limits of social acceptability. Whether this is a positive or negative development depends on the viewer's own perspective. But it is, as television tells us so often about sex, a fact of life. Even in the face of AIDS, an "L.A. Law" producer muses, "We may be heading for a new repression, a new 'Father Knows Best' era. I hope not. For television, married or celibate characters aren't as much fun."[21]

3
FROM LUCY TO LACEY

I feel like June Cleaver on acid.

—Murphy Brown

Imagine a world in which television programs are made by media moguls like Frieda Silverman, Norma Lear, and "Granny" Tinker. Hard to imagine? Maybe it's because television's creative community has always been a male preserve. Our survey of that group, described in chapter 12, found only one woman out of 106 people interviewed. How would a change of gender at the studio and network boardrooms affect the fantasy world of television entertainment? We can't know for sure, and such a feminist fantasy is unlikely to come to fruition anytime soon. But there is one way to examine the relevance of gender for prime-time programming. We can look at how the mostly male creative community has portrayed the other half of humanity on the small screen.

SUGAR AND SPICE

In the beginning there was Lucy. Television's first female archetype was a zany housewife whose madcap machinations bedeviled her loving but long-suffering husband. In her original incarnation, Lucy Ricardo and her friend Ethel Mertz were constantly getting into scrapes stemming from their efforts to get around some rule or prohibition announced by their husbands. They often ended up causing trouble for themselves and their spouses alike. Devotees relish the time Lucy finagled her way onto Ricky's TV show to do a cough syrup commercial, then got drunk on camera from sampling the highly alcoholic product. Another escapade involved Lucy's efforts to crash Ricky's nightclub act by impersonating a clown. The emphasis was on the women's ability to manipulate their men, despite the limited amount of actual power they possessed. And audiences loved it. "I Love Lucy" was the number one show with audiences for four different seasons. Along with "Here's Lucy" and "The Lucy Show," Miss Ball's vehicles landed in the Nielsen top ten for an incredible fifteen years.

Lucy Ricardo/Carmichael/Carter played in prime time from 1951 through 1974. Her most lasting influence, though, has been the many characters modeled on Lucy lines, defined largely by their frantic efforts to manipulate husbands, boyfriends, bosses, or other figures of male authority. A year after Lucy premiered on CBS, another wacky housewife was making trouble for her husband, a staid judge, on NBC's "I Married Joan." The cycle soon included working women who complicated the lives of their male bosses, like Gale Storm's Susannah Pomeroy, the social director of a luxury liner on "The Gail Storm Show" (a.k.a. "Oh Susannah"), and Ann Sothern's Susie McNamara, who was a "Private Secretary" to a talent agent. When such characters weren't married, they spent much of their time and energy hunting for men, as did Susie and her friend Sylvia, along with Eileen Sherwood, a.k.a. "My Sister Eileen," Connie Brooks of "Our Miss Brooks," and many others.

This type of irrepressible character was carried through the 1960s in various new incarnations. There were perky teenagers like "Gidget," "Tammy," Patty and Cathy Lane of "The Patty Duke Show," and the

Bradley sisters (Billie Jo, Betty Jo, and Bobby Jo) on "Petticoat Junction." The harebrained housewife routine was reprised by Phyllis Diller on "The Pruitts of Southampton" and Eva Gabor on "Green Acres." The indomitable illogic that undercut rational male authority even found its apotheosis in the supernatural powers of a beautiful witch on "Bewitched" and a glamorous genie on "I Dream of Jeannie." Both these series derived much of their comedy from the often futile attempts of hapless males to retain control over their households in the presence of such powerful female magic.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the tradition of slapstick comedy by lovable screwballs was upheld by characters like the 1950s-era friends "Laverne and Shirley" and the more contemporary Janet and Chrissy, lucky Jack's roommates on "Three's Company." Other variations on this theme were played by Mary Richards' busybody landlady "Phyllis" and Tina, the flaky housekeeper to a chauvinistic Japanese inventor on "Mr. T and Tina." The use of settings like the 1950s or male-oriented Japanese society suggest that social change may have caught up with the Lucy formula. One wellspring of such comedy is the conflict between a socially subordinate female and a theoretically dominant male authority figure, who gets manipulated by guile, charm, or the sheer lunatic inspiration of some nutty scheme. But the upsetting of male domination through feminine wiles presupposes that audiences accept the premise of male dominance in household, workplace, and love relationships. As that premise changes, the descendants of Lucy Ricardo may follow the giddy heiresses of 1930s screwball comedies into broadcast history.

Another enduring prime-time comedy type is the warm and loving housewife or mother figure. These women were often the female counterparts of their sage and tolerant husbands in happy middle-class households. They were more likely to work with their husband in solving family problems than to work around him, although the man remained primus inter pares in their partnership. If father knew best, mother was usually there backing him up. Unlike the frenetic physical comedy that was Lucy's forte, these family comedies were slower paced and aimed more at smiles than belly laughs.

Television's archetypal comic mother figure came from a show titled, appropriately, "I Remember Mama." From 1949 through 1956 "Mama" Marta Hansen, along with "Papa" Lars, presided over a Norwegian-American family of five around the turn of the century. Each episode was introduced by daughter Katrin, seen turning pages in the family album, and telling viewers, "Most of all I remember Mama." This prototype for the family comedy genre is less familiar to today's viewers because it was broadcast live and thus denied the immortality of syndication. A similar fate befell most episodes of "The Goldbergs," which featured Molly Goldberg as everyone's favorite Jewish mother from 1949 through 1954.

The wholesome housewife persona was firmly established by such long-running mother figures as Margaret Anderson of "Father Knows Best," Ozzie's wife and helpmate Harriet, and Beaver's understanding mother June Cleaver. A prime repository of television nostalgia is the recollection of watching the children in these shows grow up. Less memorable, perhaps, but cut from the same mold were characters like Donna Stone, Dr. Alex Stone's wife on "The Donna Reed Show," Danny Williams' wife Margaret on "Make Room for Daddy," and even Alice Mitchell, the hapless mother of "Dennis the Menace." All these shows carried the tradition of family comedy relatively unchanged into the 1960s.

The new decade also saw some variations on the original model. A surrogate for the traditional housewife-mother appeared in Mayberry, North Carolina, where the lovably befuddled Aunt Bea helped Sheriff Andy Taylor, a widower, raise his young son Opie. Her younger counterpart in Washington, D.C., was Katy Holstrum, the Swedish "Farmer's Daughter" who became governess of Congressman Glen Morley's two sons (and eventually became Mrs. Morley). About the same time, this character type was sent up by Jean Nash, the unconventional housewife in "Please Don't Eat the Daisies." She wrote a newspaper column, slept till noon, and could not care less what her proper suburban neighbors thought about her lifestyle. Nonetheless, she managed to raise a traditional family that included four boys and a sheepdog.

Notwithstanding this effort to break the mold, the warm and wise mother figure was carried into the 1970s by the matriarchs of two popular clans, "The Brady Bunch" and "The Partridge Family." The former numbered six children, a cat, and a dog, who were looked after by housewife Carol Brady and her architect husband Mike. The latter included five kids and a dog, along with their sound-recording equipment (the whole family became pop stars). The tradition continued through the latter 1970s with "Eight is Enough," in which first Joan and then Abby Bradford helped her journalist husband raise their brood of eight.

More recent family comedies are likely to give mom an occupation aside from child-rearing, but the scripts rarely stray far from domestic situations. Thus Elyse Keaton may have been an architect, but the real question was how this former flower child got along with her conservative children on "Family Ties." Clair Huxtable on the "The Cosby Show" is a practicing attorney, but we usually see her practicing the art of child-rearing on her five children. Whatever the changes in the American family structure, "Mama" appears in no danger of being displaced as a timeless comic figure.

One significant spinoff from this form deserves mention for merging the traditional warm but gentle mother figure with a very different environment. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" essentially shifted this character to a work setting as the "mother" to a family of co-workers. This series made a breakthrough in portraying a happy, successful, single professional woman. But Miss Moore's character was worlds away from Faye Dunaway's dragon lady television executive in "Network." Mary Richards, the assistant producer to a local television news show, provided an island of warmth and good sense in the midst of chaos. Around her swirled emotional storms induced by grown-up children like Ted Baxter, the blustering, egotistical anchorman, Phyllis Lyndstrom, the busybody landlady, and Sue Ann Nivens, the catty and man-hungry "happy homemaker."

