

# **Women's Leadership in Primetime Television**

## **An Introductory Study**

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## Women's Leadership in Prime-time Television: An Introductory Study

### *Introduction*

When television executives report their core audience, women always come out ahead. A 2007 Nielsen Media Research report showed that, with only two exceptions, every broadcast network channel had more female viewers than men. ABC's female audience almost doubled its male audience during the 2007-08 season (Atkinson, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Women onscreen, however, seem to reflect a different reality, making up only 43% of characters in the prime-time 2007-08 season (Lauzen, 2008).<sup>2</sup> As studies going back as far as the 1970s show, women on screen not only fail to represent the proportional makeup of women in society, they also overwhelmingly show a stereotypically gendered version of women (McNeil, 1975; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1977).

This paper aims to address the evolution of women's leadership in prime-time network scripted television from 1950 to 2008. Because of the way that women have been traditionally marginalized in television, it is important to study the shows that have featured women as lead characters. Characters such as Lucy Ricardo (*I Love Lucy*, 1951-1960) influenced later female leads such as Ann Marie (*That Girl*, 1966-1971), Mary Richards (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, 1970-1977) and Murphy Brown (*Murphy Brown*, 1988-1998). Thus, along with an introduction to socialization theory and feminist television criticism, this paper covers a selection of some of the most influential female characters and women-centered shows of this period. Both popularity and influence have been taken into account in selecting which shows to feature. In each section,

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<sup>1</sup> This is very likely due to ABC's push to get more female viewers, including former network head Susan Lyne's enthusiastic endorsement of *Desperate Housewives* (Jefferson, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Lauzen's study examined 2,274 characters appearing on one randomly selected episode of every drama, situation comedy, and reality program airing on ABC, CBS, CW, Fox, MyNetworkTV, and NBC during the 2007-08 prime-time season.

there is a review of every program with a female lead that appeared in the top ten Nielsen rankings for each season. There are also summaries of a few of the less popular shows that had influence on later series and characters. Tables showing the total number of female-led shows by decade and genre are also included.

### ***Why Does It Matter? Socialization Theory and Feminist Television Criticism***

Why does the leadership of these women matter? Though many argue that television is only entertainment, it is probably the most likely form of media to cross lines of class, gender, race, and ethnicity. As John Fiske and John Hartley (1989) state,

Everybody knows what it is like to watch television. Certainly; and it is television's familiarity, its centrality to our culture, that makes it so important, so fascinating, and so difficult to analyse. It is rather like the language we speak: taken for granted but both complex and vital in an understanding of the way human beings have created their world (p. 16).

Television is unique in that it seems more accessible to most than films or books. It is also segmented, allowing the audience to easily dip in and out of the story. It is used "more freely" than other types of media in the sense that it is often a form of passive media, kept on in the background and undemanding of full attention (Brown, 1990, p. 17). Because of this, it has the unconscious ability to shape our attitudes and cultural expectations. Television "is one of the ways our culture talks to itself about itself" (Johnson, 2007, p. 19).

What is portrayed on television is important to how we live our lives. A standard definition of socialization is that it is "the process of learning the attitudes, values, and behavior patterns of a given society or group in order to function effectively within it (Hoffner, Levine & Toohey, 2008). More than 48% of 12- to 23-month-olds, and 41% of 24- to 35-month olds watch more than two hours of television a day (Certain & Kahn, 2002). For adults older than age 70, television viewing occupies most of their leisure time (Horgas, Wilms, & Baltes, 1998).

Television viewing starts early and it remains a consistent companion throughout the lifecycle.

Due to this extraordinary amount of potential exposure, what television presents as social norms often become real-life social and political norms. Indeed as Valkenburg (2004) shows, children learn from attitudes and behaviors depicted by characters on screen. Rothschild (1984) found that the more often elementary aged children watched television, the more likely they were to consider gender-related activities such as cooking or playing sports and gender-related qualities like warmth and independence as belonging to the stereotyped gender.

As much as television affects our lives, it generally fails to reflect adequately how the majority of the audience actually lives. As one example, television offers a distorted view of the workforce, over-representing law-enforcement and professional work and under-representing labor and service work (Hoffner, et al, 2008). Discrepancies such as this offer profound implications on the way the audience is shaped by what they are viewing; viewers are more likely to be influenced by characters they perceive are “like them,” and a dearth of female characters at work (for example) gives the impression that women are more closely related to the home than their male counterparts. This again carries important implications for how women then behave and are seen in everyday life.

