

Television and Conceptions About Sex Roles: Maintaining Conventionality and the Status Quo

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This paper explores the image of men and women in annual sample of prime-time network dramatic television programming, and the relationship between television viewing and espousing sexist views of the roles of men and women in society. The analysis revealed that sex role images, over the past 10-15 years, have been quite stable, traditional, conventional, and supportive of the status quo. The cultivation analysis, a secondary analysis of data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Surveys, provides some evidence that television viewing may be related to more sexist views of women's role in society.

Sex roles are an integral part of people's lives. We learn the roles we exhibit from numerous sources — families, friends, teachers, books, movies, and of course, television. The role of television in sex role socialization has become an area of considerable concern and the topic of a good deal of research. Content studies isolating sex role portrayals make up a sizable portion of this research (Signorielli, 1985). These studies consistently reveal the presence of stereotypical and traditional male and female images in television programming.

Most research about the effects of television in sex role socialization focuses upon children, and examines perceptions of sex-typed behaviors or personality traits and tendencies to identify with specific characters. Miller and Reeves (1976) found that children nominated television characters as people they wanted to be like when they grew up. Reeves and Miller (1978) also found a strong tendency for children, especially boys, to identify with same-sex television characters. The identification of boys with television characters was positively related to perceptions of masculine attitudes (physical strength and activity level); girls' identification was positively related to perceptions of physical attractiveness. Reeves and Miller also found that girls

were more likely to identify with male characters than boys with female characters. Mayes and Valentine (1979) found that children perceive cartoon characters as exhibiting sex-typed (stereotypical) behaviors.

There are fewer studies examining the relationship between television viewing and conceptions of sex roles. Many of these studies, although not necessarily conducted as part of this ongoing research, reflect the theoretical perspective of cultivation analysis that television dominates the symbolic environment of modern life. The theory posits (1) that the more time spent watching television, the more likely conceptions of social reality will reflect what is seen on television and/or (2) that television viewing contributes to the cultivation of common perspectives among otherwise diverse respondents, i.e., mainstreaming (see, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Morgan & Signorielli, in press).

For example, in a study of 3–6-year-old children, Beuf (1974) found that those children who watched more television were more likely to stereotype occupational roles. Gross and Jeffries-Fox (1978), in a panel study of 250 8th-, 9th-, and 10th-grade children, found that television viewing was related to giving sexist responses to questions about the nature of men and women and how they are treated by society. Atkins and Miller (1975), in an experimental setting, found that children who viewed commercials in which females were cast in typically male occupations were more likely to say that this occupation was appropriate for women. And Pingree (1978) found that television commercials influenced children's attitudes about sex role stereotypes.

Two studies by Morgan (1982, 1987) and one by Morgan and Rothschild (1983) revealed that television cultivates sex role attitudes among adolescents. Morgan (1982), in a two-year panel study of 6th–8th graders found that television cultivates notions such as “women are happiest at home raising children” and “men are born with more ambition than women.” Morgan also found that after controlling for demographic variables and early levels of sexism, among girls, television viewing was significantly associated with sexist scores a year later but sex typing did not lead to more television viewing; for boys, there was no longitudinal impact on later sex role attitudes but sexism did lead to greater viewing. In a second study of 287 adolescents using measures taken at two points in time, Morgan (1987) found that television viewing made an independent contribution to adolescents' sex role attitudes over time, but that television viewing was not related to some of their specific behaviors.

A number of additional studies offer more support for the notion that television viewing contributes to children's concepts about appropriate male and female behaviors. Freuh and McGhee (1975), in a study of children in kindergarten through 6th grade, found that those who spent more time watch-

ing television exhibited greater sex typing than those who spent less time watching television. Rothschild (1984) found that 3rd- and 5th-grade children who watched more television were more likely to exhibit traditional sex role stereotypes for gender-related qualities (independence, warmth) and gender-related activities (playing sports or cooking).

Finally, Kimball (1986) examined perceptions relating to sex roles using data collected in three Canadian communities (NOTEL, UNITEL, and MULTITEL), before and after the time NOTEL received television. She found that in NOTEL children's perceptions relating to sex roles were less strongly sex typed before the introduction of television. Two years after the introduction of television, however, the perceptions of these children were more sex typed and did not differ from the perceptions relating to sex roles of the children in UNITEL and MULTITEL.

There are few studies examining the relationship between sex roles and television viewing among adults, and none using surveys of large national probability samples of respondents. Volgy and Schwarz (1980), in a study of registered voters in a Southwestern city, found a positive relationship between viewing entertainment programs and the acceptance of traditional sex roles. Pingree, Starrett, and Hawkins (1979), using a small sample of women in Madison, Wisconsin, found a positive relationship between viewing daytime serial dramas and supporting traditional family values and family structures. Ross, Anderson, and Wisocki (1982), using a sample of 78 college students and a group of 19 older adults, found that the amount of sex role stereotyping in self-descriptions was positively correlated with amount of viewing of stereotyped television programs.

