

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AND WORK
ON PRIME TIME TELEVISION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General

Television has been around for more than 30 years, presenting a variety of characters, images of people and ways of behaving to the American viewing public (1). There has been considerable speculation and argument about the kinds of messages television has presented to viewers from 1950 to the present. Feminist Diana Meehan, author of Ladies of the Evening studied the media, concentrating on women characters. Meehan said television portrayals are reflections of women's lives, implicit endorsements of beliefs and values about women in a very popular forum (2). Meehan said considering female characters as real people leads to questions about the representativeness of television's portrayals of women, that is how female characters compare with the female population (3).

Background

According to Mary Brown, author of Television and Women's Culture, women use television programs as part of their general discourse on their own lives, the lives of their families and friends and to add interest to their

working lives (4). However are television portrayals consistent with those of the "real-life" working women? Margaret Gallagher wrote Unequal Opportunities: The Case of Women and the Media as part of a year-long study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1979 (5). The portrayal of women in the mass media was investigated by Gallagher. A major focus of her study was on the media as a cultural force that not simply reflects but subtly and indirectly helps to shape social reality (6).

In Role Portrayals and Stereotyping on Television, Nancy Signorielli stated that television does not imply that faithful proportional representation of reality is fair or just (7). However, Signorielli wrote, viewers must be educated as to what is good programming, then given enough time to select these programs. Dating back to the 1950's television producers felt compelled to portray women in dependent, domestic roles (8). By the early 1970's women were becoming more militant about their right, as the level of discontent rose among women in all strata, but especially among the well educated and employed (9). The issue of media representation was a particularly sensitive issue, the women's movement and research findings documenting the misrepresentation of women on television, film and print supported women's complaints of media representation (10).

According to Susan Faludi, author of Backlash, due to a decrease of women viewers in the 1980's, producers rarely

attempted to portray working women in more upbeat, positive roles. However, many of the portrayals had shortcomings concerning independent women (11). In shows like "The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd," where the 34 year-old divorced heroine lost not only her husband but countless jobs, boyfriends, her neighboring female friend, and even her therapist, it took only six episodes for her to suffer a nervous breakdown, wrote Faludi (12).

In 1989 a content analysis was done by Cynthia Tuznik on Working Women's Portrayals in MS. and Working Women Magazine advertisements from 1979 to 1988. As part of her study, Tuznik looked at the "portrayals" of working female roles in the mass media. Although she focused on print media advertisements, she found unrealistic portrayals of females.

The concern for the portrayals of females has been very important since the 1950's when the traditional domesticated roles were presented on television, to the 1990's when the independent, non-traditional roles appeared, but still do not present the "real" portrayals of today's working female (13). Neither the comedies nor the dramatic genres have shown society realistically, as simple comparisons between social conditions reported in the news and those portrayed on prime time demonstrate how unrepresentative television's views of society have been, according to Signorielli.

Roles are created in direct relation to their usefulness on television. The numerous, and hence, most

useful, roles involve jobs, adventure, sex power and other opportunities and chances in life (14). The media have social responsibility to project a representative picture of the constituent groups of society, and a responsibility in the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society (15).

The Problem

Susan Faludi found through her investigation that television producers strive to stay ahead of the hiatus "disease" and to produce shows which are appealing to women viewers portraying women out of the traditional roles. She said producers are inundating women audiences with character portrayals that are not true reflections of the everyday "real life" working women, which leads to the problem of television's unrealistic portrayal of women, and the effects of that portrayal on women in society. The problem this study will address is the character portrayals of women in television situational comedies versus the role of women in society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if television portrayals of both working and non-working women are consistent with the jobs and lifestyles of real life working and non-working women.

Objectives

This study will determine whether the media present realistic portrayals of women and work on prime time television shows.

This thesis studies working women's portrayals in ten television shows. It examines attitudes (dependent, independent), dress codes (high living, not high living), marital status (married, single, divorced, involved), occupations, and working environment, and determines whether these portrayals are consistent with real-life working and non-working women as identified in The Statistical Abstract of The United States. A further purpose served by this study is to encourage further research about media portrayals and to encourage a true representation/portrayal of women in the mass media.

Methodology

This study uses content analysis to determine if television's character portrayals of women are representative or consistent with the real world female population. Richard Budd et al., defined content analysis as "A systemic techniques for analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators."¹⁶

The use of content analysis has become a viable method in the study of television content and the possible effects it has on society. Therefore, content analysis will be used

to critique the media's standards of communication. It will also help to expose the need for attention to the portrayals of working women in hopes of producing or enforcing a truer representation of working women.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study examines character portrayals of women in eight television situation comedies "Roseanne," "Murphy Brown," "Coach," "Full House," "Major Dad," "Home Improvement," and "Designing Women," Cheers," and two drama series, "Murder She Wrote," and "Northern Exposure." The selected research period includes the top 10 programs for the week of January 20-25 1992. Character portrayals were studied and coded by job status, marital status, behavior, dress code, etcetera.

Limitations of this study include the fact that it only examines the top 10 programs for the week of January 6-12, 1992, based on Nielsen ratings. After obtaining the top 10 programs for the week mentioned, each program was studied over a four-week time span--two weeks before the Winter Olympics--and two weeks after.

Outline of the Remainder of the Thesis

In Chapter II, literature relating to television's portrayal of society, to women and work and women in general will be examined. In Chapter III, the research design and methodology used and content analysis procedures are

discussed. In Chapter IV, the research data are reported and analyzed. Chapter V provides a summary and conclusion to this thesis as well as recommendations for further research.

Endnotes

1 Diana Meehan, Ladies of The Evening: Women Characters of Prime-Time Television (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1983), p. vii.

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3 Ibid viii.

4 Mary Brown, "Television and Women's Culture." Women Audiences and the Workplace, Ed. Dorthy Hobson. (Newsday Park, California: SAGE, 1990), p. 62.

5 Cynthia A. Tuznik, Content Analysis of Working Women's Portrayals in MS and Working Women Advertisements From 1979 to 1988. (Oklahoma State University, 1989), pp. 1-2.

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7 Nancy Signorielli, Role Portrayal and Stereotyping on Television. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. xiv.

8 Ibid. 159.

9 Ibid 160.

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11 Susan Faludi, Backlash. (New York: Crown Publishing Inc., 1991), p. 153.

12 Faludi 159.

13 Ibid.

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15 General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines, and Books, A Free and Responsible Press Robert D. Leigh, ed., (Chicago and London: The University Press, 1947), 26-27.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This thesis examines the characters and role portrayals of women presented by television medium by studying 10 situational programs, 8 comedies, and 2 dramas. Content analysis was used to measure whether these portrayals are realistic or unrealistic compared with women in society. The portrayals which the media present to society have been studied over the years, especially during the 1970's when the women's movement was popular, and many feminists criticized the media's representation of women (1).