Feminist television criticism has developed from these theories and their implications. Liberal feminism suggests that women on television should be portrayed equally and represented positively, such as in the numerical relationship between the population and the number of women on screen or in the variety of careers, situations and life experiences experienced by female characters. One might see *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) as a key example of a liberal feminist program – a woman thriving in a man’s domain, yet still experiencing those situations unique to her gender, such as childbirth.

The radical feminist school of thought would argue that this liberal argument ignores “the pressures on and implications of women’s choices [when] television shows...reposition women inside the home as if such a return marked the apex of feminist social transformation” (Johnson, 2007, p. 2). Scholars argue that allowing some women to exist in typically feminine spheres even while their peers succeed in male spaces still puts all women on an uneven playing field. There is a struggle between the idea that the “recognition [sic] of the importance of the domestic realm and human interests in broadcast television confirm[s] the lower status of women” (Nightingale, 1990, p. 30) and the idea that this in fact raises these traditional feminine behaviors to equal status as those of men.

Third wave feminist researchers began looking at TV programs in the context of individual episodes, which helped avoid the overarching assumptions made when television is viewed as a whole. (This evolution is similar to the advent of third wave feminism as a theory – the individual experiences of women began to be examined as related to other conditions of their lives, as opposed to previous feminisms that regarded all women as a monolith who shared similar situations and contexts of experience) (Snyder, 2008). Resistance theory comes out of this movement, addressing “the issue of how ordinary people and subcultural groups can resist hegemonic, or dominant pressures, and consequently obtain pleasure from what the political, social and/or cultural system offers, despite that system’s contradictory position in their lives” (Brown, 1990, p. 12). In other words, women can still enjoy, learn from, and otherwise experience television that does not represent their life experiences. There is a contextual shift from radical feminism (and to a lesser extent, liberal feminism) in that even so-called misogynist entertainment can serve a purpose.

Every few years television executives and critics feverishly announce that it is “the era of women.” Again and again, the number and variety of women-centered shows appear to be increasing. Yet the numbers suggest that women have made only slight advances in both their proportionality of representation on the screen and in how they are portrayed. From 2000 to 2008, there was only one primetime network scripted television show that could be classified as a woman-led show (*Desperate Housewives*, 2004-present) and one woman-hosted reality show (*Joe Millionaire*, 2003) (see Table 3). Television executives “single out women as a desired audience, yet offer programs to attract women which seem to directly address men or children” (Nightingale, 1990, p. 28).<sup>3</sup> This pattern “point[s] to a very limited commitment to women as audiences, and to a narrow, even claustrophobic, definition of woman as audience” (Nightingale, 1999, p. 28). How can this be changed? This question will be explored further in the conclusion to this paper, but first a look at the history of women on television will help put these theories into context.

### ***Methodology***

For the purposes of this study, I consulted the Nielsen rankings from 1950 to 2008 examining the top ten television programs on network TV. Though some of the data regarding these rankings was found through second-hand sources (getting the information straight from the Nielsen Corporation was cost-prohibitive and limited to industry insiders), every effort has been made to corroborate the ranks from more than one source. A list of these sources can be found in the works cited. Though there were some popular women-focused shows among the lower ranked series, and certainly programs appearing in the 11-20 ranks were still popular, space considerations forced a more narrow focus to only the top ten series of each year.

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<sup>3</sup> The popular *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-2005) is a recent example. Though ostensibly a family-centered show, the series was named after the lead male character (Ray Barone) and often revolved around his experiences.

I have defined “broadcast network TV” in the context of the “Big Four” channels in the United States. Traditionally, there was the “Big Three” – NBC, CBS, and ABC – but in the early 1990s, Fox gained a significant share of the television viewing audience, so I have included it my analysis. The network focus was chosen due to both a desire for consistency and available data. Networks such as Lifetime (Television for Women) and Oxygen were created too recently to allow me to rely on a consistent source. This is not to say that I do not recognize that women-focused networks have probably had an impact on the Big 4, but that question is beyond the scope of this study.