Executive producer Allan Burns later recalled, "On 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show' we were feeling our way. Mary was a character who was breaking out of her shell, emerging as a woman with a little authority."[1] Thus television managed to finesse a major shift in the occupational role of women by accommodating the new social situation to the older archetype. As women moved into the workplace, "mom" went to the office, surrounded by her temperamental but loving brood of fellow workers.

If Mary Tyler Moore poured old wine into new bottles, producer Norman Lear introduced a new kind of heroine who carried a hundred-proof kick. The Lear lady combine Lucy's zaniness and "Mama's" sagacity with a dollop of sharp-tongued sarcasm all her own. Most earlier comediennes portrayed middle- or upper-middle-class women whose problems revolved around family squabbles or simple failures of communication. Suddenly, in the 1970s, struggling working mothers and even welfare mothers were finding biting humor in such unlikely sitcom situations as rape, drug abuse, poverty, racism, and alcoholism. It all started when Archie Bunker's wife Edith evolved from a slow-witted "dingbat" to a more fully rounded, mature, and sometimes troubled character.

The more typical Lear woman, however, evolved from Bunker acquaintances like next-door neighbor Louise Jefferson and cousin Maude Findlay. Maude was as loud and shrill in her liberal litany as Archie was in his hard-hat conservatism. When Maude wasn't battling Archie, Louise was deflating her self-important husband George, a black version of Archie. Their interactions helped develop a style of topical, political, and ethnic comic repartee that owed considerably more to Don Rickles than Noël Coward.

A remarkable number of spin-off series established this format as the dominant comedic style of the 1970s. A stock character was the woman whose strident insults and sarcastic wit undermined male bluster. These characters included the Jeffersons' maid Florence, Maude's maid Florida Evans, Archie's housekeeper and cook, Aunt Esther of "Sanford and Son," and Della Rogers of "Chico and the Man." Most were poor blacks or white ethnics, and the problems they dealt with had rarely been encountered in the sunny middle-class world of previous sitcoms. In her own spin-off, "Good Times," Florida Evans struggled with poverty while raising three children in a Chicago housing project. In "One Day At A Time," divorced mother Ann Romano had to deal with her daughter's ventures into premarital sex, her own dating problems, sexual harassment on her job, child support and alimony, and eventually a collapse from exhaustion (little wonder!). The triumph of low-life "realism" in the lives of sitcom women inspired this bit of doggerel from one critic: "Maude

has been married and married/Phyllis's husband dropped dead/Florida's boyfriend has cancer/Joe's moved from sweet Rhoda's bed./Mary must find new employment/Alice is still slinging hash/It's assembly line work for Shirley and Laverne/The Sanfords collect people's trash."[2]

Less remarked upon, but equally dramatic, was their new relationship to men. The women of seventies' sitcoms were not afraid to go it on their own. Maude and Ann Romano were divorcees, as was Maude's daughter, and Rhoda untied the knot in the course of her series. Even more significantly, they regularly stood up to men, cheerfully trading insults with husbands, boyfriends, and employers. The longtime comic formula has not changed in some respects, however. Women are still upending men who attempt to stand on their authority. But instead of working around or subtly manipulating their men, the women slug it out toe to toe. It's a feminist version of the blue-collar fantasy, telling off the boss as an equal. "9 to 5," in which the office secretaries run roughshod over their inept sexist boss, was the culmination of a decade of change that began when Mary Richards joined WJM-TV News and Edith Bunker became an equal partner in her marriage.

The history of female stars in dramatic series is somewhat more truncated. Throughout the entire first decade of our study, there were none. Anthology hostesses like Loretta Young and Jane Wyman often starred in episodes of the shows they introduced, but they did not create continuing characters. It was not until the 1965-66 season that viewers were introduced to strong female characters who took top billing or at least shared it with a male. Ironically, one of the first pioneers was actually a British import. Mrs. Emma Peel (Diana Rigg), the cool and supremely competent secret agent on "The Avengers," was more likely to rescue her partner John Steed than to be protected by him. Another female James Bond that season was the title character in "Honey West," a tough private eye in a fetching trenchcoat.

Meanwhile, the Western genre produced a less glamorous but no less authoritative female lead. On "The Big Valley," Barbara Stanwyck portrayed Victoria Barkley, the no-nonsense matriarch of the Barkley ranch. The next few years brought such diverse but equally independent women as Julie Barnes, the "Mod Squad"'s hippie cop, and "Julia," a widowed black working mother. Such roles were strong on substance if short on the realistic situations faced by Mary Richards' circle of friends, not to mention the travails of Norman Lear's characters.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, though, female stars started getting more exposure in a different sense. Under pressure to tone down the violence of cop shows, the networks found an alternative audience grabber in a genre most succinctly described as "T & A TV." The trendsetters were "Charlie's Angels," an interchangeable team of pin-up detectives peddling soft-core suggestiveness. The new sex imagery soon ranged from "Buck Rogers"' Lycra-clad helpmate Wilma Deering to the immaculate but revealing haute couture of "Moonlighting"'s Maddie Hayes. Not coincidentally, when "The New Avengers" appeared in 1978, Mrs. Peel was replaced by sex kitten Tara King, who was much more the voluptuous damsel in distress.

Perhaps the best microcosm of the shift in female dramatic roles was the detective drama "Remington Steele." The series opened in 1982 featuring Laura Holt, a brilliant private eye, who couldn't attract business because she was a woman in a man's profession. So she created an imaginary boss named Remington Steele. The ruse was a success, and business boomed for this staunchly independent self-employed crime-fighter. When clients kept wanting to meet the elusive Steele, she hired a front man to play the part. Well into the series' second season, Steele was portrayed as a charming bumbler who knew more about old Bogart movies than actual crime-solving procedures. Laura remained very much the senior partner. Gradually, however, Steele became more polished, less naive, and more successful. At the same time, Laura began wearing fewer tweed suits and more evening gowns. In the show's final seasons, Steele became a worldly man about town, often rescuing Laura from danger. Meanwhile, Laura grew less independent and more concerned about her relationship to Steele and their future together. This role reversal ended only with the series' demise in 1986.

In the 1980s this trend was carried by the prime-time soaps, with their emphasis on heavy-breathing themes, lightweight characters, and

low-cut necklines. On shows like "Dallas," most women existed primarily to provide sexual conquests for various male Ewings. Competing series created female J.R.s like "Dynasty's" glitzy Alexis Carrington Colby Dexter and "Knots Landing's" Abby Cunningham, a worthy heiress to the Ewing tradition into which she married. In Harlequin romance fashion, these women lusted for sex and power in equal measure and attained enough of both to keep the supermarket tabloids buzzing.

Thus, today's TV sex symbols are often career women whose characters revolve more around their sexual needs than their professional achievements. Yet this is not the whole story. The 1980s also found a niche for women whose sexual presence was matched by their career competence. Such characters ranged from female police detectives "Cagney & Lacey" and public defender Joyce Davenport of "Hill Street Blues," to the unlikely secret agent Amanda King of "Scarecrow and Mrs. King" and psychologist Susan Silverman, detective Spenser's girlfriend in "Spenser: For Hire." Most prominently, the co-workers in "Designing Women" combined professional success with Mae West dialogue. There have also been occasional authoritative characters who don't need to depend on their sex appeal. The most popular is Jessica Fletcher, the middle-aged amateur detective played by Angela Lansbury. Secondary characters who exercised strong authority independent of sex included Mrs. Pynchon, the newspaper publisher on "Lou Grant," and Amanda Harding, the tough politician on "Fortune Dane." To date, the heirs of Diana Rigg and Barbara Stanwyck have managed to endure, if not prevail against, the Farrah Fawcett clones.

Group Portrait

The popular image of women on television usually begins and ends with memorable characters from hit shows. This can be misleading, though, because most female characters are neither stars nor even continuing characters. TV's women include a parade of long-forgotten housewives, secretaries, and damsels in distress whose roles never outlast a single episode. Only a systematic content analysis can chronicle the comings and goings of *all* female characters. So we catalogued the distribution, social background, and personal traits of the 2,060 women we encountered across thirty-one seasons.