This study addresses the problem of whether television is portraying working women's roles to be consistent with working women's roles in society. First, this chapter examines trends in prime time television character portrayals of women. Second, documentation to support the assumption that the media should portray working women in a socially responsible manner is presented. Also, other studies which have been conducted in relation to the portrayals of women and work are discussed along with comments on how they support this study.

Trends in Prime Time Television Character Portrayals of Women

One of the predominant experiences connecting Americans is prime time television. The images and heroes presented are important, for they link viewers to other Americans and they also give ideas about who we are and what's important (2). However, there has been considerable speculation and argument about the kinds of messages television has presented to viewers from 1950 to the present. Feminists for example, who were concerned with questions relating to sex roles behaviors and attitudes about women and men, have expressed anger about television's portrayals of female images and roles (3).

Television's portrayals of women are very important, not only because women are frequent viewers, but also because television portrayals are reflections of women's lives, and implicit endorsements of beliefs and values about women in a very popular forum (4). In doing this study, women characters were considered as real people which led to questions about the representativeness of television's portrayals of women, that is, how female characters compared with the female population.

Situational comedies and nighttime "soaps" provide viewers with ideas and values; moreover, there is considerable evidence that such television content serves as a model for audience members' behavior as well (5). Children, especially, identify with television models,

incorporating traits and behaviors of favorite characters into their own systems of expression. However, it is not just children who model their behaviors after television actions; older viewers, too, learn ways of interacting, coping and communicating from media characters (6).

Television characters convey information about roles, (that is how to react in certain situations), some of which are quite useless. Yet, some roles portrayed by fantasy characters are the commonplace ones of spouse, parent, employee, or neighbor (7).

Most social scientists who have studied the subject argue that viewers learn what's appropriate in these roles from media models as well as from real ones (8). One of the first and most enduring types of women characters on prime time television was a rambunctious rebel who was only intermittently heroic and seldom womanish. The character was a mischievous child-woman, called the "imp" (9). The "imp" appeared on shows such as, The Beverly Hillbillies, and Bonanza. In the 1970's there was Laverne and Shirley, All in the Family, and Charlie's Angels. Like a tomboy she rejected the frills and fancies of her sex for the harder advantages of the boys. Her figure and dress were boyish. She was active but awkward and graceless. In addition she was curious, imaginative, independent, adventuresome and asexual. However, for a female character, these attributes conflicted with society's expectations that she be a passive and dependent woman (10).

Thus the "imp" unlike the male hero, was restricted by the narrow boundaries of her sex role and, indeed, she did seem to be the antithesis of what psychologists described as the normal young woman--submissive, timid, dependent domestic, emotional, sensitive, and vain (11). With this definition of normal, the "imp" was in big trouble from the start and "imp" shows always dealt, to some extent at least, with the obvious conflict between her nature and behavior and society's expectations for her. This conflict was particularly evident in the most prominent television "imp" Lucy Ricardo on the I Love Lucy Show (12).

By the 1960's the "imp" was single. Freed from the domestic scene, she was no longer an inept housewife. She had newfound competence in wrestling, riding horseback, and racing cars. Her competence did not extend to traditionally female pursuits, however, and she was as much a rebel against the social definition of appropriately female as her predecessors had been (13).

While some changes in the portrayal of women were found between 1976 and 1978, the overall image of women changed very little between 1972 and 1981. Women on television were younger than women in real life and women over 60 were almost totally absent. Working women were more likely to be professionals on television than in real life (14). Women were also younger and single with an abundance of wealthy and upper-middle class women. Women were also more likely

to be found in situation comedies than in other types of programs (15).

Television's "ladies of the evening" have been arrant distortions of American womanhood. Nevertheless, television failed to accurately represent women by even the grossest measures. Concentrating on the female characters has exaggerated their relative visibility in prime time (16). What is conveyed through television characters, among other things, is information about roles, that is, social expectations for behavior. There is strong social pressure for the individual to accept and internalize certain socially and culturally prescribed roles and not others, and to endorse appropriate role behavior in others (17). Television affects the socialization process inadvertently by providing role models for its viewers in the fantasy characters it represents as entertainment (18).

In the 1980's, the numbers of women on prime time television began to dwindle in the 1985-86 season, as a new breed of action-adventure series that included women only as victimized girls began crowding out more balanced fare. In this new crop of programs, as uneasy critics commented at the time, the viciousness of the assaults on the young female characters rivaled "slasher" films (19).

But TV's counterassault on women's liberation would be, by necessity, more restrained than Hollywood's. Women have more influence in front of their sets than they do at the movies; women represent not only the majority of viewers

but, more important, they represent the viewers who advertisers most want to reach (20).

According to Faludi, when the TV programs tried to force-feed its cast of overweening guys and wilting gals in the 1987-88 season, a devastating proportion of the female audience simply shut off their sets. By December, the networks' prime-time ratings had plunged a spectacular nine points from a year earlier, an average loss of 3.5 million households a night and the lowest rated TV season ever (21).

While the drop-off can be partly attributed to the phasing in of the "people meter," a more finely tuned measure of viewership, that technological change doesn't explain why the audience flight was so disproportionately female. Nor does it explain why, in subsequent backlash seasons, when the "people meter" was no longer at issue, a lopsidedly female exodus kept recurring (22).

By the following season (1988-89) the programmers backed off a bit to admit a couple of strong female leads to the prime-time scene. "Roseanne" and "Murphy Brown," both featuring outspoken women and both, not coincidentally, created by women became instant and massive hits (23). Television began to increasingly take women seriously and there were a number of programs, or types of programs, that featured women in a more central way (24). Women's issues had arrived on the media agenda; documentaries, discussion programs and dramas on female topics such as infertility, cervical and breast cancer, rape, etc., had arrived (25).

Independent women were "seizing" control of prime time, Newsweek griped in a 1989 cover story (26). With two strong

female characters as Roseanne and Murphy, it was seen as too many. "The video pendulum has swung too far from the blissfully domestic supermom who once warmed the electronic hearth," Newsweek said. Behind the scenes, the network tried to make changes that amounted to "taking all the stuffing out of Murphy," the show's creator Diane English observed (27).

By the following season, (1989-90) prime time reverted to traditional feminine icons, as new series filled the screen with teenage models, homemakers, a nun, and that peculiar prototype of the last TV backlash, the good suburban housekeeper. An updated version of the tamed genie of "Bewitched" reappeared, in the ironically named "Free Spirit." By the next season, women were shut out of so many new shows that even comic Jay Leno joked about it at the 1991 "Emmys" (28).

Since female viewers consistently give their highest ratings to non-traditional female characters such as women leaders, heroines, and comedians, televisions producers had to develop non-traditional programs and roles, or experience a massive decline in ratings as they did in 1990.

Changes in the presentation of women also appeared in the fictional sphere, and in TV commercials there was a proliferation of the "new woman" stereotype to add to the previous advertising stereotypes of the dutiful, caring mother and the glamorous, efficient hostess. While this new image may have been more superficially in tune with reality

and, it could be argued, was a source of identification and pleasure for women, it was one that was contradictory (29).

