

SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND IMAGES OF WOMEN
IN SITUATION AND DOMESTIC COMEDIES
ON PRIME-TIME TELEVISION

being

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe sex-role stereotyping and images of women in situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television.

This thesis was a descriptive research study. The researcher used a content analysis method. Sixteen leading female characters in the top ten situation and domestic comedies of 1990 on prime-time television were analyzed by ten coders from different ages, occupations, and gender in the study.

The researcher concluded that there were some changes in the portrayal of women in the situation and domestic comedies. Most of the female characters were socially responsible adult women whose lives were characterized by a balance between masculine and feminine features as they related to the outside world and the world of family.

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INTRODUCTION

People have an image of what men and women are like. They tend to ascribe personality characteristics to women and men. Role models supply individuals with information about appropriate and socially acceptable sex-role behaviors.

The mass media are very important in people's daily lives and in their communication between each other. The media select items for attention and provide rankings of what is or is not important. The way the media choose themes, structure the dialogue, and control the debate is a major aspect of their influence. Mass media can be defined as means or instruments serving as carriers from a communicator to a mass audience.

The mass media are populated with stereotypes. They provide role models and sex-role stereotypes. The media play a part in encouraging people to reconsider certain aspects of their sex-roles. The sex-roles and sex-role stereotypes are communicated by the mass media from a cultural point of view.

Television is a prevalent medium in the presentation of sex-role stereotypes. Television provides images and ideas that can have important meaning to all television viewers. Stereotyped images of women are reinforced and perpetuated

by the mass dissemination of these images on television. Such images constitute women's perceptions of themselves and their roles in society. Women, like men, are presented in a variety of ages, shapes, sizes, and colors on television. The images of women on television take both a positive and a negative valence, with the positive image expressing dreams and a negative image nightmares.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe sex-role stereotyping and images of women in situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television.

Justification

The presentation of women in television ultimately results from an interplay of forces which mold social reality. Television, like other mass media, produces message systems and symbols which create or structure prevailing images of social change.

Sex-roles in television and the role of television in sex-role socialization are becoming a large and productive field of inquiry among communication researchers. It is an important field because it bears directly upon the everyday lives of people.

Situation and domestic comedies, like other television forms, provide information and mirror real-life sex-roles.

There is a regular cast of characters who are generally stereotypical ones and who engage in ritualistic humor through the repetition of action. Because situation and domestic comedies have an importance to influence people's perceptions, attitudes, and conduct, the studies on these television programs are becoming important. In this sense, this study will bring new viewpoints in the area.

Definitions

Prime-time. "The three-hour period from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m., local time, except in the Central Time Zone, where the relevant period is between the hours of 7:00 to 10:00 p.m., and in the Mountain Time Zone, where each station elects whether the period will be 8:00 to 11:00 p.m., or 7:00 to 10:00 p.m." (Jones, 1988, p. 76).

Sex-role. "Behavioral patterns expected from individuals by their social group believed to be typical for their sex" (Wolman, 1989, p. 313).

Stereotype. "May be considered to oversimplified, rigid, and generalized belief about groups of people in which all individuals from the group are labeled with perceived characteristic of groups" (Harre & Lamb, 1983, p. 614).

Situation and domestic comedies. In the situation comedy, the situation is simply the broad outline of events, the

special funny "thing" happens in each week to a special set of characters. Complications in situation comedy may take many forms, but most generally they are involved with some sort of human error or mistake. The domestic comedy is more expansive. There is less slapstick, less hysterical laughter. The cast built on the family, as group, is capable of reducing dependence on a single star, a single style. The real basis for domestic comedy is a sense of deep personal love among the members of the family (Newcomb, 1974).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature examined the following:

(a) sex-role stereotyping, (b) the theories of sex-role stereotyping, (c) the studies on measurement of sex-role stereotyping, (d) sex-role stereotyping in the United States, and (e) sex-role stereotyping and mass media in the United States.

Sex-Role Stereotyping

Chafetz (1974), Kessler and McKenna (1978), and Stewart, Stewart, Friedly, and Cooper (1990) explained that almost all human beings are born with a more or less clearly identifiable gender. Obvious genetic differences between male and females that have been identified include physical size, anatomy, and sexual functions. According to Yorburg (1974) and Chafetz (1974), the terms male and female have been used as biological categories while masculine and feminine serve as social definitions. Conceptions of ideal masculine and feminine behavior and emotions have been taught to individuals beginning very early in life. Stern and Karraker (1989) and Pearson (1985) supported the belief that socialization begins at birth, shaping people to behave in appropriate and prescriptive ways. Becoming men and women has gone beyond biology. Forisha (1978) described that

"Masculine and feminine are terms that refer to sex-roles. On this basis, a boy is supposed to act masculine and a girl is expected to act feminine" (p. 20).