In the artificial world of prime time, how do women rate? In general, a clear second to men. Female characters are less in evidence than males and, in many ways, they are portrayed as the weaker sex. They are less likely to be mature adults, are less well educated, and hold lower-status jobs. Their activities tend to represent the private realm of home, personal relations, and sexuality, while men represent the public realm of work and social relations. Moreover, despite television's discovery of social relevance in the late 1960s, this pattern has changed surprisingly little over the years.

The most basic finding is that men have always outnumbered women by hefty margins on prime-time shows. Since 1955, 72 percent of all characters have been male, although the gap has gradually narrowed over the years. Prior to 1965, only 22 percent of all characters coded were female. From 1965 through 1974, the proportion of women increased to 28 percent. Since then women have accounted for one-third of television's prime-time population. That represents a 50 percent increase over television's early days, but it means that two out of every three characters are still male.

Nor do women make up in credentials what they lack in sheer numbers. Among characters whose level of education was known, men have accounted for 85 percent of the college graduates and 89 percent of those with postgraduate training. The education gap has receded only slightly over the years. For example, in the first decade of our study, women made up a minuscule 6 percent of the characters with advanced degrees. In the most recent decade, their proportion has risen to 16 percent, or about one highly educated female character for every five males.

On television, a viewer's knowledge of someone's education is usually a function of that character's occupation. The audience rarely hears about a housewife's schooling, whereas we can assume that a lawyer holds a J.D. and a doctor an M.D. So the best test of social standing and authority is usually the type of job the script assigns a character.

The Girls in the Office

In the world of work, women are usually found wanting. Nine out of every ten highly educated professionals on prime-time television have been male. Since 1955 men have portrayed 93 percent of all doctors, 87 percent of lawyers and 93 percent of judges, 86 percent of corporate executives, and 87 percent of college professors. Part of the reason women represent such a small proportion of high-status jobs, of course, is their sheer lack of numbers. However, women have provided a majority of schoolteachers and low-status white-collar occupations such as clerks, typists, and secretaries, as well as most of the models and nurses. In addition, almost two women in five (39 percent) have been portrayed either as housewives or without any other identifiable occupation.

Just as notable is how little television's employment picture has changed over the years. The proportion of women in many occupations has remained constantly at very low levels. Most significant is the medical profession, always a popular setting for TV drama. Women accounted for 6 percent of the doctors throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and their numbers have increased to only 8 percent since 1975. Similarly, the proportion of female politicians went from 4 percent before 1965 to 5 percent since 1975. And throughout the entire study we coded no female engineers.

The number of women portrayed in many other professions has increased since the 1950s, but the change is usually modest, with the only real jump taking place since the mid-1970s. Prior to 1965, for example, only 2 percent of all lawyers were played by women. During the next decade the proportion increased only slightly, to 8 percent of the total. Since 1975, however, one lawyer in four has been female. The number of judges has moved in tandem, increasing from none at all before 1965 to 7 percent and then 20 percent during the next two decades, respectively. Female corporate executives have increased more gradually, from 6 to 12 and then 18 percent of the total across the three ten-year intervals. Similarly, women constituted none of the police officers during the first decade, 5 percent during the second, and 10 percent during the third.

Note, however, that part of these shifts are due to a gradual increase in the total number of women on prime time over the years.

Moreover, while women have been filtering into some high-status occupations in recent years, their portrayals of low-status employees have also increased. From 1955 through 1964, women played only a minority (42 percent) of the low-level white-collar workers—clerks, typists, receptionists, and the like. Their proportion increased to exactly half of this occupational group during the next decade. Since 1975, women have taken a big jump ahead into television's pink-collar ghetto, accounting for two out of three low-status white-collar jobs.

A very similar trend is evident among unskilled blue-collar and service workers, a category that includes casual laborers, some factory workers, taxi drivers, waiters and waitresses, and domestic workers. During the 1950s and early 1960s, women made up only one in six unskilled workers shown on television. Their numbers grew slightly, from 16 to 19 percent, during the following decade. Since 1975, however, it has increased to 36 percent. Thus, even as female characters have moved into some high-status jobs recently, the proportion of low-status female workers has more than kept pace.

How do these numbers translate into the actual characters who arrive and depart from new series each fall season? Until the mid-1960s, women had little opportunity to establish characters with a strong occupational focus, since there were no female dramatic leads, and the dominant sitcoms were homebound. Most working women in continuing roles had low-status or sexually stereotyped jobs, like beautician Esmerelda Nugent on "The Gale Storm Show" or the various nurses on medical shows like "Hennessy," "Ben Casey," and "Doctor Kildare." An exception was Dr. Maggie Graham, who always seemed to be a potential love interest for tall, dark, and handsome Dr. Casey.

Most women climbed no higher on the occupational ladder than the occasional social service job, held by characters like schoolteacher Helen Crump on "The Andy Griffith Show" or Frieda Hechlinger, the head of a welfare agency on "East Side, West Side." Otherwise, women exercised authority mainly as the boss's assistant or "girl Friday." The best known

characters in this mold were Perry Mason's assistant Della Street, photographer Bob Cummings' assistant Schultzy, and Suzy McNamara, Ann Sothern's title role in "Private Secretary."

The role of working women during these years was best epitomized by the advent of the action-adventure format. This formula was introduced in 1958 by "77 Sunset Strip," the office address for a glamorous private detective duo who were assisted by Suzanne, their ravishing French switchboard operator. The success of this show quickly spawned imitators with the same mix of characters, which was wryly dubbed "two parts private eye, one part cutie pie."[3] Among the contenders: "Bourbon Street Beat" featured two New Orleans-based private detectives and their gorgeous secretary, Melody Mercer. "The Alaskans," set in the 1890s' Yukon gold rush, presented two prospectors who teamed up with a beautiful saloon entertainer named Rocky Shaw. "Hawaiian Eye" substituted palms for pines but stuck with the usual two detectives, who were assisted by photographer/nightclub singer Cricket Blake, played by real-life singer Connie Stevens. It would be several years before women began to portray private eyes or other law enforcers themselves. For now they were stuck in supporting roles, holding down jobs that depended on their looks or office skills.

By the mid-1960s, women started to move into other occupations, although the largest proportion remained in more traditional settings. The advent of secret agent shows created some glamorous roles like those of Cinnamon Carter on the "Mission: Impossible" team and April Dancer, the "The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.," in addition to Honey West and Mrs. Peel. For the first time, women also began to portray police officers, such as Eve Whitfield and Fran Belding of "Ironside" and "Mod Squad"'s Julie Barnes. (ABC's promos identified the mod squad team as "one black, one white, and one blond".) There was even the first female lawyer in a lead role, Patricia Marshall of "The Jean Arthur Show." Characters in business-related professions ranged from rancher Victoria Barkley to "Petticoat Junction"'s hotel owner Kate Bradley.

These inroads into new job opportunities must be viewed against a backdrop of traditional women's work. Lucy Carmichael continued to work as a secretary, and "Gilligan's Island" carried on the sexy starlet stereotype with Ginger Grant. Housekeepers were also well represented, including the Baxter family's "Hazel," Mrs. Livingston on "TheCourtship of Eddie's Father," and Alice of "The Brady Bunch." Even social relevance shows, like "Room 222" and "Julia," which provided the first starring role for a black woman, placed their female characters in traditional roles like teaching and nursing.

The contemporary career woman got off to a rocky start on television with Marlo Thomas's portrayal of "That Girl" from 1966 through 1971. The title character, Ann Marie, was a spunky young actress trying to make it alone in the big city. She bounced from one odd job to another while awaiting her big break in show biz. The scripts mostly ignored the potential for portraying a determined working woman, concentrating instead on physical humor and Ann Marie's Lucy-like lovable dizziness.

As we noted earlier, the breakthrough series in this sphere was "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," which premiered in 1970, just as "That Girl" was fading toward cancellation. Like Ann Marie, Mary Richards was a small-town girl building a career in the big city. There the resemblance ended. Mary had a regular job at a local TV station as a news producer, and her fellow workers accepted her as a skilled professional. As Harry Castleman and Walter Podrazik write:

> Mary's image as an unmarried career woman with a responsible job other than a secretary or a teacher was a major break from television tradition. She was not a widow, had no children, and was working because she wanted to build her own life and career. . . the program presented, without fanfare, women as being capable of interests beyond housework, marriage, and crazy sitcom schemes."[4]

Moore's portrayal quickly became the prototype for career woman sitcom settings. For example, when Mary Richards' friend Rhoda got her own spin-off series, she quickly left her job as a department store window dresser to start her own business. Equally instructive were changes in "The Doris Day Show" format to accommodate the MTM influence.