The liberated woman is strongly marked by signs of her femininity and sexuality. She is well made-up, her clothes are up-to-date, she works outside the home but more often than not she appears in the context of consumption rather than production. She is active, lovely and sexy. Although she appears competent and independent, her liberation and well being are strongly equated with material consumption (30). When asked whether television portrayals of women will continue to be in limbo concerning the realistic representation of women in society versus non-realistic representations? Susan Faludi answers, yes, that is unless you count the millions of female viewers faced with yet another distorted image of themselves in the backlash mirror (31).

Support for The Assumption of Media Responsibility

In an 1947 report, the Commission on Freedom of the Press established as a recommended requirement that the media should have a responsibility in relation to the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society as a whole (32). The Commission on Freedom of The Press also recommended the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in society. The Hutchins Commission explained why it is important for the media to

realistically represent working women to society, because the agencies of mass communication are an educational instrument, perhaps the most powerful there is and they assume a role like that of educators in stating and clarifying the ideas toward which the community should strive (33). Therefore, the media should work on presenting a more "real" representation of women in society. The assumption that the media should portray realistic representations of working women is supported by this recommendation (34).

It was stated by the Commission that people make decisions in large part on the basis of favorable or unfavorable images presented to them in the mass media. In addition, people relate fact and opinion to stereotypes (35). These media images apply to working women who constitute a major part of society (36), and society has a right to receive realistic portrayals of working women in the media. The Commission said society should demand realism from its media (37).

Related Studies

In 1976, Lillian Robinson wrote an article that dealt with the contrast between the image of working women in television serials (including soaps) and the actual situation of women as workers in society (38).

"TV fiction," Robinson argues, "has developed a set of myths specific to women and work elaborating on the themes of whether and why women

enter the job market, what occupations they engage in, how they typically perform there, how they interact with the people and for whom they work" (39).

Turning to "actual working women" to "test" the images, Robinson also found distortions. Whereas TV images collapse women's work identity and situation into sexuality, the real working woman sees herself as a person, "both worker and woman--with a job, a boss, a pay check, and a set of working conditions, not a complex of sex roles involved in a workplace" (40). Robinson added that in addition to TV's distorted proportion of women working, there is a large difference between the kinds of work women are seen to do on TV and the work they do in real life.

In 1978 Gaye Tuchman studied the symbolic representation of women in the mass media. Tuchman concluded that relatively few women are portrayed there, although at the time women represented 51 percent of the population and well over 40 percent of the labor force (41). The working women who were portrayed were condemned, Tuchman wrote. Others were trivialized; they were symbolized as child-like adornments who needed to be protected or were dismissed to the private confines of the home (42).

In Ladies of the Evening, Diana Meehan's aim was to provide "specific and accurate descriptions of television characters and behaviors and some index of change over time." She assumed that television's presentations of women characters were "reflections of women's lives, implicit

endorsement of beliefs and values about women in a very popular forum" (43). Meehan combined the quantitative approach "counting the number of female characters or female heroes, the number of times that situation comedy jokes were at the expense of a female or that dramatic acts of violence were committed by women or against women" with a more qualitative approach so that she could address "questions about women characters' power and powerlessness, vulnerability and strength" (44).

In addition, Meehan used what might be called a comparative approach to determine the degree to which female characters were representative of the female population in society. This involved "considering female characters as real people" (45). Later, Meehan explained her assumption that "viewers evaluate the behavior of others as appropriate compared with television models, and life and its television become more interrelated" (46).

Carol Aschur's pioneering essay "Daytime Television: You'll Never Want to Leave Home," written in 1976 (under the name "Lopate") showed traces of this radical position (47). Turning to soap operas, Aschur illustrated the two important myths that they propagate: the idea of America "as a country where almost everyone is middle class," and the idea that "the family can be and is, the sole repository of love, understanding, compassion, respect, and sexuality (48). Soap opera families "portray the idealized lives of families economically headed by professional men, while most women

are housewives." Even when they work, women are rarely seen on the job, said Aschurs (49).

Aschurs concluded that there is more equality between women and men in "soaps" than in real life or any other dramatic form; and that "soaps" ultimately function to promise the housewife confined to her home that "the life she is in can fulfill her needs" (50).

In her essay on feminist criticism and television, E. Ann Kaplan considered both how women are represented on television and how women as television spectators are engaged by the medium. Kaplan surveyed the variety of feminist approaches to television that have been developed in the past 20 years, giving particular attention to what she termed "post-structuralist" feminism: the cluster of approaches that grow out of an analysis of "the language order through which we learn to be what our culture calls 'women' as we attempt to bring about change beneficial to women" (51).

In 1981, Margaret Gallagher conducted a review of studies dealing with different aspects of the relationship between men and women and the media, including the portrayal of women on North American television (52). These studies revealed that women were under represented and occupied less central roles than men. Marriage and parenthood were considered more important to women than to men and the traditional division of labor was shown as typical in marriage (53). Women were more passive than men. Employed

women were shown in traditionally female occupations, as subordinate to men, with little status or power (54). Television ignored or distorted the women's movement, Gallagher wrote. Gallagher discussed similar research in other countries.

Audrey Manes and Paula Melnyk sampled 62 female characters from a two-month sample and another 95 female and 149 male characters from a six week sample of Canadian prime-time network dramas excluding movies (55). They found generally that women employed at all occupational levels were single or unsuccessfully married. Employed women were 10 times more likely than housewives to have unsuccessful marriages. Women in low-level occupations were usually depicted as engaged to be married (56). In the six week sample (comparing males and females), married employed females were three times more likely to be unsuccessfully married than males. Females successful in having both a career and marriage were not deeply committed to their profession or were financially independent. On the whole, programs offered negative reinforcement for female aspirations and achievements outside the home and family (57).

Beth Miles, "Channeling Children: Sex Stereotyping in Prime Time TV," conducted a sample using three episodes of each of the 16 top rated programs broadcast between 7:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. during November 1973. There was considerable under representation of women in all programs;

men made up 61 percent of the major characters (58). In action-adventure programs men outnumbered women by six to one. Men worked in diverse occupations, nearly twice the number held by women. Three-quarters of the adult men in programs about families contributed to family support; only one-third of the women made financial contributions (59). All adult characters exhibited more negative than positive behaviors, but the behavior of women was more negative than that of men. More men than women displayed competent behaviors, while more women than men displayed incompetent or bungling behaviors (60).

Similar research and studies done on the portrayals of working women seem to indicate that the portrayals do not depict women in a socially responsible manner. It can be concluded that the media are still not accurate in their representation and presentation of women's roles.

This thesis follows the methods first used by M. Venkatesan and Jean P. Losco, "Women in Magazine Ads: 1959-71," Journal of Advertising Research, and more recently used by Cynthia Tuznik. However, Tuznik went further by adding the occupational categories used by Louis C. Wagner and Janis B. Banos; "A Women's Place: A Follow-Up Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements.