Signorelli (1989) explained that sex-roles have been an integral part of people's lives. People have learned the roles from numerous sources such as families, friends, teachers, and mass media. According to Forisha (1978), sex-roles, as well as all other roles people play, have closely been interwoven in the fabric of society. The adoption of certain roles, all of which have been reciprocal, have allowed humans to be somewhat predictable in the ways in which have interacted with each other. This predictability has been rewarded by society because it has been no longer necessary for people to invest time or energy to understand and respond to unexpected behavior. Barcus (1983) supported the idea that sex-roles evolved from cultural influences. These types of influences have been instrumental in shaping and reflecting the stereotypes and images of the culture. Pleck (1977) pointed out that sex-roles were "the psychological traits and the social responsibilities that individuals have and feel are appropriate for them because they are male or female" (cited in Stewart et al., 1990 p. 17).

Hargreaves (1986) explained that sex-roles were

behavior patterns which have been differentially displayed by the sexes, and sex-role stereotypes included the beliefs that people have held about these patterns. Babad, Birnbaum, and Benne (1983) offered various definitions of stereotypes. Stereotypes have been universal, used by every human being in processing information about the social environment, and they have usually been quite functional for effective social interaction (cited in Seiter, 1986). Lippman (1922) suggested that stereotypes are pictures in people's heads that they use to comprehend the world around them (cited in Seiter, 1986). According to Stroebe and Insko (1989), Stereotypes function as a set of beliefs about the personal attributions of a group of people. Pearson (1985) explained that stereotyping has referred to the process of assigning people, groups, events, or issues to a particular, conventional category. Several other researchers have suggested that sex-role stereotyping should be considered cognitive and this term has referred to relatively fixed beliefs, opinions, or attitudes that individuals have held about typical characteristics of boys and girls or men and women (Williams, LaRose, & Frost, 1981; Williams & Best, 1982). These might have related personality, occupations, or activity interests. Williams and Best (1982) explained that the stereotypes have created expectations about the behavior

of other people and allowed individuals to anticipate their behavior as well as consequences of one's own behavior. According to Pearson (1985), while stereotypes have served some useful functions, stereotyping has had a negative connotation, especially in the area of sex differences among people. Stereotyping men and women has been harmful for three reasons: First, stereotyping has limited people from becoming complete beings. Second, many of the differences between women and men have been based on myth. Finally, one sex has been placed in a position superior to the other sex.

The Theories of Sex-Role Stereotyping

<Three basic theories of sex-role stereotyping that include Psychoanalytic Theory, Social-Learning Theory, and Cognitive-Developmental Theory were found in the literature.>

<Psychoanalytic theory has assumed that there are two motivational bases for identification: fear of loss of love, and fear of retaliation (Hargreaves, 1986; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stewart et al., 1990; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978).> This theory's origins are based in Freudian psychoanalytic psychology. According to this theory, the type of identification experienced by a child is determined by the child's biological sex. Male development is controlled by defensive identification (fear of retaliation) while female development is controlled by

a libido response which is dependent on another instinct (fear of loss of love). Psychoanalytic theory has postulated a mechanism to explain why children learn appropriate gender role behaviors, but the theory has not explained how the mechanism works.

(According to social learning theory, through observation children have learned behaviors associated with both parents (Hargreaves, 1986; Frieze et al., 1978; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stewart et al., 1990)) It is understood that children learned these behaviors without any direct reinforcement because they saw their parents as powerful, effective, and as having control over rewards. Theorists have elaborated that through differential reinforcement from parents, teachers, peers, and others, children know what they can or cannot do. It has been suggested that as a result children learn to anticipate the consequences of various behaviors, and to value gender "appropriate" behaviors because they have been rewarded, and to devalue gender "inappropriate" behaviors because they have been punished or ignored. According to this theory, fathers have been the most provider of rewards and punishments, and that sons have become initially attached to them as a result. Presumably this was similar for girls and their mothers.

(Cognitive-developmental theory centered on the child's

conception of the world; on how a child perceived and categorized things and people, according to child's level of cognitive development (Hargreaves, 1986; Frieze et al., 1978; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stewart et al., 1990). A central concept of the cognitive-developmental theory has been the categorization of oneself as a boy or a girl. According to cognitive-developmental theory, imitation and reinforcement of sex-typed behavior has actually been guided by some form of internalized sex-role identity.

According to Kessler and McKenna (1978), similarities among theories have been identified. For each theory, gender has been as real as height and weight, and it could be objectively measured and studied without insurmountable problems. Gender identity and gender role, and the process that has led to their development, like identification and reinforcement, have been considered as objective facts. The theories have been similar in their emphasis on male development. The theories' treatment of both normal and abnormal development concentrated on boys and has tended to offer more satisfactory and complete explanations of male than of female development.