When the show began in 1968, lead character Doris Martin was a widow with two children, who had moved from the big city back to the family ranch. The next season she took a job at "Today's World" magazine—as a secretary. In 1971, however, after the success of "Mary Tyler Moore," the entire supporting cast was changed and Doris became a single staff writer for "Today's World."

On other fronts, Amanda Bonner appeared as a crusading lawyer on "Adam's Rib," and Dr. Anne Jamison teamed with her father Sean as pediatricians who ran a free clinic on "The Little People" (later renamed "The Brian Keith Show"). Even in a more traditional occupation, Major "Hot Lips" Houlihan of "M*A*S*H" was very much the head nurse, providing a sharp contrast from the docile nurse Martha Hale of "Hennessey" days.

The trend toward working women in middle-class jobs has accelerated since the late 1970s and shows no sign of abating. In 1975 the first female lawyer in a dramatic lead role appeared in the person of "Kate McShane." Medical shows began to supplement nurses with female doctors as regular characters, such as "St. Elsewhere"'s Drs. Annie Cavanero, Cathy Martin, and Wendy Armstrong, and "Trauma Center"'s Dr. Brigitte Blaine. Women even graduated to the role of hospital administrator, in the person of "House Calls" character Ann Anderson and, later, Jane Jeffries.

Female law enforcers proliferated on cops 'n' robbers shows. They ranged from sexy supercops like "LAPD's" Christie Love, "Policewoman" Pepper Anderson, and "Bionic Woman" Jaime Sommers, to more realistic police officers like "Barney Miller"'s officers Whitworth and Baptista, "Chippies" Bonnie Clark and Sindy Carhill, and Robin Tataglia and Lucy Bates of "Hill Street Station." The shortlived "MacGruder and Loud" even offered a husband-and-wife team of California cops who must hide their marriage from the department so they can remain partners on the job.

Women also began to acquire business savvy as executives and even owners of businesses. At radio station "WKRP in Cincinnati," the staff was very much under the thumb of owner Lillian Carlson. Nor did "Los Angeles Tribune" publisher Margaret Pynchon brook any nonsense from staffers, not even crusty city editor Lou Grant. In the 1980s, the evening soaps offered tough businesswomen who acquired new properties and new husbands almost interchangeably, like "Dallas"'s Pamela Barnes Ewing Grayson, "Dynasty"'s Alexis Carrington Colby Dexter, and Abby Cunningham Ewing of "Knots Landing."

Even the journalistic profession, long a male preserve in prime time as in reality, began to acquire female representatives. Following in Mary Richards' footsteps were Jennifer Barnes, news anchor of Boston's WYN-TV on "Goodnight, Beantown"; hard-driving reporters Carla Mardigian and then Billie Newman on Lou Grant's staff; and even Mindy McConnell, who worked for KTNS-TV when she wasn't dealing with the alien Mork from planet Ork. Finally, "Murphy Brown" represents TV's current feminist ideal as a TV newswoman who is intensely career-oriented and independent, bulldozing her way into interviews and all-male social clubs with equal comic ferocity.

All the while, despite these genuinely new opportunities, television has continued to provide many more traditional portrayals. The 1970s began with banker Milburn Drysdale depending on his trusty girl Friday, Miss Jane, on "The Beverly Hillbillies," and English nanny Phoebe Figalilly taking equally good care of her math teacher employer on "Nanny and the Professor." Throughout the decade various male series stars relied on their female secretaries. They ranged from detective "Mannix"'s Peggy Fair, a Della Street clone, and attorney "Owen Marshall"'s legal secretary Frieda Krause, to the brash and breezy Carol, psychologist Bob Hartley's receptionist on "The Bob Newhart Show."

On the medical shows, meanwhile, the occasional female doctor continued to be eclipsed by far more numerous nurses. Even in the 1980s, shows like "Trapper John, M.D." preferred to focus on hoary stereotypes like loyal nurse-assistant "Starch" Willoughby and sexy young nurse "Ripples" Brancusi. The short-lived 1989 series "Nightingales" traded on the nurse-as-sex-kitten stereotype to a degree that brought protests from the nursing profession and hastened the show's cancellation. The 1980s also brought a profusion of female schoolteachers, who populated the faculty of New York's High School for the Performing Arts

on "Fame," as well as mythical schools like "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" and "Square Pegs"' Weemawee High School. College teachers, however, remained mostly male.

The early 1980s also witnessed a profusion of cooks and waitresses, as a kind of déclassé version of the happy homemaker of yore. "Archie Bunker's Place" was staffed by Veronica Rooney, the sharp-tongued Irish cook, and Archie's niece-turned-waitress, Billie Bunker. On "Alice," Mel's Diner was worked by title character Alice, fun-loving Flo, and the more demure Vera, as well as later replacements Belle and Jolene. "It's a Living" featured a more upscale setting in a Los Angeles restaurant, but waiting tables was still the main order of business for a crew that included Lois, Dot, Vicki, and Cassie. Thus, even as new doors began to open for some female characters in recent years, others walked through them right back into the kitchen.

Female upward mobility on television was epitomized by Ann Romano of "One Day At A Time." She was a divorced mother trying to support two teen-aged daughters by working as a secretary. When one of her daughters entered college, Ann decided to go as well. (She had married and begun to raise her family right after high school.) After some travail, she eventually got a degree and began a career in advertising, ending up as a partner in a new agency. Thus Ann began the series with little education or occupational status and gradually worked her way into the upper middle class.

As a counterpoint to Ann Romano, consider the long but traditional career of the ubiquitous Lucy. During the 1950s Lucy Ricardo of "I Love Lucy" mainly wanted to raise her family, though she did have aspirations to break into show business, which husband Ricky regularly thwarted. During the 1960s, on "The Lucy Show," Lucy Carmichael was cast as a widow trying to snare a new husband. Partly to meet more eligible men, she went to work as a secretary in a bank. Throughout the 1970s, on "Here's Lucy," widow Lucy Carter worked for the Unique Employment Agency, which was owned by her brother-in-law. Lucille Ball finally moved up to ownership status when she inherited half of her husband's hardware store (which she shared with old nemesis Gale Gordon) in the short-lived 1986 flop "Life With Lucy." Lucy the career woman turned out to be a not-ready-for-prime-time player.

Make Room for Mommy

Women not only hold lower-status jobs on television, they also tend to have a weaker occupational identity than men. Female characters are less likely than males either to hold a job or to be shown working at one. Only three out of five women have been identified as holding a paying job throughout television's history. Despite the rise of the TV career woman since Mary Richards joined WJM, the totals have been surprisingly consistent over the years. In the era of the sitcom homemaker prior to 1965, 43 percent of all female characters were either identified as housewives or had no known occupation outside the home. From 1965 through 1974, the breakthrough period for working women in lead roles, the proportion declined only to 40 percent. Since 1975, this figure again dropped slightly, to 37 percent. Overall, that makes an increase of only 6 percent across three decades in the proportion of working women on television.

Some of the difference stems from the persistence of housewives on television. The little woman who cleans house and takes care of the children is usually associated with television's early days. The enduring image of the aproned housewife as a bedrock of stability was established by a wide range of sitcoms. In many ways, TV's housewives seemed interchangeable during the 1950s. They spent their days dealing with children (Wally and Beaver, Ricky and David; Princess, Bud, and Kitten) and neighbors (the Mertzes and Nortons), while waiting for their sometimes bumbling husbands (from Ralph Kramden to Herbert Gillis) to come home. Through it all they represented domestic tranquility and provided a homey simplicity.

The 1960s featured some variations on the theme of sitcom housewives. There were rural comedy wives like Lisa Douglas of "Green Acres," who knew not a whit about cooking and housework. And there were positively unearthly housewives like Samantha Stevens of "Bewitched" and Morticia Frump Addams from that ghoulish family. In

"Gentle Ben," Ellen Wedloe kept up a household in the Florida Everglades that included a 650-lb. black bear as an honorary member. And Maureen Robinson showed that the nuclear family could survive in the Alpha Centauri star system in "Lost in Space."