This study compares and evaluates the roles and characters of working women portrayed by the media. Also, it evaluates and critiques the media to see if they are fulfilling the obligation of presenting women in a socially

responsible manner, one that is commensurate with the realities of the female population.

Endnotes

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58 Signorielli 60.

59 Beth Miles, Channeling Children: Sex Stereotyping in Prime-Time TV (Princeton, N.J.: Women on Words and Images, 1975).

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study uses content analysis to determine if television's character portrayals of women are representative of the female population. Richard Budd, et al defined content analysis as a systematic technique for analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators (1). The use of content analysis has become a viable method in the study of television content.

Scope of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to determine if television portrayals of working and non-working women are consistent with the characteristics of the real-world population of women. This thesis examined 10 television programs: "Roseanne," "Murphy Brown," "Coach," "Full House," "Major Dad," "Home Improvement," "Designing Women," "Murder She Wrote," "Northern Exposure." and "Cheers."

The selected research period was a four-week time period, February 3, 1992, to March 3, 1992. This allowed each program to be viewed four times over a four-week period

for a total of 40 episodes to compare and study for realism in relation to females in society.

Media Selected

This thesis examined working and non-working women's portrayals in 10 television programs: "Roseanne," "Murphy Brown," "Coach," "Full House," "Major Dad," "Home Improvement," "Designing Women," "Murder She Wrote," "Northern Exposure," and "Cheers." These programs were rated in the top 10 Nielsen ratings the week of January 6-12, 1992. Of the 10 shows, five appear on Monday nights on CBS, which are, "Major Dad," "Murphy Brown," "Designing Women," "Northern Exposure," and "Murder She Wrote." Four appear Tuesday night on ABC: "Full House," "Home Improvement," "Roseanne," "Full House," and "Coach," with "Cheers" showing Thursday night on NBC.

"Roseanne," "Full House," "Home Improvement," and "Major Dad," deal with family situations, "Murphy Brown," "Designing Women," "Murder She Wrote," and "Coach" deal with occupational aspects of working women. "Northern Exposure" and "Cheers" deal more with everyday survival and the social environment of individuals.

Of the 10 shows, four have plots which center around a woman or women. The remaining six either have a man as the main character, or a mixture of a visible male along with a visible female character. Brief descriptions of the 10 programs are as follows:

Major Dad: A CBS comedy involving a military officer and his newly formed family and life on a military base as a newlywed, stepfather and officer. Recurring characters include two middle-aged adult women, three middle-aged adult males, and three female children.

Murphy Brown: A CBS comedy which centers around a very prominent single mother/news anchor and her co-workers, with most scenes taking place in the newsroom. Recurring characters include two younger adult female, one middle age female, two younger adult males, one middle age male, two older age females, and one male child.

Roseanne: An ABC situational comedy featuring a blue collar family. Recurring characters include two adult females, one middle-aged adult male, three middle-aged adult females, and three young children.

Cheers: An NBC comedy about a Boston bar and the workers and customers who frequent the establishment. Recurring characters include four middle-aged adult males, three middle-aged adult females, and one younger adult male.

Full House: An ABC family comedy featuring a widowed father, his brother-in-law and a male roommate, who share a house and help care for the widower's three children. Recurring characters include one middle-aged adult male, two

young adult males, two teenage females, one young adult female, and two female children.

Murder She Wrote: A CBS drama series involving an older age adult female author of detective books whose job is to solve mysterious murder cases. Recurring characters include one older adult female and one older adult male. Each plot is different, therefore cast members vary on a weekly basis.

Coach: An ABC comedy featuring a football coach/father and his absent minded coaching staff. Recurring characters include one older male, one middle-aged male, one young adult male, one middle-aged female and one young adult female.

Designing Women: A CBS situational comedy featuring four women owners of an interior design company called "Sugarbakers." Recurring characters include three middle-aged females, one older age adult female, and one middle-aged male.

Home Improvement: An ABC family comedy featuring a husband/father/repairman, who has a weekly television show on how to repair houses and make home improvements. Recurring characters include two middle-aged males, one middle-aged female and three young male children.

Northern Exposure: A CBS drama featuring a young adult female pilot who breaks up with her boyfriend and moves to a

remote town in Alaska. Recurring characters include one young adult female, three young adult males, one middle-aged female, one older age female and two older males.

Time Frame

The research period was a one-month time frame, from February 3, 1992, to March 4, 1992. Four episodes of each program were recorded for a four-week period. A sample of 40 program episodes was used for coding, allowing for comparison between each program's portrayal of women characters. The episodes were recorded on videotape and coded at a later date.

Coding

Judges consisted of two college graduates, a male and a female, and a female "controller" who oversaw the coding and eliminated problems with the coding procedures. Judges evaluated each program episode by answering the following questions concerning the women portrayed: 1. Were women portrayed as being dependent on men? 2. Were women portrayed as having a high-living style or luxury possessions? 3. In what occupations were women portrayed? 4. Were women portrayed as being married or single? 5. Were women portrayed as having children? 6. Were women shown more in the home, or at their place of employment?

Categories for Analysis

This thesis uses categories of analysis that were developed and tested by M. Venkatesan and Jean P. Losco (2), and more recently used by Cynthia Tuznik in a study of "Content Analysis of Working Women's Portrayals in MS and Working Women Advertisements From 1979 to 1988" (3). The occupational categories were previously used by Louis C. Wagner and Janis Banos (4).

The following indicates the categories used in this study to determine the characteristics of women in each program.

Defining the Categories

Women as Dependent on Men

In order to complete a task a woman needs male instruction.

Woman needs male encouragement or reinforcement.
Woman requires males for affection, instruction, happiness, leisure.

Woman as High-Living

Woman concerned with luxury leisure.
Woman concerned with adornments and material possessions.
Woman concerned with decorative products.

Occupational

Professional - minimum of a bachelor's degree needed to perform job.

White collar - high school education expected to perform job.

Blue Collar - little or no education needed to perform job.

Unemployed - does not work, stays home.

Woman as Single, Married Divorced

Woman is single, does not date or have a steady boyfriend or companion, does not have children.

Woman is married, has husband.

Woman is divorced, was married no longer has husband.

Woman is involved in relationship, dates or has a steady boyfriend or companion.

Woman as Parent

Woman has one or more children.

Woman has no children.

Working Environment

Woman shown mostly in home, but dressed for work.

Woman shown mostly at work performing job duties.

Hypotheses of the Study

The overall hypothesis predicted no difference in character portrayals of working and non-working women on television and no difference between television portrayals and women in society.

Hypothesis #1

There will be no difference between the role portrayal of woman as dependent on man, in the television programs selected and women's dependency on man in "real-life."

Hypothesis #2

There will be no difference between the percentage of role portrayals of woman as high-living in the television programs selected and the percentage of women as high-living in "real-life."