The present study starts to expand our knowledge about the relationship between viewing and sex role conceptions among adults. It examines television portrayals of male and female roles, and looks for relationships between television viewing and conceptions about sex roles using a national probability sample of adults. The research, conducted from the theoretical perspective of cultivation analysis, seeks to ascertain if there is a relationship between television viewing and having views of the world that are more reflective of the images seen on television than those actually experienced.

This study examines the hypothesis that the television world is filled with male and female roles that are very traditional, sex typed, and supportive of the status quo. It also explores the hypothesis that those who watch more television will express more stereotypical and traditional responses regarding woman's role in society. Moreover, since sex role orientations are also influenced by sources other than television, such as race and education, the study predicts that mainstreaming will be found among certain demographic subgroups. Specifically, for those demographic subgroups that differ in the tendency to endorse sexist statements, such as college-educated or

noncollege-educated respondents, television may serve an homogenizing function.

METHOD

This research was conducted as part of Cultural Indicators, an ongoing research project that has been examining trends in television content and conceptions of social reality since 1969 (Gerbner et al., 1980, 1982, 1986). The design consists of two interrelated procedures: (1) message system analysis—the annual content analysis of week-long samples of prime-time and weekend-daytime network dramatic television programs, and (2) cultivation analysis—determining the conceptions of social reality that television viewing tends to cultivate in different groups of viewers.

Message System Analysis

The analysis examines data collected on major and minor characters in annual week-long samples of prime-time network dramatic programs broadcast between 1969 and 1985. Some analyses use variables that were added to the recording instrument in either 1973 or 1975. The sample consists of 19,775 characters (14,011 men and 5691 women), including 3892 major characters (2692 men and 1193 women). The variables are demographic (sex, age, race, marital status, occupation) and descriptive (“good”-“bad,” success, violence, victimization) in nature.

Coders isolate only those details presented in the particular episode included in the sample. Thus some details of a character’s portrayal that may be “well-known” by “fans” would not be coded unless specifically mentioned in the episode. The aggregating of data from all available sample years provides not only a description of images found in prime-time programs, but because many of the programs in the earlier samples are currently syndicated and broadcast on independent stations, the data base also reflects the images viewers see when they watch the independent stations, often during nonprime-time viewing hours.

Each program in the 17 annual samples was independently coded by two pairs of trained monitors in order to provide data for a full reliability analysis. (The final data set consists of a random selection of one of these two codings for each program.) An agreement coefficient was then calculated for each item (see Krippendorff, 1980). Yearly coefficients range from .96 for the sex of a character to .70 for marital status to .77 for occupation.

All variables included in this analysis have agreement coefficients of .66 or larger, and meet acceptable standards for reliability.

The analysis presents both aggregate figures and trend data. Two types of statistical analyses were used. First, simple cross tabulations were generated and chi square was used (when appropriate) to test for statistical significance. Second, trend analyses were conducted for a number of specific categories. The trend analysis used both linear and polynomial regression models, inputting data from each sample year as a data point. Data for gender, age, and violence data to 1969; occupation to 1973; and variables relating to home, marriage, and family to 1975. The categorical (dummy-type) variables were tested for significant linear and quadratic trends, as well as significant deviations from the linear or quadratic trend. If there was a significant linear or quadratic trend but there was also a large and statistically significant deviation component, it was assumed that the regression line was not a good fit to the data and that there were no year-to-year trends in the portrayals (Ferguson, 1966, p. 346).

Cultivation Analysis

The cultivation analysis was conducted via a secondary analysis of data from the 1975, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1985, and 1986 NORC General Social Surveys. The hypotheses were tested by examining the relationship between television viewing and responses to an index of sexism made up of four questions in these surveys. The index is additive in nature, summing respondents' agreement with sexist statements about woman's role in society. These questions were asked in the 1975, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1985, and 1986 NORC General Social Surveys.¹ The reliability of this index, measured by Cronbach's alpha, is acceptable (alpha = .68). Respondents who gave the sexist response to two or more of the following four statements (sexist response in italics) were categorized in the "high" sexist group; only those respondents who answered all four questions were included in the calculations:

Do you *agree* or disagree with this statement: Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men.

Do you approve or *disapprove* of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?

¹Although these items were asked in the 1982 General Social Survey, one of these questions had a very high percentage of missing answers, thus considerably reducing the size of the sample available for the analysis. Thus this year was dropped from the analysis.

If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job? Yes or No?

Tell me if you *agree* or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.