Lily Munster and Morticia Addams notwithstanding, these housewives were for the most part more attractive and alluring than their earlier counterparts. Their careful coiffures and stylish attire helped them avoid the dowdy appearance previously deemed appropriate for television housewives. Their successors in the 1970s continued to keep up appearances. Carol Brady and Shirley Partridge kept up with fashion trends, as did young brides like Carrie Bratter on TV's all-black version of "Barefoot in the Park" and Nancy Smith, the president's daughter, on "Nancy." Sally McMillan of "McMillan and Wife" was young and gorgeous and dressed the part, as did Bridget Fitzgerald of "Bridget Loves Bernie" and Emily Hartley on "The Bob Newhart Show."

Some of these women, like Bridget and Emily, held jobs, but the audience usually saw them in their wifely roles. Nonetheless, they were neither the kindly nurturers of the 1950s family shows nor the zany wives of the far-out 1960s sitcoms. Many were childless, which eliminated the frenetic pacing of earlier shows. They were calmer, more together, with more time to be involved in activities outside the household. They were sometimes called upon to deal with real social issues, such as inflation, minorities' and women's rights, drug abuse, and runaway children. They also began to have serious problems of their own, like Maude's abortion, Edith's attempted rape, Bridget's Jewish in-laws, and woes that ranged from an adulterous husband to breast cancer on "Family."

The 1980s brought a continuation of these trends, except that outside careers have become much more obvious. In fact the "pure" housewife, whose life was circumscribed by home and family, has largely disappeared from prime time. Thus, Pam Davidson Hinkley portrayed a top-notch lawyer and loving wife on "The Greatest American Hero," as did Claire Huxtable on "The Cosby Show." Muriel Rush, a band singer before her marriage, became a successful free-lance photographer while looking after her college-aged daughters on "Too Close for Comfort." Home and work activities were often integrated in the plot. On "Newhart," Joanna Loudon helps husband Dick run a country inn, and police officer Marybeth Lacey was assisted by a very understanding husband. On "My Sister Sam," Samantha (Sam) Russell acted as a mother surrogate to sister Patti while running a successful photography business out of her apartment. And the inimitable "Roseanne" races back and forth between home and job trying to stay a step ahead of both the household chores and her work quotas at the plastics factory. It has been a long haul from Lucy to Lacey, but television seems to be making the transition to two-career families.

There is another, less obvious reason why women only rarely establish authoritative job identities on television. Even when their characters are assigned occupations, they are less likely to be shown actually working at their jobs than are males. Thus, a majority of plot lines involving women concern their personal or private lives rather than their work activities. Just under 60 percent of the female characters are shown in a purely personal context. That's nearly double the 33 percent of males whose roles don't concern their occupational activities. This ratio has narrowed somewhat over the years as the proportion of men shown at work has remained stable, while the proportion of working women has risen. Even since 1975, however, a majority (54 percent) of female roles has nothing to do with their occupations, compared to one in three male characters.

As noted, the best-known female leads of the 1950s and early 1960s rarely ventured beyond home and hearth. They were balanced somewhat by the nurses, librarians, teachers, and secretaries who appeared in shows with mainly male stars (excepting the occasional Gale Storm or Ann Sothern). Even as a new crop of working women entered prime time with the private eyes and superspies of the mid-1960s, other series began to show women balancing their careers and personal lives. "That Girl" Ann Marie was forever juggling her acting and modeling activities to make time for Donald, her boyfriend. Lawyer Patricia Marshall likewise balanced her law practice with an active social life. Even Lucy Carmichael/Carter was shown trying to meet the often competing demands of her children and her boss. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" is often remembered in this context. It also marked a sharp contrast to the

earlier "Dick Van Dyke Show," a prototype home-and-office comedy in which Miss Moore's character, housewife Laura Petrie, was confined to the home front.

Throughout the 1970s women continued to move slowly into shows that actually showed them at work. Ironically, this is one area in which the Lear women sounded a traditional note. Edith and Maude were both housewives without outside careers. Florida Evans' life also centered on her home and family. Louise Jefferson and Helen Willis were housewives whose only outside activities involved volunteer work. The female characters in "Chico and the Man" and "Sanford and Son" were usually involved in personal rather than work-related activities. Ann Romano, with her simultaneous concerns over career advancement, social life, and parental responsibilities, was the exception rather than the rule among this group.

Elsewhere the proliferating law enforcement shows offered increasing opportunities for writers to show both the personal and occupational aspects of female characters' lives. Such diverse shows as "Get Christie Love!," "The Bionic Woman," "Policewoman," "Charlie's Angels," "Kate McShane," and "Barney Miller" all featured women who worked at solving crimes while remaining open to personal (often romantic) involvements. In fact these women differed from the single-minded male crime fighter stereotype precisely in their openness to personal involvement. There were no female equivalents to "Hawaii Five-O"'s Steve McGarrett or Bumper Morgan of "The Blue Knight," not to mention earlier crime-fighting machines like Joe Friday and Elliot Ness. Thus, even when they leave the household, women are shown as more open to the personal side of life.

The past decade has actually seen something of a resurgence in popular shows that place women mainly in a personal context. The women in series like "Laverne and Shirley," "Three's Company," and "Eight is Enough" often had jobs but were rarely seen at work. The focus was on their family or social lives. The same is true of such recent trendsetting shows as "Family Ties," "Silver Spoons," "The Cosby Show," and "Kate & Allie." Even working women aren't as fully integrated as men into their careers, at least in the world of prime time.

Prisoners of Sex

Why are women less linked to the workaday world? One major reason is their traditional function of providing a romantic interest. In recent years, as scripts have become increasingly desublimated, romance has given way to sex, with no apologies offered for presenting women as overt sex objects. Throughout television's history, however, female characters have been defined in terms of their sexual identity to a greater degree than males. This is shown indirectly by the use of attractive young women who often function as window dressing in shows dominated by older, more authoritative male characters.

The typical female character has always been younger than her male counterpart. Women are about twice as likely as men to be portrayed as young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. Thirty-five percent of all women fall into this category, compared to 18 percent of men. We found the opposite trend among mature adults, the thirty through fifty-nine age bracket, when characters tend to be most authoritative. By this definition, only a minority of women (49 percent) are portrayed as mature adults, compared to 70 percent of men. Since most characters are male, that means just over one out of five mature adults on television are women. These differences have remained almost unchanged over the years, with shifts of less than 5 percent in any age category across three decades.

Even a cursory review makes clear that Hollywood favors young women for just one reason. Although kindly mothers were the most memorable female characters of television's early years, there were plenty of pretty young things even then. There was photographer Bob Collins, who chose his dates from a bevy of beautiful models on "The Bob Cummings Show." In fact Bob referred to his workplace as "the harem." An equally successful ladies' man was "Bachelor Father," a Hollywood attorney who squired a succession of glamorous starlets. The sexiest girlfriend of the period was probably Edie Hart, the sultry jazz singer at Mother's, where Peter Gunn used to hang out.

A major infusion of young beauties was provided by the wave of action adventure shows pioneered by "77 Sunset Strip." Not only was the

"cutie pie" series regular an essential part of the formula; each episode also brought with it a newly minted damsel in distress. You can't be a glamorous detective without an endless procession of fair maids to rescue. Beginning in the mid-1960s there was a profusion of pulchritude in continuing roles, ranging from Ginger and Mary Ann on "Gilligan's Island," to backwoods beauties like Elly May of the "Beverly Hillbillies" and the Bradley sisters on "Petticoat Junction," to dashing secret agents like Mrs. Peel and April Dancer.

All this was nothing compared to the cheesecake boom that began in the mid-1970s and has yet to abate. In addition to outright "jiggle shows" like "Charlie's Angels" and "Three's Company," the ogle quotient rose across the board. There were sexy sitcoms like "The Love Boat" and "Operation Petticoat," dramas like "Fantasy Island," and rural comedy/adventure series like "B.J. and the Bear" and "The Dukes of Hazzard," which provided their Li'l Abner heroes with plenty of Daisie Maes. In the 1980s this pattern began to change as the nighttime soaps discovered the allure of middle-aged sexpots. In addition to the requisite quota of sweet (and not so sweet) young things, viewers could choose from such fortyish and even fiftyish sex symbols as Alexis and Krystle of "Dynasty," Sable Colby of "The Colbys," and Valene and Abby Ewing and Karen MacKenzie of "Knots Landing." Even in its so-called decade of the older woman, television wasn't about to give up on women as sex objects. It just found a way to stretch the age limit.