Hypothesis #3

There will be no difference in the occupational status of woman in the television programs selected and the occupational status of women in "real-life."

Hypothesis #4

There will be no difference in the role portrayal of women shown in their working environment in the television programs selected and women in their working environment in "real-life."

Hypothesis #5

There will be no difference in the television programs selected of the portrayal of women as single, married or divorced.

Hypothesis #6

There will be no difference in the television programs selected portrayal of women as parents or non-parents.

Tabulation

Each program episode was coded according to the behavior characteristics portrayed, women as dependent on man, women as independent of man, women portrayed as having high-living style, women's occupational level, women's marital status, women as parents and women's working environment.

Raw scores for each episode, each program and each characteristic were totaled and percentages computed.

Presentation of Data

The data collected from the television programs in relation to categories of analysis are represented in tables. Tables I and II, in Chapter IV, indicates the percentages of situational comedies containing a particular category of analysis and the category of analysis based on the 1992 Statistical Abstract of the United States.

Limitations

A limitation to this thesis was that the sweeps rating period chosen was limited to a one week time span. Therefore, the shows were chosen as the top ten shows for only one week which did not allow for specific selection of particular situational comedies focusing on women characters. Also the findings are not representative of all time frames, or of all television shows.

Endnotes

1 Richard W. Budd, et al. Content Analysis of Communications (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1976), 2.

2 M. Venkatesan and Jean P. Losco, "Women in Magazine Ads: 1959-71," Journal of Advertising Research, vol. 15, no. 5 (October 1975), 49-54.

3 Cynthia A. Tuznik, Content Analysis of Working Women's Portrayals in MS. and Working Woman Advertisements From 1979 to 1988. (Oklahoma State University, 1989), p. 7.

4 Louis C. Wagner and Janis B. Banos, "A Woman's Place: A Follow-Up Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements," Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 10, (May 1973), 213-214.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The problem investigated in this study was whether media portrayals of women and work are consistent with women and work in "real life." Hypothesis predicted no difference between character portrayals of working women on television and working women in "real life."

Procedures

Two coders and a "controller" were used to evaluate the following characteristics of women in 10 situational comedies: 1. Were women portrayed as being dependent on men? 2. Were women portrayed as showing a concern for high-living and luxury possessions? 3. In what occupations were women portrayed? 4. Were women portrayed as single, married, or divorced? 5. Were women portrayed as being a parent? 6. Were women shown in their working (occupational) environment?

The 10 shows coded were: "Roseanne," "Murphy Brown," "Coach," "Full House," "Major Dad," "Home Improvement," "Designing Women," "Murder She Wrote," "Northern Exposure," and "Cheers."

All three judges looked at videotaped episodes of each program which were taped every week for a period of one month. Based on the categories of content analysis coders decided in which category each female character portrayal fell. Female characters in each of the shows were coded by programs, character name, and role portrayed.

Coding Scale Used

For Each Category

Category #1

Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

D = Dependent

I = Independent

Dependent

- A. In order to complete a task, woman needs male instruction.
- B. Woman needs male encouragement or reinforcement.
- C. Woman requires males for affection, instruction, happiness, and leisure.

Category #2

Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

HL = High Living

NHL = Not High Living

High Living

- A. Woman concerned with luxury, leisure.
- B. Woman concerned with adornments and material possessions.
- C. Woman concerned with decorative products.

Occupation

Category #3

Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations Outside the Home?

P = Professional

WC = White Collar

BC = Blue Collar

UE = Unemployed

- A. Professional - Minimum of a bachelor's degree needed to perform job.
- B. White Collar - High school education expected.
- C. Blue Collar - Little or no education.
- D. Unemployed - Does not work, stays home with children.

Marital Status

Category #4

Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

M = Married

S = Single

D = Divorced

I = Involved

- A. Married - Has husband.
- B. Single - Does not date or have steady boyfriend or companion.
- C. Divorced - Was married, now divorced.
- D. Involved - Woman is involved in relationship date or has a steady boyfriend or companion.

Woman as Parent

Category #5

Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

P = Parent

NP = Not Parent

- A. Parent - Woman has one or more children.
- B. Not Parent - Woman has no children.

Working Environment

Category #6

Were Women Shown in a Working Environment?

WE = Working Environment NWE = Non-Working Environment

- A. Working Environment - Woman shown mostly at work, performing job duties.
- B. Non-working Environment - Woman shown mostly out of working environment, but dressed for work.

Results of Coding

Each program was coded one at a time, using the six categories specified. All three judges viewed each program and, after discussion, came to a consensus.

"Roseanne"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Roseanne: Very independent, main character on show, does not need male instruction, does only what she wants to do, when she wants to do it.

Jackie: Dependent, Roseanne's sister, who is dependent in her thinking, looks to Roseanne for approval and

encouragement, also looks to males for affection and to find happiness in her life.

Crystal: Dependent, friend of the family, who looks to her husband for approval and encouragement, afraid of performing a duty before asking husband's approval or permission.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Roseanne: Not high living, not concerned with luxury, very "down to earth." Not concerned with nor does she own adornments or expensive material possessions, whether it be clothing or household items.

Jackie: Not high living, plain dresser, usually in jeans and t-shirt, not concerned with adornments or decorative products. Sometime dresses more "tomboyish" than feminine.

Crystal: Not high living, conservative dresser, usually in button-up sweater, shirt, jeans or slacks. Wedding ring only visible sign of jewelry or decorative products. Does not draw attention to self under any circumstances.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Roseanne: Blue collar, waitress in restaurant at local mall, where she usually gives customers, as well as her boss, a hard time.

Jackie - White collar, police woman who usually performs security work. Talks about aspects of her job such as chasing down a burglar, but is never shown on the "streets" performing job duties.

Crystal - Unemployed, does not work.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Roseanne - Married, has husband.

Jackie - Involved, single but dates on occasion, does not have a steady boyfriend or companion, but is constantly searching for one (male).

Crystal - Married, has husband.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Roseanne - Parent, has three children, two teenage girls and one young boy.

Jackie - Not parent, has no children.

Crystal - Parent, has one small child less than a year old.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in their Working Environment?

Roseanne - Working environment, shown at work performing job duties. Mostly shown resisting job duties and responsibilities.

Jackie - Not working environment, usually shown in police uniform but never at work, nor shown performing job duties. Is shown or implies she has just left work, but isn't shown performing job duties.

Crystal - Unemployed, does not work outside the home.

"Murphy Brown"

Category #1-- Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Murphy Brown: Independent and outspoken, gives males instruction rather than takes instruction from them under any circumstances.

Corky: Dependent, not very intelligent when common sense is concerned, dependent when it comes to work and the working environment.

Audrey: Dependent, portrayed as dependent, not only on males, but in general. Seems to need guidance in every endeavor she attempts to do.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Murphy: High living, dresses more casually than sophisticated but still shows concern for luxury. Usually shown in loose fitting, free flowing clothing that hides her figure. Apartment appears to have expensive decorations and adornments.