The tables at the end of this paper include both scripted and non-scripted shows, despite my focus within the paper on only scripted programs. This is due to the fact that Nielsen reports on both types of series and treats them equally in determining its top ten programs. In most of the tables, I have excluded repeat appearances by shows in the data (for example, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) appears in multiple years during the 1970s; for all but Table 2, I have counted it only once.) This is to show the influence and popularity of certain shows, while still keeping the numbers true to how many individual women-focused programs there were.

I also examined the shows by genre to show how men, women, and ensemble-leads there were in each type of program. The genres are grouped by anthology or movie; comedy or sitcom; news, sports, or talk show; dramas, soap operas, or action shows; and reality, variety and game shows. Most of these are self-explanatory, but some comedies and dramas are somewhat harder to differentiate – for example, was *All in the Family* (1971-1979) a humorous drama or a serious comedy? For the most part, I have classified hour-long shows as dramas and half-hour programs as sitcoms or comedies. If these categorizations differ, it is due to the show’s producers choosing a different classification for their particular program.

The leads in each show were determined by several factors. Every show that was named after a character was assigned to the gender-led category of that character (i.e. *Alice*, 1976-1985, was named for the female character Alice, thus making it a woman-led show). Shows that did not have a title-character were decided based on who was most often focused on within the program, such as *That Girl* (1966-1971), where all the central stories revolved around Ann Marie. Variety and reality shows were evaluated on the basis of their host. Male and female co-hosted shows were classified as ensembles. Men-led news shows, such as *60 Minutes* (1968-present), were classified as male-led.

### ***The Good Old Days? 1950s and the “Golden Age” of Television***

Emerging from the bans on the creation of television sets during WWII, the fights between companies for television licenses, and other controversies over how to handle this new form of news and entertainment, television finally began to come into its own in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Though much of the programming of this time was in the form of live-action variety shows, such as *Texaco Star Theatre* (1948-1956) featuring Milton Berle, there were also early forms of the sitcom and dramatic serial television. Drawing from the top-ten Nielsen rated shows from this decade, *I Love Lucy* (1951-1960) is by far the most enduringly popular, achieving a first-place ranking for four years of the decade and a top-ten ranking the first six seasons of its nine-year run (McNeil, 1996). Relevant to this paper, it was one of the only shows appearing in the Nielsen top-ten that had a female in a lead role, notable exceptions being *Mama* (1949-1957) and *December Bride* (1954-1959). Other scripted shows such as *77 Sunset Strip* (1958-1964) offered women supporting roles, usually in the form of secretarial or sidekick status. Overall, 42 of 47

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<sup>4</sup> For more on pre-1950s and more general television history, see Albert Abramson's *The History of Television, 1942 to 2000*.



top ten shows (excluding repeats) were either hosted by men or featured a male as the lead character (see Tables 1 and 3).

*I Love Lucy* (1951-1960) was unique in the fact that it not only featured a female lead, it also was headed by a woman behind the scenes. Lucille Ball is a prime example of leadership in the television industry. Though Ball began her career as B-level movie star, her successful radio program, *My Favorite Husband*, proved to be the beginning of her superstar status. When the program was to be moved to the small screen, she and her husband (Desi Arnaz) arranged to produce their own pilot (Harmon, 2003). Desilu Productions was formed and she became the force behind one of the most successful shows ever aired. Her marriage would eventually crumble,<sup>5</sup> but she kept her financial and business success. In the early 1960s, when Arnaz sold his stock of their production company, she became the president of the largest film and television production studio in the world. After eventually selling that company, she founded her own, Lucille Ball Productions and produced a new series starring herself and her two children (Lowe, 1999, para. 24-28). In 1984, she was the only woman (out of seven) to be honored in the first class of actors inducted into the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Hall of Fame.

Despite its star's progressive accomplishments, it is certainly easy to view *I Love Lucy* as the anti-thesis of feminism, a representation of a time when women were the "weaker sex," such as in her husband Ricky's familiar refrain that Lucy had "some splainin' to do." However, the show also portrayed a strain of female leadership, especially for the time. As much as Lucy was the object of her husband's condescension, she also showed a rebellious streak to the notion that she was to be controlled by her husband. In addition, Ricky and Fred (one of the couple's best friends) were often portrayed as fools. Lucy shows distinct sass in several exchanges, such as:

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Mary Tyler Moore's marriage followed a similar path – she and her husband, Grant Tinker, formed the successful production company MTM Enterprises, which produced many of the most popular shows of the 1970s. They divorced in 1981 after selling the company (McLeland, n.d.).