Women on television behave as sexual creatures in more overt and directly measurable ways as well. Take TV's answer to Freud's famous question: What do women want? By a margin of 32 to 18 percent, women are more likely than men to act out of a desire for sex, romance, or marriage. On the other hand, men are more likely to be motivated by political concerns or ideological principles. Here the margin is nearly four to one, 27 to 7 percent. Thus, television's dichotomy between the public and private spheres influences men and women's behavior as well as their backgrounds.

A similar split is evident from the methods characters use to get what they want. Men are over twice as likely as women to rely on their authority and on violent means, while women are twice as likely to depend on the help of "champions" and seven times as likely to use sex appeal or romantic charm. As usual, there has been little change in these sex-typed ends and means over the years. So while men tend to exert either force or forcefulness, women depend on romantic charm and the kindness of strangers.

The games women play have changed somewhat over the years. Flibbertigibbets like "Petticoat Junction"'s Bradley sisters and hard-core manhunters like the girls in the office on "Private Secretary" have lately given way to cool independent singles like Christine Cagney and Kate McArdle. But the name of the game is still the same—to catch or hold a man, whether as a long-term provider or (lately) a one-night stand. The single woman on the prowl for a husband is a sitcom caricature dating back to Eve Arden's high school English teacher in "Our Miss Brooks," forever frustrated in her efforts to land the shy biology teacher Mr. Boynton. Other representatives of the genre range from comedy writer Sally Rogers on "The Dick Van Dyke Show" to Mary Richards' friend Rhoda Morganstern. In fact, when wedding bells finally rang for Rhoda in her own spin-off series, the husband-hunting activity shifted to her younger sister Brenda, in a kind of Rhoda redux role.

Another perennial theme concerns the complications that arise from women's fickleness, jealousies, or romantic strivings. A typical example comes from "I Dream of Jeannie." The title character is a genuine genie, remarkably well preserved for her two thousand years, who develops a crush on Tony Nelson, the astronaut who finds her in a bottle. In a 1969 segment we coded, Jeannie thinks Tony is cheating on her because his companion on a mission is a sergeant named Marion. She shows up on their plane and causes pandemonium by using her magic powers to switch the top-secret film he's carrying. When Jeannie discovers that Marion is a male, she changes the film back again. Jeannie was actually one of the more successful husband hunters in TV history. In her first season she made life so difficult for Tony's fiancee Melissa that the poor woman disappeared from the series. Then, after four years of being chased by a jealous genie, Tony finally let himself be caught.

This vein is by no means confined to comedy. Consider that hardy perennial, the fool for love, which popped up on a very serious "Playhouse 90" telecast. In this 1956 story, the widow of a shipping magnate takes a cruise on one of the ships she now controls. Also on board is a Latin American revolutionary being extradited for trial. The woman falls in love with him and tries to convince the captain to release him before they reach port. He refuses, on principle, even after she offers to give him title to the vessel. Then, as his boss, she orders him to release the rebel. Again he refuses, on the ground that she has no authority over a ship's captain at sea. Readers will recall that women do have difficulty exercising authority on television.

In recent years the motives of marriage and romance have been joined by less sublimated forms of desire. Sometimes this is sanctioned by marital relations. Thus, one episode of "Eight is Enough" avails itself of that old chestnut, the husband and wife whose kids never let them, well, have time to themselves. Tom and Abby Bradford employ various stratagems too clichéd to recount in order to get rid of the children. Meanwhile, Abby flirts and acts seductively to keep her husband's interest up. Alas, they never do find the opportunity to be alone together. After all, this is the family hour time slot.

No such constraints have ever hampered the intrepid Christine Cagney, who epitomizes television's portrayal of the sexually active single woman. In a 1982 episode we coded, Chris is attracted to a defense lawyer she's dating. She grows increasingly disappointed and troubled, however, when he fails to make a pass at her. Finally, after dinner at her apartment, she takes the bull by the horns. She tells him, "by now we should be getting a little more familiar." Reminding him that his parking space is valid only until 6:00 A.M., she hands him the keys and asks, "We don't want to wake up that early, do we?" It turns out that her friend can take a hint. Imagine Cagney's surprise the next morning, though, when she finds out the fellow was having qualms because he's married. Sometimes you just can't win.

TV's women are not only more likely to want romance, they are also more likely to use sex to get what they want. Given the constraints of network censors, this usually means the promise of sex, offered in somewhat oblique fashion. Back in 1960, an attractive young wife on "Route 66" in effect declares her intentions by walking in on her husband's business meeting while wearing only a swimsuit. She wants Buzz to take her away from all this, but her method of enlisting him is made clear less from the dialogue than from a sultry saxophone playing on the soundtrack. These days the pitch is likely to be more direct. In a 1979 episode of "Alice," the lusty waitress Flo gets the show business bug. She decides to network in time-honored fashion by getting to know a country singer she meets as a guest on the "The Dinah Shore Show." She tells him, "Here is a matchbook from Peppy Siesta's Motor Court. Call that number and you won't be 'Lonesome Larry' no more."

The most proficient practitioners of sexual promises are the female detectives and secret agents who routinely use their charms to lead the bad guys on to their doom. Charlie's angels made this approach to crimefighting into something of an art form, but it goes back at least to Honey West, the female James Bond who lasted one season in the mid-1960s. Among the shows in our study, a typical femme fatale was a U.S. agent on "I Spy" named Melanie. She flirts and teases her way into the villain's lair, stretches out seductively in his bedroom, fends him off "since things might get out of hand," and emerges with both the top-secret microfilm and her virtue intact. Apparently this stratagem is unlikely to grow stale with overuse. In an episode of "Buck Rogers," a glamorous agent of the Earth Defense Directorate lures a crime syndicate boss to her room, where she gets the drop on him. Television writers are apparently confident that bad guys will be suckers for a sexy come-on at least until the twenty-fifth century.

Rounding out this portrait of woman as the more sexually oriented gender are those characters for whom sex serves as both ends and means, both what they want and how they try to get it. One example will suffice, drawn from a "Dick Van Dyke Show" episode we sampled. The character in question (and her character is in question throughout) is a young dancer named Joan. When scriptwriters Rob and Buddy decide to put her in the Allen Brady show, she kisses Rob and tells him that she loves him. Naturally, Rob's wife Laura walks in at this point, and the plot is off and running.

After Joan does some more heavy-duty flirting with Rob, Laura tells him to chase Joan to scare her off, "but don't, under any circumstances, catch her." Rob unfortunately does just that, and Joan agrees to run off to Mexico with him. Of course, she first calls her boyfriend, Ernie, to inform him of this slight change of plan. Ernie arrives and slugs Rob, to Joan's delight, since her real motive was to win Ernie's devotion by making him jealous. So Joan gets Ernie, Laura gets Rob back, and Rob gets a shiner and a new appreciation of the sexual wiles of women.

From "Mama" to Maude

Television's treatment of women is more than the sum of its individual characters. It is also reflected in story themes and plot lines that deal with women's role in American society. Our study detected fifty-four instances where scripts address issues of women's rights or equality between the sexes. Despite all the sex-role stereotyping of female characters, most shows that raise such issues have come out foursquare for women's rights: 71 percent support feminist arguments, while only 7 percent reject them, with the rest taking no position. There was also a clear shift over time. Prior to 1965, 22 percent of the episodes coded rejected the feminist position. Thereafter not a single episode derided notions of sexual equality.

Perhaps the most common theme is that women's abilities should not be underestimated. They can accomplish as much as males if given a fair opportunity. An episode of "Eight is Enough" raised this point in the context of a family camping trip. The men of the family, Tom Bradford and his four sons, plan to go off alone without the women. But his wife and four daughters get wind of this plan and protest their exclusion. They insist they can hold their own in the wilds and argue that the men are being insensitive. Eventually they win the argument, and the whole family goes together.