Corky: High living, dresses very sophisticated, usually shown in what appears to be expensive suits and accessories. Everything is usually coordinated, very concerned with appearance.

Audrey: Not high living, very conservative dresser most clothes look like they're from vintage shops. Most clothing looks dated and worn.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Murphy: Professional, news reporter, a position which probably requires a college degree and previous broadcasting experience which involves a comfortable salary.

Corky: White collar, newsroom runner, does some news stories on air. Is mostly shown gathering information or news ideas to bring to the meeting table.

Audrey: Blue collar, newsroom secretary, which probably requires little or no education.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Murphy: Single, does not date or have steady boyfriend or companion. Is never shown out on date with male, only shown communicating with males at work.

Corky: Involved, dates on a regular basis is also shown with, or mentions steady boyfriend or companion. At one time was engaged to marry steady boyfriend.

Audrey: Involved, is involved in a steady relationship, dates the producer of the show on a regular basis. She is seen quite a bit on dates with her boyfriend and at times shares his apartment with him.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Murphy: Parent, has one small child, but father of child was not mentioned or does not play a major role in the show.

Corky: Not parent, has no children, but would like to have some one day.

Audrey: Not parent, has no children.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Murphy: Working environment, usually shown in the newsroom writing or developing story ideas. Sometimes shown on air performing job duties as an anchor. A lot of emphasis is given to her career.

Corky: Working environment, mostly seen in the newsroom discussing projects and performing job duties associated with news gathering, writing and reporting.

Audrey - Working environment, shown at work, in her working area answering telephone, taking messages, or making coffee. Does a lot of meddling with others' job duties when she becomes bored with her job, which is often.

"Coach"Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Christine: Independent, outspoken, does her own thinking, performs several duties without the help or instruction from males. Lives alone and financially supports self.

Kelly: Dependent, depends heavily on father for decision making and looks to please husband. In many cases wants his approval before continuing or beginning an activity.

Linda: Dependent, needs male instruction to complete her duties, has very little common sense. Is usually put down by others, but very rarely recognizes it as such.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Christine: High living, dresses very sophisticated and classy, shows much concern for luxury and material possessions.

Kelly: Not high living, usually shown in casual clothing, jeans, jackets, vest, sporty shirts, etc. More of a "college attire" used to express her character.

Linda: Not high living, shown mostly in athletic attire. Because of her height, is shown only in tennis shoes or flat shoes.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Christine: Professional, television news reporter, a position which probably requires a degree. She does well in her profession, therefore has been offered promotions with other stations based on her performance. However, chooses to stay close to fiance.

Kelly: White collar, works at the school newspaper as a student editor on a part time basis. Main part of the show characterizes her as a college student.

Linda: Professional, college girls basketball coach and physical education teacher at Minnesota State University.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Christine: Involved, has very steady and serious relation with male lead in show. Is engaged, and plans to marry soon.

Kelly: Married, has husband, whom she met her second year in college.

Linda: Involved, has steady boyfriend, who is assistant football coach at Minnesota State.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Christine: Not parent, has no children, does not express desire to have any.

Kelly: Not parent, has no children.

Linda: Not parent, has no children.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Christine: Working environment, shown in working environment on occasion. Sometimes shown working in her apartment on story ideas from her apartment.

Kelly: Not working environment, has never been shown in work setting. Usually shown "on the go," stopping by father's office or home for advice, or whining when she has to make a decision or things don't go her way.

Linda: Working environment, shown at work on the Minnesota campus where she is a coach, usually with a whistle cord around her neck. Very seldom shown performing job duties or seen coaching any of the female athletes.

"Full House"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Becky: Dependent, looks to husband for encouragement and reinforcement. Seems to need affection as if she were a child.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Becky: Not high living, very fashionable dresser but not flashy and concerned with decorative products or material objects.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Becky: Unemployed, usually shown at home taking care of her two small children.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Becky: Married, has husband whom she had dated for several years before marrying about two years ago.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Becky: Parent, has small twin boys.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Becky: Not employed, stays home with children.

"Major Dad"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Gunny: Independent, works independently, exemplifies very stern and demanding authority when needed, but mostly expresses passive side of personality.

Polly: Independent, has mind of her own. Discusses many things with her husband, not for his opinion, but more for communication purposes.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Gunny: Not high living, conservative, mainly shown in military uniform. If shown outside of work, jeans and sweatshirt are the usual attire.

Polly: Not high living, casual dresser, usually slacks, shirt and free flowing jacket. Sometimes shown in jeans and shirt. Does not appear to be concerned with material objects, most decorative items in home are associated with the military.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Gunny: Professional in the United State Marines. Is shown mostly as the office manager, where she supervises two younger military men.

Polly: White collar, free-lance writer/editor. Does not work on a steady basis.

Category #4--Are Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Gunny: Single, does not date or have steady boyfriend or companion. Has never been shown with male companion or discussing one (companion).

Polly: Married, has husband, second marriage for both.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Gunny: Not parent, has no children.

Polly: Parent, has three teenage girls from her first marriage.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Gunny: Working environment, always shown on military base performing job duties, whether it's taking or giving instructions or performing secretarial duties.

Polly: Not working environment, never shown working, but shown talking about work and duties at hand. Sometimes shown at seminars gathering information about a particular subject that she will write about later.

"Home Improvement"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Jill: Dependent, wants to have husband's approval and opinion before doing a task, doesn't always get it, but depends on it. Will sometimes argue with husband for his approval.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Jill: Not high living, shirt and jeans or causal dress is the usual attire. Sometimes shown in "workout" gear.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Jill: Unemployed, does not work outside the home. Talked about accepting a position as a magazine editor at one time, went to job one day, and decided it wasn't for her. She felt her place was in the home.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Jill: Married, has husband.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Jill: Parent, has three young boys.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Jill: Unemployed, housewife.

"Designing Women"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Julia: Independent, very strong headed and stubborn, sometimes sarcastic in opinion and decisions. Has attitude of "It's my way or no way."

Mary Jo: Dependent, has own mind and performs several duties as an individual, but seems to need encouragement and reinforcement for doing the right thing. Looks to male for happiness and affection.

Allison: Dependent, very hesitant to do anything until it has been discussed and approved by others. Tries to have attitude of a very strong willed person, but breaks under pressure.

Carleen: Dependent, lacks common sense and direction, is usually told what to do and how to do it. Easy going personality, is bothered by little, does not embarrass easily or at all.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Julia: High living, very fashionable dresser, concerned with luxury and material possessions. Appears to wear expensive clothes accompanied by expensive accessories. Sometimes looks down on others.

Mary Jo: High living, dresses very nice and casual, but overly concerned with material possessions.

Allison: High living, dresses more in expensive suits and heels concerned with her appearance and what others think. Will spend money on expensive material objects to impress people she doesn't like.