A preliminary analysis of this index for each of the six surveys in which these items were included revealed that the percent of respondents who gave "sexist" responses decreased considerably between 1975 and 1983, and then remained stable between 1983 and 1986. Consequently, to simplify the analysis, data from these six surveys were combined into two groups: surveys from the 1970s (1975, 1977, and 1978) and surveys from the 1980s (1983, 1985, and 1986).

Two types of analyses were conducted. In the first analysis respondents were divided into two groups—those who had high scores and those who had low scores on the Sexism Index. Cross tabulations of this variable with reported daily television exposure, controlling for sex, age, education, race, income, social class, political orientation, and occupational group (professional-technical, managerial, and blue collar) were calculated. This analysis classified respondents into "light" (under 2 hours each day), "medium" (2–3 hours each day), and "heavy" (4 or more hours each day) television viewers.² Responses were compared in terms of the "cultivation differential" (CD)—the percent of heavy viewers minus the percent of light viewers who give a specific response. The degree of the relationship is measured using the gamma statistic, with significance level indicated by tau-b or tau-c. In the second analysis the relationship between television viewing and the index was examined by calculating zero- and sixth- or seventh-order correlation coefficients, using the same set of control variables.

Sex-Related Stereotypes in Prime-Time Drama

The nature of characterization in prime-time dramatic television programs is well known by this time. As has been shown in numerous analyses (Signorielli, 1983; Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979; Signorielli, 1985), the world of prime-time network dramatic television programming is predominantly male. In the 17-year period from 1969 to 1985, prime-time programs have been populated by between 2–3 males for every female. Although an analysis of year-to-year trends in the proportion of men and women in these sam-

²Television viewing is divided into as close to an even three-way split as possible. This division serves to separate those who watch the most television (the heavy viewers) from those who watch the least television (the light viewers). Traditional cultivation analysis is set up to focus upon the relative degree of watching television rather than the "exact" number of hours a respondent says he or she watches television on an average day.

Table I. Some Characteristics of Television Characters Prime-Time Network Programming

	Major characters		All characters	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>N</i> (69-85)	2949 %	1276 %	14,011 %	5691 %
Social age (69-85)				
Cannot code	2.1	2.1	2.2	1.6
Child/adolescent	6.3	7.1	6.6	10.4
Young adult	18.8	28.4	16.2	27.4
Middle aged	69.3	59.4	72.2	56.9
Old (elderly)	3.5	3.1	2.8	3.7
	$(\chi^2 = 52.2; p < .001; df = 4)$		$(\chi^2 = 496.3; p < .001; df = 4)$	
Commit violence (69-85)				
Does not commit	62.2	72.8	77.4	90.5
Hurts others	36.7	23.3	18.8	8.3
Kills	11.2	3.9	3.7	1.2
	$(\chi^2 = 167.2; p < .001; df = 2)$		$(\chi^2 = 455.6; p < .001; df = 2)$	
Victimization (69-85)				
Not hurt	48.0	67.6	73.9	84.4
Hurt	46.8	29.9	21.4	13.4
Killed	5.2	2.6	4.7	2.2
	$(\chi^2 = 138.6; p < .001; df = 2)$		$(\chi^2 = 258.0; p < .001; df = 2)$	
<i>N</i> (73-85) =	2167 %	983 %	11,321 %	4724 %
Occupation (73-85)				
Unknown	12.0	29.6	18.2	37.1
Not working	16.4	18.6	13.5	15.3
Housewife	0.0	6.3	0.0	3.5
Unemployed	1.5	2.3	0.8	1.1
Student	5.6	6.6	4.6	7.9
Other	9.3	3.4	8.0	2.9
Working	71.5	51.8	68.4	47.6
Professional	19.0	20.3	18.6	18.3
White collar	15.0	10.9	12.1	12.6
Blue collar	28.4	14.3	32.3	13.2
Other	9.1	6.2	5.3	3.4
	$(\chi^2 = 359.5; p < .001; df = 8)$		$(\chi^2 = 1561.9; p < .001; df = 8)$	

ples reveals a statistically significant increase in the number of women ($F = 53.92, p < .001, df = 1,15$) and a corresponding statistically significant decrease in the number of men ($F = 50.93, p < .001, df = 1,15$), women are still underrepresented. The overall figures reveal that males make up 71% of the sample while females make up 29% of the sample. Males have ranged from a low of 68% to a high of 76%; the largest proportion of female was 35% in 1982. Among major characters similar patterns exist, with men averaging 69% of the sample and women averaging 31% of the sample.

As can be seen in Table I, the television population is also primarily made up of characters who are young adults or middle aged, with women usually younger than the men. Among men, 72% are middle aged and 16%

are young adults; among the women 57% are middle aged and 27% are young adults. There is only one significant trend in these data (see Table II); the small proportion of old/elderly men decreased even further between 1969 and 1985.