More often this theme comes up in the context of women's work aspirations. Although job opportunities for female characters were quite limited before the mid-1970s, this theme has recurred in various program formats throughout television's history. The earliest version we observed came in a 1956 segment of Loretta Young's dramatic anthology. In this episode Miss Young plays a young woman struggling to meet the mortgage payment on her small farm. The bank officers are skeptical about trusting a woman to run a farm alone, but she charms them into granting an extension on her loan. When the loan finally comes due, after many travails, it appears at first that she can't come up with the payment. The bank president opines that they shouldn't trust "young ladies" with such responsibilities. The woman demurs and, in the end, she prevails. Throughout, the struggle of a small farmer is also presented as a woman's struggle to prove her worth against male skepticism.

A decade later virtually the same theme was played out in a Western setting on "The Road West." When a small-town doctor dies, his daughter tries to fill in for him. Early in the show she is forced to fend off the repeated unwanted advances of a male patient. Later she decides to go to the aid of a farmer who needs her help. The liveryman is reluctant to give a team of horses to a woman, but she insists. During the trip, her independence is underscored by an encounter with a farmer and his wife. The farmer is a brute who orders his terrified wife to do his bidding. The contrast of this wretched cowering woman with the self-sufficient heroine could hardly be more obvious.

About the same time, "The Jean Arthur Show" applied a lighter touch to the notion that a woman can more than hold her own in a man's world. The star plays Patricia Marshall, a vivacious fortyish widow who is the best defense attorney in town. In the episode we coded, however, she is asked to teach manners and sophistication to a mobster so that he will be able to find a good woman. Of course, her protégé falls for her and is about to pop the question when she is called to work on a fast-moving case. Her breakneck pace quickly proves too much for a mere man to handle, and the pupil is ready to drop from exhaustion while Patricia is still going strong. Eventually Patricia explains that she enjoys his company but can't give up her freedom and fast-paced lifestyle to become his wife. They agree that she needs to remain free to live her active life without apron strings attached. Quite a trick for the 1966 season, when "That Girl"'s dizzy young actress Ann Marie represented the TV sitcom's idea of a working woman.

Bringing this motif up to date was a recent episode of "Hardcastle and McCormick," on which a young female clerk at the police department discovers an undercover operation that has run amok. She falls for McCormick, who is helping her uncover the scheme, but she nonetheless insists that he treat her as an equal. A leitmotif of the script concerns McCormick's repeated efforts to leave her behind and relegate her to unimportant tasks, to ensure her safety while he goes off to fight the bad guys. The script, however, opts for equality over chivalry. She insists on being involved and, in the end, proves a useful partner to the intrepid detective.

Thus, despite its depiction of women as the weaker sex in many ways, television has also presented object lessons of women proving themselves men's equals through pluck and determination. The clear lesson is that, whatever their traditional status, women possess the potential to compete effectively in supposedly male pursuits. An even more basic lesson, also observed repeatedly, is that women are independent beings and not men's chattel. For example, a 1965 segment of "Chrysler Theatre" concerned an overly possessive husband in the old West. At one point he accuses his wife of planning to leave him for a rival named Paxton and threatens to shoot them both. She asks, "Do you think I'm some piece of property. . . you can kill a man for?" He responds, "Yes, I do [kissing her]. . . your body. . [passionate kisses] I own. . . If you turn my property over to Paxton I'll do a little shooting to get it back." Angered, his wife breaks away from him and leaves. Later he realizes that she really loves him, and that his possessive and domineering approach threatens their marriage. He makes peace with himself and promises to show more respect and understanding for his wife.

A 1963 segment of "East Side, West Side" gave a Freudian twist to the theme. This time the problem is a father's domination of his daughter. He tries to keep her cloistered from the outside world and especially the boyfriend she loves. He also tries to keep her away from the show's social worker protagonists, who attempt to intercede. At one point he argues that he has a right to make decisions for "his kid." A social worker asks tartly whether she's his kid or his maid. But the program's main point is delivered by Frieda, the head of the welfare agency. She accuses him of a vision of life in which "boys are hoods and grabbers who take what they can. . . .You are the father of a child who stopped being a child and became a woman. That is what is shining in your eyes, not the love of law and order."

In the 1970s television began to supplement these general expressions of support for women's rights with more contemporary themes. A leader in this area was Norman Lear's "Maude." Many of the plots in this series revolved around Maude Findlay's frequently comic but always serious efforts to assert both her own independence and the rights of modern women. In one episode in our sample, Maude is directing a 1975 bicentennial celebration. She decides that its theme should be famous women in history. Her husband Walter and the other men involved disagree; they're afraid no one will come. Maude comes under considerable pressure to change her mind, and she wavers briefly. Then she remembers what the show is all about. In her own words, "the show was supposed to inspire women to strive and struggle for their place in life." Taking heart from her own principles, she decides to stick it out: "The whole point of the show is not quitting but persevering for one's rights." Impressed, her husband rallies to her side, and the show is a huge success.

Less well remembered but no less in the forefront of feminist scripting was the 1973 sitcom "Adam's Rib," named after the Tracy-Hepburn film about dueling husband-and-wife lawyers. Half the show's writers were women, and many of the scripts tackled women's rights themes. In the episode in our study, defense attorney Amanda Bonner becomes outraged at the legal double standard that subjects women (but not men) to arrest for sexual solicitation. To prove her point, she goes to a bar and deliberately gets herself arrested for picking up an undercover cop staked out there. She explains to her district attorney husband (and the audience) that she did it to show up the legal system's hypocrisy, since she neither mentioned money nor promised any sexual activity. Her husband takes on her defense and, in court, says the case will show how women are denied rights that men enjoy. Eventually the charges against her are dropped, and, to drive the point home, the arresting officer is reprimanded.

It was not only high-profile feminist-oriented shows that began endorsing more activist forms of women's liberation. But the less socially committed shows tended to have things both ways, first taking potshots at "libbers" and then piously putting down the traditionalists. An example comes from "The Jimmy Stewart Show," a short-lived early seventies sitcom featuring the star as James Howard, an avuncular anthropology professor. In one scene we learn that James' wife Martha has joined a consciousness-raising and civic action organization with the acronym "WAG," for Women's Action Group. James cracks that it really stands for Women Against Gentlemen. Their young son complains that "they're always having meetings and causing trouble," and James chimes in, "kind of like Congress in skirts." Martha has the last word, however, explaining that "we WAG women are trying to make this man-made world a better place." The show clearly endorses this unexceptionable sentiment, thereby having its chauvinism and berating it too.

Still, a decade earlier the script might well have denied Martha her rebuttal. For television has not always applauded such sentiments. A case in point comes from the aptly titled 1950s sitcom "My Favorite Husband." The main characters are George and Liz Cooper, a bank executive and his scatterbrained wife. In one episode Liz, a typical suburban housewife, decides there must be more to life than just cooking and cleaning. She decides to write a play that will express her disaffection with the traditional homemaker's role. George decides that he shouldn't stifle his wife's needs and arranges for her to go to a cabin in the mountains where she can concentrate on her play. As she struggles to write, without much success, George bumbles around at home trying to handle the household chores. Finally George begs her to come home, though he tells her he has no right to ask her to give up her new life and admits, "I stifled you into being a scullery maid." If this show were being done today, Liz would accept his apology and return with assurances that her career needs would be accommodated. But this is 1956. In the actual script, she replies, "Well, then, that is what being a woman means, George. I accepted those terms when I married you. You have a right to ask me to come home. . . .I'd rather be your wife than anyone else on earth." Liz returns home with renewed dedication to her role as a happy homemaker.

A few years later, the question of appropriate sex roles was raised in quite different fashion on "Ensign O'Toole," a typical service comedy set aboard a destroyer. In this episode an attractive Russian ballerina named Anya defects by swimming out to the ship and requesting asylum. When the ship is ordered to bring her to the United States, she demands to be treated as an equal and sets about scrubbing, swabbing decks, and taking KP duty. Then O'Toole convinces the ship's executive officer that it's a mistake to treat her as "one of the men." He argues that her desire for equal treatment "stems from Russian thinking. . . . We don't want her to arrive on the shores of America proud of her treatment as a man. . . . We want her to arrive proud of our treatment of her as a woman." The change in treatment is a success, and Anya becomes kittenish and seductive or, as an officer puts it, "a beautiful testimony to freedom." The only problem arises when she's scheduled to hold a press conference on arrival. She refuses to come out because she just doesn't have a thing to wear.