The Studies on Measurement of Sex-Role Stereotyping

(Hort, Fagot, and Leinbach (1990) explained that the stereotypes of males and females differ in their structure

as well as in their content; especially, the male stereotype appeared to be more rigidly defined than the female stereotype, or people's perceptions of males have appeared to be more stereotypically framed. According to Hort et al. (1990) and Hampson (1986), the recent history of research on sex-role stereotypes began with Broveman in 1960s. Social psychologists have developed more refined trait-adjective measures of sex-role stereotyping, the best known of which have been the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Skitha & Maslach, 1990; Hort et al., 1990). The BSRI characterized a person through the differences between his or her endorsement of a masculine or feminine society. The BSRI was founded on a conception of the sex-typed person as someone who had internalized society's sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women, these personality characteristics have been selected on the basis of sex-typed social desirability (Bem, 1974). Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) examined criticisms of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, a measure of gender orientation, and further examined its reliability and validity. Their first study produced a two factor solution which was similar to other analyses. Second study demonstrated what adjectives best described males and females in American society. From two studies, a revision of

the Bem Sex Role Inventory was proposed with 10 items each measuring masculinity and femininity. Hort et al. (1990) described the PAQ as possessing the degrees of "instrumentality" and "expressiveness" (p. 199) relating to subject personality. In the PAQ, like BSRI, subjects described a target, such as "the typical female or male" or "females and males" or even "yourself" by marketing the degree to which each of list of gender-typed adjectives have described that target (p. 199). Williams and Best (1982) have used Gough's Adjective Check List (ACL) as a way of measuring what they called sex-trait stereotypes (cited in Hampson, 1986). The ACL has been used in personality research as a self-assessment instrument. (According to Hampson (1986), sex-role stereotypes have contained more than traits; there have also been beliefs about behaviors, occupations, and physical appearances. These elements constituted relatively independent components of sex-role stereotypes, and knowledge about one component, particularly physical appearance, used to make inferences about others. Non-verbal components to sex-role stereotypes, in particular, affective reactions to the stereotype are considered important elements of a stereotype itself.)

Sex-Role Stereotyping in the United States

According to Barcus (1983), the traditional division of

male and female behaviors that has evolved in the U.S. have been based on the concept of dominant masculine and more passive feminine stereotypes. Bem (1974) stated that men are supposed to be masculine, women feminine, and neither sex is supposed to be like the other. Supposedly men have been independent, tough, and assertive, while women should have been dependent, sweet, and retiring. Goldberg (1983) explained that in the traditional contemporary home the father has deferred to the innate "maternal wisdom" (p. 92) of his wife in the early child-rearing process. The father was consumed by economic pressures. His role was to keep the bills paid and provide for the necessities of life. According to Pearson (1985), traditional games-playing has encouraged sex-role divisions. Differences in the playing behavior of children included the thought that boys play outdoors more than girls and engage in more team sports and fantasy games. Girls have tended to play indoors with dolls and board games. As a result of these differences in play behavior, girls have been more restricted in their bodily movements and vocal expressions, while boys have been provided with more training for independent behavior. Fiske (1987) explained that to "be a man" (p. 200) has been a frequent admonition to young boys that has required them to behave more maturely

than their physical age.

Many occupations have been highly sex-typed (Williams & Best, 1982; Archer & Llyod, 1985). At the professional level, elementary school teachers and nurses have usually been women, and engineers and accountants have usually been men. At a less skilled level, domestic workers have usually been women, and truck drivers have usually been men. In the Business area, most clerical workers have been women, and most managers have been men. Shorthridge (1986) supported the findings that leading occupations for women have included secretaries, elementary school teachers, bookkeepers, cashiers, general office clerks, registered nurses, and waitresses. Williams and Best (1982) explained that there has been a tendency to think of such occupations as more appropriate for that sex. Women have been better suited to certain occupations and men to others because of the personal characteristics which have been differentiated women from men, the sex-trait stereotypes. Sex stereotypes have created a barrier whenever people of one sex seek entry into an occupation that has been traditionally occupied by members of the opposite sex. Women have shown more interest in entering traditionally male occupations than males have shown in entering traditionally female occupations, which might be partially due to higher status and salaries to the

traditionally male occupations. Benokraitis and Fegain (1986) claimed that most women have been judged primarily by their beauty or attractiveness whereas men have been judged primarily in terms of their achievements. Being attractive to men has been a major goal of many women.