Women are also less likely than men to be portrayed as working outside the home, yet few are housewives (3.5%). Almost 40% of the female characters cannot be classified by occupation, 15% are not working, and less than half are working in specific occupations. Among male characters, 18% cannot be categorized by occupation, 14% are not working, and 68% are working. On prime time, men and women are equally likely to be professionals, while men, because more are portrayed as employed outside the home, are more likely to be found in most other occupations. There is one important significant trend (see Table II); a consistent decrease in the proportion of female major characters portrayed as not working outside the home. Nevertheless, among all characters, this pattern is not statistically significant.

As numerous studies have shown, violence and hurting are important aspects of television programming and characterizations (see, for example, Gerbner et al., 1978; Gerbner, Gross, & Signorielli, 1986). Patterns of committing violence and being victimized are also quite different for male and female characters (see Table I). Overall, men, especially as major characters, are more likely to be involved in violence than women. Men, however, are equally likely to hurt others as be hurt themselves while for every 10 women who hurt other characters, 16 women are hurt. Trend analyses reveal very stable patterns of characterization among male characters while there was a small but statistically significant increase in the proportion of women who hurt or killed other characters (Table II).

Home, Family, Marital Status, Romance, and Employment

Content items relating to home, family, and romance are especially important to conceptions about sex roles, and reveal very traditional and stereotypical portrayals (Table III). First, home, family, and marital status are much more likely to be developed in female characterizations; for most of these variables the proportion of women categorized as "cannot code," "no reference," or "not involved" usually is smaller than the proportion of men so categorized.

Marital status is a good example of how men and women have been presented differently and yet stably in prime-time network dramatic programming. Using a ten-year³ sample of major characters in prime time, only 13%

³The coding of marital status was expanded in 1975 to include classifications for characters who were divorced or widowed. This analysis uses only data coded from 1975 so as to examine characters who are divorced and widowed as well as those who are married. Examination of the data for the full 17-year sample, looking just at those who are married, not married, or could not be coded, reveals similar findings.

Table II. Trend Analyses for Major Characters

	Linear trends		Quadratic trends	
	($F =$)	Deviation	($F =$)	Deviation
Men				
Young adults	36.50 ^c	1.62 ^a	6.48 ^a	1.32
Middle aged	30.55 ^c	2.20 ^b	9.97 ^b	1.71 ^a
Old (elderly)	20.07 ^c	1.55	2.97	1.46
Victimization	.01	2.55 ^c	7.26 ^a	2.25 ^b
Commits violence	.49	2.13 ^b	1.86	2.15 ^b
Homemaking tasks	2.24	2.64 ^b	1.11	2.83 ^b
Care for minors	.00	.98	.18	1.08
Has children	.48	1.11	.22	1.22
Parents seen	.31	1.33	1.00	1.37
Romantic involvement	5.29 ^a	.64	1.65	.52
Importance family life	15.91 ^c	3.86 ^c	5.62 ^a	3.64 ^c
Not married	7.29 ^b	1.55	6.48 ^a	.93
Married	1.26	1.00	.66	1.05
Formerly married	.52	1.08	.21	1.19
Occupation unknown	14.18 ^c	3.34 ^c	.24	3.65 ^c
Not employed	2.44	1.93 ^a	.69	2.06 ^a
Single	2.07	1.89 ^a	2.31	1.84
Married	4.46 ^a	1.46	.45	1.59
Formerly married	.01	1.33	.52	1.43
Employed	2.00	1.72	.11	1.88
Single	3.29	2.33 ^b	2.48	2.31 ^a
Married	.00	1.34	.27	1.47
Formerly married	.57	.62	.84	.59
Women				
Young adult	25.34 ^c	1.34	7.31 ^b	.97
Middle aged	19.52 ^c	2.47 ^c	12.79 ^c	1.82 ^a
Old (elderly)	.06	.78	1.24	.75
Victimized	2.94	1.85 ^b	.58	1.93 ^b
Commits violence	5.02 ^a	1.31	.26	1.38
Homemaking tasks	14.42 ^c	1.65	2.19	1.47
Cares for minors	.33	.53	.93	.48
Has children	.04	.75	1.89	.61
Parents seen	.04	1.66	1.28	1.70
Romantic involvement	1.61	.66	.33	.70
Importance family life	1.62	2.13 ^a	.07	2.39 ^a
Single	.88	1.32	3.86 ^a	1.00
Married	3.49	.59	.62	.58
Formerly married	.18	2.23	.43	2.46
Occupation unknown	9.73 ^b	2.17 ^b	.01	2.39 ^b
Not working	39.34 ^c	.86	.04	.95
Single	.00	1.04	.37	1.12
Married	8.46 ^b	.66	.02	.74
Formerly married	.07	1.38	.75	1.46
Working	3.98 ^a	2.02 ^b	.07	2.42 ^b
Single	1.02	2.65 ^b	1.79	2.00 ^a
Married	1.08	1.16	2.24	1.03
Formerly married	.71	1.68	3.21	1.49

^a $p < .05$.^b $p < .01$.^c $p < .001$.

of the woman compared to 31% of the men could not be coded on marital status. Furthermore, 51% of the women were not married, 21% were married, and 13% were formerly married. While there was some fluctuation from year to year, as can be seen in Table II, among female major characters there were no significant differences or linear trends across the 10 years included in this sample.