Carleen: Not high living, dresses with a "southern flair," more "down to earth" dresser. Is impressed with luxury and material possessions of others, but not overly concerned when it comes to self.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Julia: White collar, part owner of a interior design company named Sugarbaker's, which is operated out of her home.

Mary Jo: White collar, interior decorator for Sugarbaker's.

Allison: White collar, interior decorator for Sugarbaker's.

Carleen: White collar, interior decorator for Sugarbaker's.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Julia: Single, does not date or have steady boyfriend or companion. Also does not appear to be bothered by the absence of a male companion.

Mary Jo : Involved, dates on occasion.

Allison: Married, has husband.

Carleen: Single, does not date or have steady boyfriend or companion.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Julia: Parent, has older children, have been mentioned but not shown in the program episodes.

Mary Jo: Not parent, has no children.

Allison: Parent, has one child.

Carleen - Not parent, has no children.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Julia: Working environment, shown in working environment discussing projects, but very rarely shown working.

Mary Jo: Working environment, shown in working environment, but rarely shown working.

Allison: Working environment, shown in working environment, but rarely shown working.

Carleen: Working environment, shown in working environment, but rarely shown working.

"Murder She Wrote"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Jessica: Independent, intelligent thinker, many times males come to her for instruction and encouragement. Does not need male support.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Jessica: Not high living, casual dresser, not concerned with luxury and expensive adornments. Does a lot of "dirty work," not concerned with what others think of her. Is more concerned with performing the job at hand to the satisfaction of her clients.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Jessica: Professional, top notch detective, investigator as well as a mystery writer, who is very involved in her work.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Jessica: Single, does date occasionally. Is sometimes shown out on a dinner date, but nothing close to a serious relationship.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Jessica: Not parent, has no children, or at least there is no indication on the show.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environment?

Jessica: Working environment, basically shown in working environment, performing job duties in every show. Show is centered around her profession and her "knack" for solving murder mysteries.

"Northern Exposure"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Shelly: Dependent, looks to males for encouragement, needs male affection and instruction. Looks to older wiser males for advice about life.

Marylin: Dependent, quiet withdrawn, looks for male instruction and reinforcement. Is usually told what to do.

Maggie: Independent, very outgoing young female. Provides a great deal of support for male characters on show. Isn't easily depressed or discouraged, always seems to find some good in even the worst situations.

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Shelly: Not high living, shown in worn mini skirts and shirts, sort of a "shabby" dresser.

Marylin: Not high living, usual attire consists of an Indian printed jacket, wornout jeans, moccasins, and blouse.

Maggie: Not high living, unpredictable dresser. Wardrobe ranges from jeans, t-shirts, hiking boots to skirts. Appears as if she may have been high living before moving to Alaska. However, in such a remote location, the need for expensive clothing and material items does not exist.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Shelly: Blue collar, waitress in local bar, which is the main meeting place for the town's people.

Marylin: Blue collar, secretary/receptionist in local health center. Does very little work on a regular basis.

Maggie: Professional, commercial pilot, which requires a college degree and probably some advanced training.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Shelly: Single, does date occasionally, talks about male companion but is rarely shown with one.

Marylin: Single, does not date or have steady male companion. Does not appear to be concerned with having a male companion.

Maggie: Involved, does date and at one time had a steady boyfriend, but now has a steady companion with whom she is beginning to grow closer.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parents?

Shelly: Not parent, has no children.

Marylin: Not parent, has no children.

Maggie: Not parent has no children, but talks about having them one day.

Category #6--Were Women Shown in Working Environments?

Shelly: Working environment, shown in bar where she works, taking orders and serving customers.

Marylin: Working environment, usually shown sitting behind the desk at the clinic where she works. Is shown at times checking patients in for appointments.

Maggie: Not working environment, talks about being a pilot, but does not perform duties associated with job. May have performed pilot duties before moving to Alaska.

"Cheers"

Category #1--Were Women Portrayed as Being Dependent on Men?

Rebecca: Dependent, comes across as a strong female, but needs male encouragement and reinforcement when performing job duties. Looks to males for affection, happiness and leisure. Can sometimes become financially dependent on males as well.

Carla: Independent, sarcastic talker somewhat crude. Does whatever, whenever she wants to. Does not respect authority from males or anyone else.

Lilith: Independent, very intelligent, logical thinker, who makes own decisions. Works and thinks independently of husband and others

Category #2--Were Women Portrayed as Being High Living?

Rebecca: High living, sometimes flashy dresser. Loves luxury, leisure and material possessions. Very concerned with decorative products. Dresses to please others.

Carla: Not high living, dresses in whatever she feels comfortable in, which is usually jeans, sweatshirts and t-shirts. Does not try to impress anyone.

Lilith: High living, very sophisticated dresser, usually shown in somewhat conservative suits, but still concerned with luxury and leisure. Very professional in her appearance and the way she carries herself.

Category #3--Were Women Portrayed as Having Occupations?

Rebecca: White collar, co-owner, manager of the bar "Cheers."

Carla: Blue collar, waitress at "Cheers," where she has worked for 11 years.

Lilith: Professional, psychologist/therapist, who has her own practice along with her husband who is a therapist.

Category #4--Were Women Portrayed as Married, Single, Divorced or Involved?

Rebecca: Involved, dates on a regular basis, continually searching for male comfort. Sometimes decides who she will date based on how much money he possesses or what he can buy her.

Carla: Divorced.

Lilith: Married, has husband.

Category #5--Were Women Portrayed as Parent?

Rebecca: Not parent, has no children, but desperately wants one by Sam, the owner of "Cheers."

Carla: Parent, has nine children ranging in age from six to 21.

Lilith: Parent, has one small child.

Category #6--Were Women Portrayed in Working Environment?

Rebecca: Working environment, is shown in working environment, sometimes shown working, but mostly shown searching for attention or plotting ways to get ahead of everyone else.

Carla: Working environment, usually shown in working environment, performing job duties, and giving customers a "hard time" through her sarcastic statements.

Lilith: Not working environment, states what her profession is, but is never shown performing job duties, or shown in working environment. Has been shown with husband on television talk show addressing psychological behavior, but is never shown in office counseling patients.

Table I
PERCENTAGES OF CATEGORIES FOR EACH
SITUATIONAL COMEDY REVIEWED

Category	Percentages
Woman as dependent on men	58%
Woman as independent of men	42%
Woman as high living	33%
Woman as non-high living	67%
Professional	29%
White Collar	38%
Blue Collar	21%
Unemployed	12%
Married	33%
Single	29%
Divorced	4%
Involved	34%
Parents	42%
Not Parents	58%
Working Environment	67%
Non working environment	21%
Not working	12%

The figures in Table I indicate the percentages of situational comedies which contain characteristics defined in the category of analysis. Figures in Table II indicate the percentages of women in society that fit into the categories of analysis, which are occupation, marital status

and parental status, as extracted from the 1992 Statistical Abstract of the United States

Table II
STATISTICAL ABSTRACT

Category	Percentages
Professional	25%
White Collar	42%
Blue Collar	11%
Unemployed	
Married	59.3%
Single	19.3%
Divorced	9.6%
Involved	
Parents	61%
Not Parents	39%

Endnotes

1 Cynthia A. Tuznik, "Content Analysis of Working Women's Portrayals in MS. and Working Woman Advertisements From 1979 to 1988." (Oklahoma State University, 1989).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This thesis was prompted by a desire to examine whether the media presents realistic portrayals of woman and work on prime time television. Portrayals of women and work were studied for the top 10 television shows for January 1992 based on Nielsen ratings.