Sex-Role Stereotyping and Mass Media in the United States

Severin and Tankard (1988) and Stewart et al. (1990) explained that modern society would be unimaginable without the mass media. Mass media have covered people's daily lives whether they wanted the exposure or not. According to Severin and Tankard (1988), the mass media have been many things to many people and variety of functions. Media have functioned to communicate information, values, and norms from one generation to another or from the members of society to newcomers. In this way media have served to increase social cohesion by widening the base of common experience. They have aided integration into a society by continuing socialization after formal education has ended as well as by starting this process during preschool years. The mass media have operated as languages by helping shape the world to people, each in its own way. The mass media have not been all powerful in affecting change. Dodd (1987) stated that the mass media's effects have been highly related to a complex set of other variables. He claimed

that "mass media's effects have actually been a function of the media and the following elements; interpersonal networks; cultural norms, values, and world view; demographic categories and group members; motivation, needs, and salient means of gratifying those needs; and personality characteristics" (p. 160).

Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979), Chafetz (1974), Stewart et al. (1990), and Mamay and Simpson (1981) explained that mass media messages have reflected cultural stereotypes. These messages have reinforced images of the world. According to Stewart et al. (1990), these messages have also influenced people's individual lives by affecting their cultural values and their images of each other. Geise (1979) and Stewart et al. (1990) agreed that the mass media have provided role models and sex-role stereotypes. (On the other hand, Stewart et al. (1990) explained that most of the people who control the media have been concerned with making money. Media people have emphasized some stereotypes of women and men because these kinds of representations earn money.)

(According to Durkin (1986), the mass media have presented the sexes in different ways. The mass media have clearly used a large amount of highly traditional sex-role stereotypes. Evidently they have been biased toward

overpresentation of what might loosely be called a man's world. Toeplitz (1980) supported that the images of women projected by the media have been traditional. According to Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979), women's images have been disseminated by mass media. These images in the media have tended to reinforce women's perceived reality and encouraged, both women and girls, to limit their horizons both socially and professionally to those roles which have been portrayed through media (Report of the Task Force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in Broadcast Media, 1982).

Sex-Role Stereotyping on Television. Toeplitz (1980) and Brown, Geis, Jennings, and Porter (1984) concurred that the effects of TV in shaping attitudes and concepts were unquestionable. According to Ellis and Armstrong (1984), television has certainly been a significant source of learning. Viewers have tended to learn about others vicariously. People have formulated large and integrated attitudinal and behavioral patterns through observation of behavior models. Television has played a role in social learning. Stewart et al. (1990) explained that people have had a casual reaction to television, and some of its power comes from that casual relationship. People have been less likely to think deeply about messages received through TV, even those messages have affected their perceptions of

cultural values, including sex-role stereotypes.

Highly stereotypic sex-role behaviors have been presented in every aspect of television programming, including children and adult programs (Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 1979). To varying degrees, all types of television programming have presented highly stereotypical images of women which complemented an equally stereotyped images of men. Ross, Anderson, and Wisocki (1982) claimed that television presented programming which has included stereotyped sex-roles. According to Signorelli (1989), the television world has been filled with male and female roles that have been very traditional, sex-typed, and supportive of the status quo. (In a review of television content analysis studies Durkin (1985) reported:

1. Men appeared on television more frequently than women.

2. Men were more often portrayed as employed in high status occupations than women.

3. Men were portrayed as active problem solvers while women were portrayed as less competent and more emotional.

4. Men were portrayed as powerful and inclined to exhibit aggressive violence while women were more often victims (cited in Dambort, Reep, & Bell, 1990, p. 387-388).)

(McGhee and Freuh (1980) explained that male role models

have existed in greater numbers than females with the exception of day-time soap operas in which men and women have been equally represented. Females have rarely been depicted as working outside the home and occupied positions of low responsibility when they have been employed. They also examined prime-time television. Accordingly, they found that sex typing of behavior or personal characteristics during prime-time television could be explained as follows:

1. Females tend to be much younger than males and more likely to be depicted as being married or about to be married.
 2. Females are most likely to be cast in leading roles when some family or romantic interest is central to the plot.
 3. Males are more likely to be cast in serious roles while females are more likely to be cast in comic and light roles.
 4. Males are most likely to initiate violence while females are most likely to be victims.
 5. Females are less likely to get away with violence when they demonstrate it.
 6. Females tend to be depicted as more attractive, happier, warmer, more sociable, fairer, more peaceful, and useful, while males tend to be represented as smarter, more rational, more powerful, more stable, and more tolerant
- (p. 180).>

According to Greenberg (1988), women's roles in television programs have largely been confined to home life centering on family and personal relationships and interests. Even when seen in out-of-home contexts, the women's expressed concerns more often have focused on family and personal patterns. Similar patterns have also been presented in women's relative lack of employment, their underrepresentation in professional occupations, and the decreased likelihood of combining marriage and a job.