This show is interesting for the way it turns a feminist argument on its head. Its premise is that sex roles are indeed socially determined, but traditional roles are the American way. The desire for equal treatment, by contrast, is the product of communist indoctrination! The theme echoes "Ninotchka," without the Lubitsch touch—inside every female commissar lurks an all-American desire for silk stockings.

To round out these examples of the way we were, consider how a 1963 "Ben Casey" segment presents a modern career woman. Dr. Casey is treating a young female lawyer (incidentally, the earliest female lawyer to appear in our study). An unpleasant and embittered person, she went on an alcoholic binge and tried to kill herself. Later she reveals the reason behind her unhappiness and self-destructive behavior. Her mother died when she was a child, and her father, a prominent judge, tried to make her into his ersatz son. He forced her to compete first in sports and then in the law. Once, she tells the earnest Dr. Casey, she bought a doll and tried to hide it. But her single-minded father found it and threw it

away. Eventually the pressure to succeed in male fields drove her to drink. A cautionary tale, indeed, and not one you would be likely to see a quarter century later.

Two Faces of Eve

Television has shown that it can tell both feminist and traditionalist tales about women's place in American society. The dominant message has always supported woman's rights and rejected sex role stereotyping. An undercurrent of traditionalist sentiment remained until the mid-1960s, when it virtually disappeared as a plot motif. By the 1970s themes of sexual equality became more timely, often including references to the rapidly growing women's movement and its focus on discrimination and consciousness-raising. In the 1980s, it was less of an issue and more of a given, with women's equality taken for granted. When a character in "The Cosby Show" incautiously voices the sentiment that women's place is in the home, the entire Huxtable family ridicules the notion. There's hardly a conflict; it's more a matter of correcting an embarrassing anachronism.

The upshot is that television sends mixed messages about women. The roles played by female characters provide some powerful reinforcement for traditional ideas about women's proper place. Throughout television's history viewers have been exposed to female characters with lower status and less authority than males. The concerns of women on television tend to revolve around either home or "him." The edges have softened somewhat in recent years, so that this portrait is not so sharply etched as it once was. The proportion of working women and divorcees is certainly rising, and "December Bride" is a distant memory. But television still balances Kate with Allie, just as Edith Bunker used to follow Mary Richards on CBS's Saturday night lineup.

Many of these traits have been documented before. During the 1970s scholars began to study the traits of television's female characters. Their conclusions are very similar to ours, although the measures are sometimes different. The results were summarized in a 1982 National Institute for Mental Health report: Men greatly outnumber women; they are older and hold higher prestige jobs; they are more authoritative and represent the public realm of politics and work, while women occupy the private realm of home and family.[5] Our study traces these characteristics back to the early years of television and shows how slowly they have changed.

At the same time, our study reveals a longstanding dichotomy between the portrayals of individual characters and the themes addressed by the scripts. This thematic analysis is a critical component of any effort to understand television's worldview, because programs are more than the sum of their characters. The plots and scripts present conflicts, provide options, and drive home morals that create a framework of meaning for the characters. The demographics and behavior of female characters are important to know, but no less so than the overt messages the program proffers about the proper place of women in society.

Thus, the theme of women's rights has always been prominent in prime time, and characters who deride women's abilities are now invariably shot down by the script. This facet of the study fails to support feminist critics who charge television with nothing less than the "symbolic annihilation" of women.[6] The overall picture is more ambiguous. What television says about women in general is often quite different from what it shows about particular women.

This discrepancy probably reflects the inevitable compromises between social conscience and commercial incentive among creators of mass entertainment. The writers and producers we surveyed present themselves as progressive on feminist issues, but they are hardly radical. For example, they overwhelmingly believe feminists should have greater influence and reject the notion that a woman's place is in the home, but most also reject preferential hiring treatment for women. Moreover, since virtually all are male, their shows may reflect a discrepancy between their conscious "ideological" sentiments and the unquestioned assumptions that shape their female characters.

Finally, the success of a series depends on its appeal to popular tastes, which tend toward the traditional almost by definition. Thus, "Cagney & Lacey" began as an avowedly feminist show that concentrated on breaking down stereotypes as the heroines broke up crime rings. But when initial

ratings were poor, CBS executives decided the show was "too harshly women's lib. . . too tough, too hard, and not feminine." An unnamed network source told *TV Guide* that "The American public doesn't respond to the bra burners, the fighters. . . .We perceived them as dykes."[7] As a result, Cagney was recast with a softer, more "feminine" actress in the part, although the character remained socially and sexually "liberated."

For all that, the mid-1980s featured a breakthrough in depicting stronger and more professionally competent women. The watershed year was 1984, which saw the first screenings of "Cagney & Lacey," "Kate & Allie," Angela Lansbury as a mystery writer detective in "Murder, She Wrote," a male-female cop team in "Hunter," and two popular series that reversed the traditional homemaker-breadwinner roles—"Who's The Boss" and "Charles in Charge." Another change has been the introduction of female "buddy" shows like "Cagney," "Kate," "Golden Girls," and "Designing Women." According to CBS executive Harvey Shepherd, "There is nothing coincidental about the trend. Traditionally, if you used women in prominent roles. . . they had to be in nonthreatening roles. But there is really a sociological change going on. . . .There is a growing acceptance of the more liberated role of women. Our schedule reflects that."[8]

One source of this shift is audience demographics. The networks' audience is becoming more heavily female, as males are drained off by the "spice and slice" sex and violent action programming available on cable channels. Further, women are most likely to purchase many of the products, such as cosmetics and household goods, that are advertised heavily on prime-time shows.[9] But pressure for change is coming from the supply side as well as the demand side. The new shows reflect the personal perspectives and social commitments of the first generation of successful female writers and producers. Those working in the comedy genre include Diane English ("My Sister Sam," "Foley Square," "Murphy Brown"), Linda Bloodworth-Thomason ("Designing Women"), and Susan Harris ("Soap," "Golden Girls," "Empty Nest"). Among their counterparts in drama are Barbara Corday ("Cagney & Lacey"), Terry Louise Fisher ("L.A. Law," "Hooperman") and Esther Shapiro ("Dynasty," "The Women's Room").

All these women received their first major writing or producing credits in the past ten years, most within the past five. Each created or developed concepts for female-centered shows that have been hits with audiences and critics. Their shows have featured strong-willed and sharp-tongued professionally successful women, who often function within a wider circle of female "types." A common device is to contrast the powerhouse character with traditional foils like a scatterbrained friend, a sex kitten, or a June Cleaver-style mother figure. The strong character sometimes serves as a mentor or role model for the others.

Like many contemporary TV characters, the tube's liberated women share a tentative, ambivalent view of life. They want a "relationship," but only on terms they can live with. They want family ties, but are wary of the commitment and bother, or the effect on their self-image. They want career success, but wonder about the cost to their personal development. Characters like hard-driving Murphy Brown reflect Diane English's own perspective on the changing social persona of women: "Nice and sweet are out. TV's new women aren't trying to please other people. . . . Not being afraid of what people think of you is in." Similarly, comedienne Roseanne Arnold so resisted what she considered stereotypical aspects of her character in "Roseanne" that she forced the departure of the show's (male) executive producer.[10]

As television enters the 1990s, Ben Stein writes, "A medium once studded with manly men and shrinking women is now peopled with strong, aggressive women—women who kill, women bossing around men, and women without men."[11] Yet Stein's description is composed of equal parts wit and hyperbole. The change is undeniable, but it still takes place against a backdrop of traditional mothers, sex symbols, and unthreatening comediennes. Women's place in television may be undergoing a decisive shift at the hands of Hollywood's newly empowered feminists. But, despite the more rapid change in recent years, television's portrayal of women has long included some progressive flourishes that stand out against a more traditional landscape.

This mixed bag reflects the conflicting tendencies that feed into scripts and storylines. The fantasy world of prime time is neither a pure

reflection of popular taste nor the product of a consistent ideological agenda. Television's view of women is influenced partly by what its creators think the audience wants, partly by what they think it needs, and partly by the stereotypes and assumptions they inadvertently project onto their creations. Put it all together and you get a curiously ambivalent view of women that runs from Alice to Allie, from Edith to Maude, from Lucy to Lacey. According to television, woman is man's equal, but women are still the second sex.

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