Among men in major roles, 43% were not married, 16% were married, and 8% were formerly married (see Table III). Table II reveals that, there was one significant trend between 1975 and 1985: more men were classified as "single" in the later years; there were no differences, however, in the proportion of married or formerly married men across the samples. Analyses of the entire character population are quite similar; the one difference is that considerably more characters (68% of the men and 41% of the women) cannot be classified by marital status. By comparison, among adults living in the United States in 1982, 24% of the men and 18% of the women were single, 67% of the men and 62% of the women were married, and 6% of the men and 8% of the women was divorced.⁴ The analysis thus reveals the underrepresentation of married people and the overrepresentation of single people in prime-time network dramatic programs.

Second, the presentation of men and women in regard to notions of home and family is quite different. Women are more likely than men to be romantically involved; more than half of the women, but only a little more than a third of the men, are involved in some type of a romantic relationship. Similarly, almost 20% of the women are shown performing homemaking activities for others; by comparison, only 3% of the men perform these types of activities. Proportionately more women than men are presented as having children or as caring for children under 18 years of age. Finally, family life is presented as important for more female than male characters. In addition, as can be seen in Table II between 1975 and 1985 there were only two significant time-related changes: more men became involved in romantic relationships while fewer women were seen performing homemaking activities for others in 1985 than in 1975.

The areas of marriage and employment outside the home have undergone tremendous change in the past 20 years. In the U.S. labor force more than 9 out of 10 men and almost 6 out of 10 women who are married are also employed outside the home.⁵ The television world, which underrepresents both married men and women, has not kept up with these societal changes. For example, on television among major characters, less than a third of the

⁴*Statistical Abstract of the United States 1984*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, 1983, Table 50, p. 43.

⁵*Statistical Abstract of the United States 1984*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington DC, 1983, Table 682, p. 412.

Table III. Home and Family Roles for Major Characters in Prime-Time Network Dramatic Programs (1975-1985)

	All		Men			Women		
	N	Col%	N	Col%	Row%	N	Col%	Row%
Total	2712	100	1852	100	68	860	100	32
Marital status (Chi square = 112.67, $p < .001$, $df = 4$)								
Cannot code	688	25	576	31	83	112	13	16
Not married	1246	46	811	43	65	435	51	35
Married	479	18	300	16	63	179	21	37
Formerly married	260	10	145	8	56	115	13	44
Mixed	39	1	20	1	51	19	2	49
Homemaker (Chi square = 183.91, $p < .000$, $df = 1$)	226	8	63	3	28	163	19	72
Cares for minors (Chi square = 34.69, $p < .001$, $df = 1$)	392	14	217	12	55	175	20	45
Has children (Chi square = 22.25, $p < .01$, $df = 1$)	516	19	307	17	60	209	24	40
Parents seen (Chi square = 36.0, $p < .00$, $df = 1$)	672	26	401	22	59	271	32	40
Romantic involvement (Chi square = 65.39, $p < .00$, $df = 2$)								
Not involved	1527	56	1135	61	74	392	46	26
Involved	1103	41	657	36	60	446	52	40
Family life (Chi square = 79.84, $p < .00$, $df = 2$)								
Cannot code	1298	48	982	53	75	316	37	24
Not important	165	6	125	7	76	40	5	24
Important	1249	46	745	40	60	504	59	40
Sexual orientation (Chi square not applicable)								
No reference	885	33	723	39	82	162	19	18
Heterosexual	1820	67	1123	61	62	697	81	38
Homo/Bisexual	7	<1	6	<1	86	1	<1	14

married women and half of the single and formerly married women are portrayed as working outside the home. By comparison, among male characters, no matter what their marital status, three quarters have an occupational identification. Again, trend analyses reveal few differences from year to year. Moreover, some of these differences are not what one would expect in light of recent changes in society. For example, as can be seen in Table II, there has been a significant decrease (although not of great numerical magnitude) in the proportion of both married men and married women who do not work outside the home.