Sprafkin and Liebert (1978), Baehr (1980), Zemach and Cohen (1986), and Greenberg (1988) supported that women on television have been more emotional and more in need of emotional support than men. Women were portrayed on TV shows as more attractive, fair, happy, and peaceful than males. Males have been more powerful, stable, rational, and smarter than females. Women have been depicted as passive, dependent, submissive, and weak. Women have also been shown as warmer and more friendly, as more emotional, and as less rational. Women have been confined to the home environment and they have been usually shown in traditionally feminine occupations such as nurses, secretaries, servants, or actresses. They have rarely been shown as lawyers, judges, doctors, or scientists.

Although there have been some studies about sex-role

stereotyping, women, and television, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the studies about sex-role stereotyping of women in situation and domestic comedies on television have not been adequate (Fishburn, 1982; Stewart et al., 1990).

Situation and domestic comedies have traditionally been 23 minute shows (Himmelstein, 1984). According to Zynda (1988), situation and domestic comedies have placed the characters and the audience in a new relationship. The characters have not been deep, but even as flat characters, they have been rounder, developed in a number of dimensions of personality. Newcomb (1974) explained that situation and domestic comedies have not conformed to the artistic standards of high art in the development of action character, event, and conclusion. Shows have been based solely on confusion, and the audience is let in on a joke that will backfire on the characters thereby the comic episode. The interior set of domestic comedies has been defined by the uses of the typical family. The kitchen and the living room, for example, have been special places. This has also been true in the situation comedy. Women's sex-roles have been highly stereotyped. According to the National Commission on Working Women (Broadcasting, Nov. 13, 1989), none of the shows have represented a step forward for women. There have been old stereotypes and unbelievable characters. Some shows have

portrayed women as paying attention only to their hair, thin figures, and boyfriends.

Stewart et al. (1990) examined studies between 1969 and 1982. They found that from 1969 to 1972 female characters accounted for 28% of all leading roles and from 1972 to 1982 44% of female television characters were portrayed in work place. They concluded that the stereotypical relationships between men and women that have been characteristic of television programs in the past, have been changing in recent programming. "The male and female characters have engaged equally in attempts to exert control but both sexes exemplify the male stereotype of dominance instead of exploring other roles. Women have been expected to conform to this masculine stereotype" (p. 193).

METHODOLOGY

This thesis was a descriptive research study. The researcher used a content analysis method.

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe sex-role stereotyping and images of women in situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television.

Subjects

The top ten situation and domestic comedies of 1990 on prime-time television (7:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m.) were selected from American Broadcasting Company (ABC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and Fox Broadcasting Company (FOX). Sixteen leading female characters were analyzed by ten coders from different ages, occupations, and gender in the study.

Apparatus

In the study, programs were recorded using videocassettes and a videocassette recorder. The collected data was analyzed using a computer.

Procedure

First, the top ten situation and domestic comedies were selected based on the ratings in Broadcasting between July and November 1990. According to the density of the

programs in these ratings, the top ten situation and domestic comedies were selected from ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX. One episode of each program was recorded over a two-week period December 3, 1990, to December 15, 1990. The time was also recorded by a digital clock including program matter and opening and closing credits (see Appendix A).

Second, sixteen leading female characters were selected according to the classifications of their roles in these programs. Some of the programs had four, three, or two leading female characters while the others had only one. Supporting female characters were not evaluated in this study (see Appendix B).

Third, the categories and the instruments of the categories were defined in the study. The categories were determined as age, occupation, family role, setting, personality, appearance, and common behaviors. The instrument for personality trait-adjectives of female characters was based on the revised Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) examined existing analyses of the BSRI. The two factors (femininity and masculinity) were extracted in their study. Based on a two-factor solution, the following criteria were applied to select dimension items: identification of ten items with

the highest loadings for each dimension, and selection of items that were perceived more desirable for males, and vice versa. The researcher used their selected items for a revision of the BSRI in this study. The instrument for appearance trait-adjectives of female characters was based on Hort, Fagot, and Leinbach's (1990) study. In their study 200 undergraduates were asked to describe their various interpretations in terms of appearance trait-adjectives using a modified form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). The instrument for common behaviors of female characters was based on Henderson and Greenberg's (1980) study. They developed 17 categories to encompass a broad perspective of a person's normal day. Each was presented as a general category and sample behavior for women and men. The instrument for occupations of female characters was based on Williams and Best's (1982) and Shorthridge's (1986) studies. They examined appropriate men and women occupations in the U.S. The leading occupations for both men and women were adapted from their studies by the researcher in the study. The categories of family role and setting were based on Goldberg's (1983) and Pearson's (1985) studies (see Appendix C).

Fourth, 10 coders (seven female and three male) were found for this study. The ages of the coders were between

22 to 41. The coders were from different occupational groups and included two students. The researcher did not code for this study. The training of coders was as follows:

(a) conceptual definitions and operational definitions were discussed, (b) use of the coding form was explained, and (c) practice sessions with videotape segments were held. Discussions about conceptual and operational definitions continued until it was clear to the researcher that all coders understood and agreed upon the conceptual and operational meanings. The 10 programs were coded by the coders independently. The coding was completed between February 1, 1991, and March 2, 1991.