The focus of this study was to investigate whether media portrayals of women are realistic and consistent with those of "real-life" working women.

This thesis investigated whether prime time television presents character portrayals of women consistent with their roles in society today. A comparison was made of the portrayal of women in 10 situational comedies, with statistical data from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, to determine if the media portrayals of women are realistic. It was predicted that despite an increase of women in the workforce, the roles and character portrayals of women on prime time television programs are inconsistent with the realities of women in society.

Some of the categories for analysis used in this study were previously used by M. Venkatesan and Jean P. Losco, as

well as by Cynthia Tuznik. The following were the role categories: 1. woman as dependent on man. 2. woman as high-living, showing concern for luxury possessions (1). 3. woman as a parent, one or more children, no children. 4. marital status, single, married, divorced, or involved.

In addition, occupational categories were examined. The following were the occupational categories analyzed. 1. professional, minimum of a bachelor's degree required to perform job duties. 2. white collar, high school education expected. 3. blue collar, little or no education required. 4. unemployed, does not work. The last category was: 1. working environment, woman shown mostly in working environment performing job duties, woman shown mostly in home, but dressed for work.

A panel of three judges coded each program according to the categories for analysis. The judges evaluated the women portrayed in the programs according to the specified characteristics of the women in the programs.

Research Hypotheses and Findings

1. There will be no difference between the role portrayals of woman as dependent on man in the television programs selected, and women's dependency on man in "real-life."

Findings indicate that there was no difference in women's dependency on man between the television shows selected and that of "real-life" women.

2. There will be no difference between the role portrayals of woman as high-living in the television programs selected and the percentage of women as high-living in "real-life".

Is there a difference in role portrayals of women as high-living in the television programs selected and the percentage of women as high-living in "real-life." Women in "real-life" were less high-living than those in the television shows.

3. There will be no difference in the occupational status of woman in the television programs selected and the occupational status of women in "real-life".

Findings indicate that there was a difference in the occupational levels. Women on television were portrayed as having more professional positions than women in "real-life," and fewer white collar positions than women in "real-life."

4. There will be no difference in the working environment of women in the television programs selected and women in "real-life."

Findings indicate that there is a difference in women shown in their working environment on television and women in their working environment in "real-life". Women in "real-life", tend to be in their working environment performing job duties more than women portrayal on television.

5. There will be no difference in the marital status of women in the programs selected and the marital status of

women in "real life."

Findings indicate that there is no difference in televisions portrayal of women and "real-life" women in relation to their marital status.

6. There will be no difference in the parental status of women in the television programs selected, and women in "real life."

Findings indicate that there is a difference in televisions portrayals of women as parents and that of "real-life" women. Women in the television programs were portrayed more often as nonparents than women in "real-life."

The typical woman portrayed on television was not "high living" and was dependent on men. The findings for the occupational analysis indicated a high percentage of women portrayed in white collar professions. This percentage was 38% compared to 29% for woman as professionals, requiring a college degree. However based on statistical data from the United States Department of Commerce Statistical Abstract of the United States 1992, the percentages for 44,723 females indicated that 25% were professionals with four years of college or more. Another 42% were in white collar professions, with four years of high school, while 11% were considered blue collar with less than four years of high school (2).

In the marital status category, most women in the programs were portrayed as being married, 34% married versus only 4% divorced. Statistical data showed of 95,833 females

19.3% were single 59.3% were married and 9.6% were divorced (3).

Women were portrayed 42% of the time as parents, in the situational comedies studied, while 58% was the percentage for nonparents (4). However based on statistical data of the United States, 61% of females are parents, while only 39% are not parents.

In the working environment category, women were shown in their working environment 67% of the time. However only 31% were shown actually performing job duties. There was not any statistical data available to compare this category with.

These results are surprising because based on the shows studied, it was predicted that the results would differ from the status of working women in society. The lack of a difference may be due to the small sample size, programs selected or research time frame of the programs selected. Further investigation of this topic may want to focus on portrayals of women over a increased time span (years) to chart changes in portrayals of women from five to 10 years ago to today. Also, studying the portrayals of non-working women and women as a whole would be helpful because roles of working and non-working women are different in society. Therefore, focusing only on non-working character portrayals would show how the media perceives non-working women in society.

Recommendations for Further Research

In addition, other researchers may want to focus on one characteristic in each category, such as occupational, marital, independence or parental status etc. to see if they can find the "ideal" person who would communicate the most positive image of modern women.

Examining shows targeted specifically toward women would also be useful because the majority of the shows in this study had more of a male slant and target because men played most of the main character roles. A show targeted at a women audience may have different character portrayals of women.

Future research may correct some of the deficiencies in this study which, included the small sample size of 10 shows, and the time period used. Maybe selecting different time periods for these shows would indicate change over time. Perhaps a study of just the main character of each show, along with a larger sample shows, would have indicated differences with the "real world."

Conclusion

Findings in this thesis compared with census statistical data indicate that the character portrayals of women and work on prime time television are somewhat consistent with the real world. But despite the findings of this thesis, women and researchers should pay closer attention to the portrayal of women in the television

medium, because there is still a need for the media to attempt to accurately reflect the changing roles of women in society. According to the Hutchins' Commission, the media have a grave responsibility. "The responsibility to project a representative picture of constituent groups (working women) of society was not completely accomplished."(5)

A large majority of society uses television as a reflection of their own lives, how they should be or how they are not. If television isn't portraying real reflections of society, television is not performing in a socially-responsible manner. The media possess power through what society sees and how society reacts. Therefore, the media should strive to accurately represent women in a more socially responsible manner, consistent with the roles and characteristics of women in society.

Endnotes

1 M. Venkatesan and Jean P. Losco, "Women in Magazine Ads, 1959-71, Journal of Advertising Research, vol. 15, No. 5 (October 1975), 52.

Cynthia Tuznik, Content Analysis of Working Women's Portrayals in MS and Working Women Advertisements From 1979 to 1988 (Oklahoma State University, 1989), 7.

2 Statistical Abstract of the United States 1992: Labor force, Employment and Earnings Occupations of Employed Civilians by Sex, Race, and Education Attainment (United States Department of Commerce, 1992), 396.

3 Statistical Abstract.

4 Statistical Abstract.

5 General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines, and Books, A Free and Responsible Press, Robert D. Leigh, ed., (Chicago and London: The University Press, 1947), 27.

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