance. But for the first time ever, these women were real. They had hopes, dreams, and ambitions—just like the women who created them” (Reese).