Fifth, a reliability check was done. The objective was to obtain a minimum of 80 percent reliability of among coders. For each item, frequency and percentage distributions of the coder's answers were done. After the first reliability check, the coders reached or exceeded the minimum reliability level of the items in the first, second, third, fourth, sixth, and seventh categories. There were some disagreements between the coders on some items of some characters in the fifth category. These items were discussed and the programs related to these characters and items were watched one more time. In the final reliability check all items in this category met the minimum standards.

Finally, the data was analyzed on computer. Computer analysis utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS-x) program. Descriptive statistics were applied by designing frequency and percentage distributions, measures of central tendency, and dispersion.

RESULTS

One third of all situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television on ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX were analyzed using a content analysis method. The results of the study were examined using the seven categories of age, occupation, family role, setting, personality, appearance, and common behaviors. The findings were designed in univariate descriptive statistics as frequency and percentage distributions, measures of central tendency, and dispersion.

Age

The middle-aged female was the most represented character in the programs. It was found that young and old characters were represented equally (see Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of the Female Characters by Age Group

Group	Frequency	Percent
Young (20-35)	3	18.8
Middle (36-50)	10	62.5
Old (50 +)	3	18.8
Total	16	100*

* Percent column does not equal 100% due to rounding procedure.

Occupation

Highly sex-typed occupations were analyzed in this category. It was found that the largest percentage of the occupational roles was managerial (43.8%). Clerical work, nursing, science, and engineering could not be coded as female occupations. Two (12.5%) female characters were portrayed in the role of wife and mother. Six (37.5%) female characters could not be identified in any occupational role. One (6.3%) female character was coded as a teacher (see Table 2).

Table 2

Occupational Roles of the Female Characters

Occupational Role	Frequency	Percent
Teaching	1	6.3
Managerial	7	43.8
Wife/Mother	2	12.5
Uncertain	6	37.5
Total	16	100*

* Percent column does not equal 100% due to rounding procedure.

Family Role

Both male and female family roles were analyzed for the female characters. Distributions were designed for each role separately.

It was found that 10 (62.5%) female characters could not be identified in any family role. Some of the female characters were not shown in a family situation. Because of this, their family roles could not be identified. Although some of the female characters were shown in a family situation, it was difficult to code their roles in the family.

Some of the characters were shown in only one family role while the others more than one. Among all female characters 31.3 % were shown in a maternal role, 12.5 % were shown as housekeepers, and 6.3 % provided for the family.

The rank of family roles from largest to smallest was as follows:

1. Maternal (F).
2. Housekeeping (F).
3. Providing for the family (M).

(F= Female Stereotype; M= Male Stereotype)

Setting

Female characters were usually shown at home. Although they were also shown at other places such as business and outdoors, the most frequent setting was in the home including the living room and kitchen (see Table 3).

Table 3

Distribution of the Female Characters by Setting

Setting	Frequency	Percent
Home	5	31.5
Home-Outdoors	4	25.0
Business	2	12.5
Home-Business	1	6.3
Business-Outdoors	2	12.5
Combination	2	12.5
Total	16	100*

* Percent column does not equal 100% due to rounding procedure.

Personality

The measure of personality traits used in this study consisted of 20 Likert type items in which an adjective was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from almost never true (1) to almost always true (7). Ten of the 20 items were associated with the female stereotypes and the other 10 were associated with the male stereotypes. The researcher utilized Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart's (1981) study based on the revised Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) in this category.

Distributions and measures of central tendency of each item were made. It was found that some adjectives relating to male stereotypes were above the median while some adjectives related to female stereotypes were below the median. Especially some stereotypes such as "assertive," "willing to take a stand," "strong personality," "independent," "forceful," and "aggressive" were found more than some female stereotypes in the personality of female characters. Some female stereotypes such as "tender" and "gentle" had the lowest scores (see Table 4).

Table 4

Mean Ratings of Personality Trait Adjectives

Personality Trait Adjectives	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sensitive to needs of others (F)	4.438	1.788
Eager to soothe hurt feelings (F)	4.438	1.896
Warm in relations with others (F)	4.438	1.825
Understanding (F)	4.438	1.788
Helpful to others (F)	4.813	1.870
Compassionate (F)	4.250	1.880
Tender (F)	3.875	1.746
Friendly (F)	4.875	1.708
Gentle (F)	4.000	1.826
Sincere (F)	5.125	1.408
Independent (M)	5.250	1.483
Assertive (M)	5.438	1.315
Strong personality (M)	5.313	1.250
Forceful (M)	5.250	1.390
Leadership abilities (M)	4.875	1.708
Dominant (M)	4.875	1.544
Willing to take a stand (M)	5.375	1.147
Aggressive (M)	5.188	1.471
Acts as a leader (M)	4.563	1.459
Competitive (M)	4.313	1.250

(F= Female Stereotype; M= Male Stereotype)

Appearance

Both masculine and feminine appearance trait-adjectives were analyzed on the female characters. Distributions were made on total female characters for each item separately.