Overview of Sex Role Portrayals

Overall, the data support the hypothesis that the men and women who populate prime-time network dramatic programs are portrayed in rather traditional and stereotypical ways. Moreover, on a number of dimensions characterizations have changed very little and sometimes in unexpected directions

over the past 10–20 years of prime-time dramatic programming. Women are seen less often than the men and in many respects may be considered as less important. When women do appear, they usually are younger than the men, more attractive and nurturing, portrayed in the context of romantic interests, home, and family, and are more likely to be victimized. Women are somewhat more likely than men to be married (although both men and women are much more likely to be single), and if they are married, they usually are not employed outside the home. We do not find the same patterns for male characters. Women who are employed outside the home are often cast in traditionally female occupations – nurses, secretaries, waitresses, and sometimes teachers. Nevertheless, the world of television does not always accurately reflect women’s work roles. For example, there are a number of occupations in the U.S. labor force where women outnumber the men, but in the television world, due to the general overabundance of men, the men outnumber the women. These include teachers, restaurant workers, and all professionals. While in the U.S. labor force there are about equal numbers of men and women in the professions (and according to an article in the *New York Times* of March 19, 1986, there are now *more* women professionals than men professionals),⁶ on television only 29% of the professionals are women while 71% are men.

Men, on the other hand, are older. They tend to be more powerful and potent than the women, and proportionately few are presented as married. Significantly more men are employed outside the home, and they usually work in high prestige and traditionally masculine occupations such as doctors, lawyers, police, and other higher status jobs. Moreover, among married male characters, about three-quarters are employed, and one-quarter are either not working or their employment status is unknown. Among women the pattern is reversed—only 3 out of 10 married female characters are also employed, a finding quite different from the “real world” in which more than half of all married women are employed. Thus, the image conveyed by prime-time television is that women, especially if married, should stay home and leave the world of work to men.⁷

⁶The same article also reported, however, that women professionals are paid about \$100.00 a week *less* than men in these fields and that men still dominate in the more prestigious professional occupations.

⁷Naturally, there are exceptions and most people know at least one television program in which the women are able to mix careers and marriage and/or family. It is important to remember, however, that this analysis is looking at aggregate images based on the information given *only* in the episodes included within each sample.

Conceptions about Sex Roles

The results of the cultivation analysis are summarized in Table IV, which gives the percent of light and heavy viewers in each group who have high scores on the Sexism Index, the cultivation differential (the percent of heavy viewers minus the percent of light viewers in that group), and gamma.

This table reveals that the cross-sectional analyses provide some support for the basic hypothesis and a number of instances of mainstreaming, especially for data gathered during the 1970s. The findings are weaker for data collected in the 1980s. Essentially, men, women, whites, liberals, those with some college education, middle-class, and middle-aged respondents are more likely, when heavy viewers, to give the sexist response to these questions. That is, there is a positive relationship with television viewing for these subgroups. Among nonwhites there is a significant negative relationship, with proportionately fewer heavy viewers than light viewers endorsing these statements.

Mainstreaming generally suggests the notion of homogenization—television as the melting pot of the 20th century. Two patterns of mainstreaming exist. One pattern goes hand in hand with the basic hypothesis that more heavy viewers than light viewers will endorse sexist views. In these instances the differences between the percent of respondents who have high Sexism Index scores in the light-viewing demographic subgroups is larger than differences found among the heavy-viewing demographic subgroups. That is, heavy viewers in all groups have more similar views. These patterns were found for sex, income, political orientation, and occupational group.

The second type of mainstreaming reflects the notion that television viewing may be a homogenizing factor because it “liberates” certain demographic subgroups. That is, television viewing may erode differences ordinarily due to a person’s location in the nexus of sociodemographic factors. In this case the percent of respondents with high scores on the Sexism Index is smaller for the heavy viewers in a particular subgroup, while in the other subgroup(s) more heavy viewers than light viewers have high scores on the Index.⁸ This pattern exists for the racial subgroups. As can be seen in the cross-sectional analyses reported in Table IV, in both the 1970s and the 1980s, among light viewers, whites are less likely and nonwhites are more likely to give sexist responses. Among heavy viewers, however, nonwhites are less likely and whites are more likely to give sexist responses. All four of these relationships are statistically significant.

⁸Mainstreaming does not necessarily imply that the light–heavy viewer differences must point in the same direction or involve all subgroups (see Gerbner et al., 1986, pp. 37–38).

Table IV. Cultivation Analysis for Sexism Index^a

	1975, 1977, 1978 GSS ^b			1983, 1985, 1986 GSS ^b				
	%Light	%Heavy	CD ^c	Gamma	%Light	%Heavy	CD ^c	Gamma
Overall	34	42	8	.110 ^f	24	32	8	.132 ^f
Sex								
Men	31	42	11	.136 ^f	25	31	6	.109 ^d
Women	36	43	7	.090 ^d	23	32	9	.145 ^f
Age								
Under 30	20	28	8	.140 ^d	16	19	3	.068
30-54	30	38	8	.098 ^d	17	26	9	.180 ^f
55 and older	54	60	6	.981	47	46	-1	.007
Education								
No college	48	46	-2	-.027	38	35	-3	-.001
Some college	16	26	10	.177 ^e	12	20	8	.166 ^e
Race								
White	32	43	11	.150 ^f	23	33	10	.167 ^f
Nonwhite	57	37	-20	-.238 ^e	31	24	-7	-.159 ^d
Income								
Low	48	48	0	-.007	36	34	-2	-.032
Medium	32	37	5	.070	23	34	11	.180 ^e
High	20	28	8	.130 ^d	17	24	7	.112 ^d