It was found that 15 (93.8%) female characters had fair skin. All female characters wore make-up. Among all female characters 75.0 % wore jewelry, 50.0 % were graceful, 43.8 % were of a delicate build, 68.8 % had soft voices, 68.8 % had long hair, 6.3 % were muscular, 43.8 % were small-boned, 43.8 % were tall, 18.8 % were strong, 33.8 % had broad shoulders, 31.3 % had deep voices, and 31.3 % had short hair. The rank of appearance trait-adjectives from largest to smallest was as follows:

1. Wears make-up (F).
2. Fair skin (F).
3. Wears jewelry (F).
4. Long hair (F).
5. Graceful (F), soft voice (F).
6. Delicate build (F), small boned (F), tall (M).
7. Broad shoulders (M), deep voice (M), short hair (M).
8. Strong (M).
9. Muscular (M).

(F= Female Stereotype; M= Male Stereotype)

Common Behaviors

Both male and female common behaviors in a person's normal day were analyzed for the female characters. Frequency and percentage distributions were designed for each behavior separately.

It was found that 5 (31.3%) female characters could not be identified according to any common behaviors used in this study. Some of the characters showed only one common behavior while the others more than one. The common behaviors of the female characters found in this study were doing housework (12.5%), preparing food (25.0%), entertainment (18.8%), using the phone for personal reasons (6.3%), caring for children (37.5%), caring for their bodies (25.0%), consuming food (50.0%), drinking and smoking (6.3%), and carrying out social courtesies (25.0%).

Although female characters showed some female behaviors, they also showed some male behaviors more than some other female behaviors. The rank of behaviors from largest to smallest was as follows: (a) consuming food (M), (b) caring for children (F), (c) preparing food (F), carrying out social courtesies (M), caring for their bodies (F), (d) entertainment (F), (e) doing housework (F), and (f) drinking and smoking (M), using telephone for personal reasons (F).

(F= Female Stereotype; M= Male Stereotype)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe sex-role stereotyping and images of women in situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television.

Conclusions

When compared with the early studies revealed in the review of literature in this study, it was found that there were some differences between those studies and the results of this study. There were some changes in the portrayal of women in the situation and domestic comedies.

Age. The middle-aged female was the most represented leading character in the programs. Most of them were sexually mature, and socially responsible adult women. In the early programs revealed in the review of literature characters were much younger and less competent than characters in the programs of 1990.

Occupation. The leading female characters were usually shown in some occupational roles which were traditionally occupied by men in the society. For example, the largest percentage of occupational roles was managerial in the programs while this area indicated in highly male-typed occupations by the early studies. Many occupations called traditionally feminine could not be found in the programs

of 1990 while they were shown very often in the early programs revealed in the review of literature.

Family Role. Although leading female characters were shown as continuing their traditional roles in the family, they were also shown in traditionally masculine roles. The female characters were going out of their traditional roles and trying to go in to the opposite one in the programs of 1990. For example, they were providing for the family while this role was ascribed for men in the early studies revealed in the review of literature.

Setting. Although leading female characters were shown at business and outdoors, home was still a common location in the programs. Female characters' lives were presented by a balance between the outside world and the world of family and home.

Personality and Appearance. Leading female characters were shown in a combination of masculine and feminine traits. Their feminine attributes were shown physically by their bodies, jewelry, long hair, fair skin, and so on. Their attractiveness and beauty were important. When compared with the studies revealed in the review of literature, traditionally stereotyped appearance of women did not change in the programs of 1990. Although physically the characters were shown in traditional stereotyping, they had a flexibility

in their personalities and sex-role behaviors. They had an inclination towards male stereotypes while they were shown in totally traditional feminine traits in the early studies revealed in the review of literature. The characters of 1990 were assertive, strong, willing to take a stand, aggressive, independent, and dominant (masculine traits) and were also friendly, sincere, helpful, sensitive and so on (feminine traits).

Common Behaviors. Common behaviors in a person's average day were displayed by leading female characters in the programs. Also changes in the images of women in the programs were observed. Masculine and feminine behaviors presented by female characters could not be separated at certain points. Common behaviors were displayed in combination by both sexes to varying degrees.