Political orientation													
Conservative	41	49	8	.093	31	39	8	.102					
Moderate	34	41	7	.084	20	30	10	.166 ^c					
Liberal	20	34	14	.206 ^f	15	28	13	.242 ^f					
Occupational group													
Professional	20	29	9	.123	16	24	8	.111					
Manager/clerk	28	34	6	.092	18	25	7	.140 ^d					
Blue collar	44	47	3	.038	34	34	0	.022					
Class													
Lower/working	42	40	-2	-.021	29	30	1	.030					
Middle	26	44	18	.248 ^f	19	36	17	.264 ^f					
Upper	37	58	21	.226	41	21	20	.259					

^aDue to inflation, the specific categories for income changed as follows: low income went from under \$10,000 to under \$15,000; medium income went from \$10,000-\$15,000 to \$15,000-\$25,000; and high income went from over \$20,000 to over \$25,000.

^bGSS; General Social Surveys.

^cCD (cultivation differential) is the percent of heavy viewers minus the percent of light viewers within the particular subgroup.

^d $p < .05$.

^e $p < .01$.

^f $p < .001$.

Table V. Partial Correlation Analysis for Sexism Index

	1975, 1977, and 1978 General Social Surveys				
	All respondents	No college	Some college	White	Nonwhite
Overall	.070 ^c	-.003	.100 ^c	.095 ^c	-.108 ^b
Controlling for					
Sex	.068 ^c	-.003	.100 ^c	.092 ^c	-.094 ^a
Age	.072 ^c	.011	.102 ^c	.088 ^c	-.070
Education	.000	—	—	.021	-.134 ^b
Race	.065 ^c	-.005	.091 ^c	—	—
Income	.023	-.039 ^a	.090 ^c	.054 ^c	-.149 ^c
Political orientation	.073 ^c	-.001	.108 ^c	.096 ^c	-.098 ^a
Class	.062 ^c	-.004	.101 ^c	.090 ^c	-.109 ^b
Occupational group	.039 ^c	-.009	.096 ^c	.065 ^c	-.120 ^b
All controls	.004	-.015	.071 ^b	.019	-.096 ^a
<i>df</i>	(3743)	(2495)	(1234)	(3317)	(420)
	1983, 1985, and 1986 General Social Surveys				
	All respondents	No college	Some college	White	Nonwhite
Overall	.046 ^b	-.022	.041 ^a	.059 ^c	-.041
Controlling for					
Sex	.044 ^b	-.023	.042 ^a	.057 ^c	-.041
Age	.024	-.029	.028	.029 ^a	-.034
Education	-.032 ^a	—	—	-.019	-.096 ^a
Race	.043 ^b	-.024	-.042 ^a	—	—
Income	.001	-.067 ^c	.036	.013	-.064
Political orientation	.051 ^b	-.014	.035	.062 ^c	-.034
Class	.043 ^b	-.020	.045	.057	-.041
Occupational group	.018	-.033	.040	.035 ^a	-.075
All controls	-.045 ^b	-.062 ^b	.009	-.042 ^a	-.082
<i>df</i>	(3306)	(1963)	(1342)	(2894)	(412)

^a*p* < .05.^b*p* < .01.^c*p* < .001.

The relationship between television viewing and giving sexist responses to this four-item index was further analyzed using partial correlations. This analysis used the same two groupings of General Social Survey data (survey from the 1970s and 1980s) and divided the samples into two subgroups based on education (no college, some college) and two subgroups based on race (whites and nonwhites) to further explore the relationships.

The results of these analyses, especially the seventh- and eighth-order partial correlations, provide less support for the hypotheses than the results of the cross-sectional analyses. Yet in some cases, even though the data do not reach statistical significance, they follow expected directional patterns. Table V reveals that in both the 1970s and the 1980s there is an overall significant and positive relationship between television viewing and giving more sexist responses to questions in this index. This relationship remains statistically significant except when individually controlling for education and income (and occupational groups in the 1980s). When simultaneously

controlling for all eight demographic subgroups we find that in the surveys fielding during the 1970s (1975, 1977, and 1978) the relationship between television viewing and giving more sexist responses disappears.

In the more recent surveys (1983, 1985, and 1986), however, the implementation of simultaneous controls results in a small,⁹ significant, but negative relationship between television viewing and sexism, which may reflect the "liberalization" interpretation of mainstreaming. Education is probably responsible for the negative relationships; the first-order partial correlation (controlling for education) is negative and among respondents who have not been to college the overall relationship is not statistically significant, but the eighth-order partial correlation is negative and statistically significant. Moreover, there is a negative relationship between watching television and education that has remained negative but increased in magnitude during this ten-year period; in the General Social Surveys of the 1970s the correlation was $-.186$, $p < .001$, and in the 1980s surveys the correlation was $-.233$, $p < .001$. Analyses also show that attending college and sexism are negatively related. Less than one-fifth of those who have been to college have high scores on the sexism index while close to 4 out of 10 of those who have not gone to college have high scores on this index.

Examination of the cross tabulations in Table IV indicates that there is some mainstreaming in the racial and educational subgroups. In Table V the partial correlation analysis conducted for these four subgroups, while not always statistically significant, sheds more, if somewhat confusing, light upon this phenomenon. This analysis reveals that in the earlier General Social Surveys (1970s) the relationship between television viewing and sexism remained positive and statistically significant among the college educated respondents (who were less sexist to start) even when simultaneously controlling for sex, age, race, income, class, occupational group, and political orientation. The relationship does not hold up (but remains in a direction consistent with mainstreaming) among those who have not been to college (who are more sexist to begin with).

In the later (1980s) General Social Surveys (when respondents in general were much *less* likely to give the more sexist replies) the relationship holds up, after the implementation of simultaneous controls, among respondents who have not been to college. But consistent with mainstreaming, the small but statistically significant relationship is negative, indicating that, for this group, television viewing may be more "liberating" than "restrictive." Among

⁹Given that television is but one of many things that contributes to our culture's beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews, the observable independent contribution of television can only be relatively small. But just as the outcome of an election or the continuation/cancellation of a television series can be determined by a slight margin, so too can a relatively small but pervasive influence make a crucial difference.

the college-educated subgroup the relationships completely disappear with the implementation of simultaneous controls.

Examination of the partial correlational analysis for the racial subgroups also reveals some interesting patterns. Among white respondents in both the 1970s and 1980s General Social Surveys, most of the first- and second-order coefficients (except education and income) are statistically significant. The seventh-order coefficient is not statistically significant for data collected during the 1970s and is statistically significant, but in a negative direction for data collected during the 1980s. Again, it appears as though education may be the pivotal variable because the relationship becomes negative when controlling for education. Among nonwhites there is a statistically significant and negative relationship between television viewing and responding with the sexist answers in the 1970s while the relationships are considerably reduced (and not statistically significant) during the 1980s. Data from the 1970s support the mainstreaming hypothesis. Data from the 1980s, while consistent with mainstreaming for nonwhites, are not statistically significant; among whites, however, the data are inconsistent with mainstreaming, probably due to the interrelationships with education.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the image of men and women in prime-time network dramatic television programs, and the relationship between television viewing and espousing sexist views of the roles of men and women in society. Overall, the image of women over the last 17 years has been quite stable, very traditional, and generally supportive of the status quo. This is not to say that there have been no "good," "modern," or nontraditional women on television, for, in fact, each season there are a few who are different, and who are more indicative of the depth and breadth of women's personalities and achievements in real life. Rather, the data present an aggregate image of conventionality, tradition, and status quo, to which viewers are exposed almost daily. On television, women are less likely than the men to be seen working outside the home; the women who do work outside the home usually are not married, although very often they are divorced. Most of the women are younger than the men and are quite attractive, but they age rather quickly. Men tend to be older and in charge—they have more high-status positions and more of them can successfully combine outside employment with marriage.

The cultivation analysis provides mixed support for the general hypothesis that those who watch more television will have more sexist views and the mainstreaming hypothesis that certain groups of respondents who espouse

very different views as light viewers, will, as heavy viewers, have more similar outlooks in regard to woman's role in society. There has been an overall striking trend between the 1970s and 1980s for fewer respondents to agree with sexist statements, and in the analyses of more recent samples the implementation of simultaneous controls results in small but statistically significant negative coefficients, probably due to interrelations with education. It may be that the issues tapped in this index, that a woman's place is in the home and that, in the political arena, women should have more limited roles, are no longer considered viable options and have been rejected by a large segment of the population. This finding may then reflect that television's primary function, at least in regard to these types of issues, may now be one of "liberating" the most sexist groups. Nevertheless, it is possible that other aspects of sexism, not tapped in these measures, are still being cultivated by viewing and it will be important to continue this line of research using other measures of sexism.

Overall, television may be contributing to the development of somewhat ambivalent views about women's roles in society because television images are so obviously at odds with reality. The majority of women on television have not changed very much during the past two decades; society, though, has made numerous changes. Both women and men know that things are different. How much greater, however, could these changes be if television were more reflective of the actual status and role of both women and men in the United States?

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