Based on the results of this study, the researcher suggested that the changes in images of women in situation and domestic comedies could exist because of two factors. These were as follows: (a) the process of the change in every unit in the society, and (b) the role of the media in the society. First, it was obvious that there were some changes in the society and changes in every unit would effect others. Because of so many factors, society is always in a process of change. These changes would be seen in every social

institution such as familial, economic, and political. Such institutional changes would feed back and further reinforce the changes in the sex-role definitions.

Specifically, there have been changes in beliefs about the value of the family, and the possibility of self-expression through work. Along with these changes in attitudes have come changes in role participation, with more women participating in more diverse roles. In changing sex-roles females were taking male functions and vice versa. Females were entering the mainstream of life outside home and becoming more rational and psychologically and intellectually confident and competent.

Next, the media played a very important role in the process of change within society. Media reinforced these changes along with the other elements in society which parallel the natural flow of this process. Changes could be reflected by media directly or indirectly through the process of communication. On the other hand, although media could not be separated from the sovereign thoughts in society, they could cause some changes in society by changing some traditional molds. Changes were a result of their power and effects upon the process of communication.

Because sex-roles are a part of the everyday lives of people, and sex-roles and media have become an important

field, this study offers some new results in the communication field.

Limitations of This Research

There were some limitations in this study. First, although one third of the situation and domestic comedies on prime-time television were analyzed, the programs and characters might not be adequate to reflect some points related to the purpose of this study. Second, this study did not try to find relationships between variables. Third, this study used 7 females and 3 males as coders. Because of this, potential coder sex-bias could exist. Finally, highly sex-typed occupations both males and females were revealed in the review of literature and applied for the category.

Implications for Future Research

For further research, this researcher would suggest a follow up study which would include all situation and domestic comedies and all male and female characters in these programs. Comparison between male and female characters in these programs could help to understand some differences or equalities between these two sexes' images. For further study, wide variety of jobs could be listed and applied for the category to avoid occupation stereotypes. Finally, this researcher would suggest an examination of relationships among variables.

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APPENDIX A

Prime-Time Programs

Time on Program Title

NBC

Saturday

8:00-8:30 p.m. Golden Girls

8:30-9:00 p.m. Empty Nest

Thursday

7:00-7:30 p.m. Cosby Show

8:00-8:30 p.m. Cheers

ABC

Tuesday

7:00-7:30 p.m. Who's the Boss?

8:00-8:30 p.m. Roseanne

Wednesday

7:30-8:00 p.m. Growing Pains

CBS

Monday

8:00-8:30 p.m. Murphy Brown

8:30-9:00 p.m. Designing Women

FOX

Sunday

8:00-8:30 p.m. Married with children

APPENDIX B
Female Characters

<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Character Name</u>
Golden Girls	Rose
	Dorothy
	Blanche
Empty Nest	Barbara
	Carol
Cosby Show	Claire
Cheers	Rebecca
Who's the Boss?	Angela
Roseanne	Roseanne
Growing Pains	Maggie
Murphy Brown	Murphy
Designing Women	Charlene
	Julia
	Suzanne
	Mary Jo
Married with Children	Peggy

APPENDIX C

I- Age of the Female Character

Young (20-35)

Middle (36-50)

Old (50 +)

Uncertain

II- Occupation of the Female Character

Clerical work

Teaching

Nursing

Managerial (all professions in this position)

Science-Engineering

Wife/Mother

Uncertain

III- Family Role

Maternal

House keeping

Decision of major spending

Management of money

Providing for the family

Shopping for food

Uncertain

IV- Setting

Home

Outdoors

Business

Home-Business

Home-Outdoors

Business-Outdoors

Combination

V- Personality Trait-Adjectives

Sensitive to needs of others (F)

Eager to soothe hurt feelings (F)

Warm in relations with others (F)

Understanding (F)

Helpful to others (F)

Compassionate (F)

Tender (F)

Friendly (F)

Gentle (F)

Sincere (F)

Independent (M)

Assertive (M)

Strong personality (M)

Forceful (M)

Leadership abilities (M)

Dominant (M)

Willing to take a risk (M)

Aggressive (M)

Acts as a leader (M)

Competitive (M)

VI- Appearance Trait-Adjectives

Fair skin (F)

Graceful (F)

Delicate build (F)

Wears jewelry (F)

Soft voice (F)

Wears make-up (F)

Long hair (F)

Small boned (F)

Tall (M)

Deep voice (M)

Muscular (M)

Short hair (M)

Strong (M)

Broad shoulders (M)

VII- Common Behaviors of the Female Characters

Housework (F)

Food preparation (F)

Sewing (F)

Entertainment (F)

Riding (F)

Using the phone for personal reasons (F)

Shopping (F)

Caring for children (F)

Caring for their bodies (F)

Consume food (M)

Drink and smoke (M)

Yard work (M)

Driving (M)

Operate machinery (M)

Use the phone for business (M)

Athletics (M)

Social courtesies (M)

Uncertain