LUCY : I don't think it's very nice of you making fun of my Spanish.  
 RICKY : Well, you've been making fun of my English for fifteen years.  
 LUCY : That's different. Spanish is a foreign language.  
 RICKY : English is a foreign language to me.  
 LUCY : Well, the way you speak it, it is to me too.

Though many of the firsts prescribed to the show are not actually true (such as the myth that hers was the first pregnancy on television),<sup>6</sup> the show did have groundbreaking elements for women. Lori Landay (1999) describes the show as “proto-feminist” due to its “attention to the power relations between the sexes in domestic life” (p. 27). Though Lucy usually was ridiculed for her “desire to escape the confines of domesticity, to be autonomous and public instead of dependent and private,” the show did offer “glimmers of equality in the Ricardo marriage, [which] combined with the audience’s extratextual knowledge of the real-life Ball and Arnez marriage/creative partnership, posited the hope of a collaborative marriage...” (p. 27).

Other examples of female leaders on television at the time include Lily Ruskin on *December Bride* (1954-1959) and *Mama* (1949-1957). On *December Bride*, the lead character, Lily, was an older single widow in search of the right husband. *Mama* featured the stories of a Norwegian family, told through the voice of the eldest daughter. Both of these shows were notable for their strong female characters. Though Lily was somewhat ditzy and could be classified as man-crazy, she was also portrayed as successfully living by herself. *Mama* was, in a departure from sitcoms of the time a competent family head.

Lucy, on the other hand, was an example of the stereotype of female characters as ditzy housewives. During the 1950s, 53% of the women on television appeared in this role (Dominick, 1979, p. 408). As the top ten rankings for the decade of the 1950s show, with the exception of

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<sup>6</sup>Though often attributed to *Lucy*, the first female to appear pregnant on TV was Mary Kay Stearns on network television’s first situational comedy, *Mary Kay and Johnny*. Though that show’s run was prior to the “Golden Age” of TV, it was important in the general history of television.

the three programs described above, women were not allowed to be anything other than silly sidekicks or perfect mothers.

A 1954 study shows that, up to that year, around 80% of women in starring roles appeared on situation comedies, compared to 44% of men (Dominick, 1979, p. 408). Men carried the dramatic shows, beginning a trend that continues today. For the most part this is because the dramatic series were overwhelmingly set in typically male environments, such as the many forms of the western that had extended top ten Nielsen success, such as *Hopalong Cassidy* (1949-1952), *The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957), *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* (1955-1961), *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975), *Tales of Wells Fargo* (1957-1962), *Have Gun, Will Travel* (1957-1963), *The Restless Gun* (1957-1959), *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1958-1961, and *Wagon Train* (1957-1965), along with the detective and legal dramas *Dragnet* (1951-1959) and *Perry Mason* (1957-1966). Indeed the 1954 study found that women made up only 32% of the characters on television to that point (United, 1977).

Such popular (though not top ten) shows as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966) and *Leave It to Beaver* (1957-1963) idealized the mother figure. Indeed the name of *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960) sums up this genre. Television did not have this stereotype entirely wrong; according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force participation rate of women was only 34 percent in 1950 (Toossi, 2002). In this way, television was mirroring the discrimination women faced in the real world. This makes the leadership of the female leads on *December Bride*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Mama* all the more important and apparent. Without examples that women could head successful shows, it is unlikely that television executives would have ever been as willing to support the wave of female-centered shows that came in the 1960s and 1970s.

Overall, the portrayal of women in the 1950s reflected the pre-second wave feminist time period of which they were aired. Women were pigeon-holed into the role they were usually forced to play in real life. Though it is hard to fault television too much for offering a picture of what was really going on in America at this point, the question raised in the discussion of socialization theory is certainly relevant here: are people influenced by what they see as the perfect life on television, or is it the other way around? Betty Friedan remarked in *The Feminine Mystique* that she had never seen a portrayal of a woman who successfully worked outside the home and raised a family (Friedan, 1963). For the most part, 1950s television was not filling this gap in leadership or example.

### ***The Women's Movement Arrives: Women on Television in the 1960s***

In the decade from 1960 to 1970, the growth rate of the labor force for women was more than three times greater than that of men (Toossi, 2002). Increasingly open educational opportunities, the rise of the women's movement, and a shift in family culture all were contributing to the changing environment for women both inside and outside the home. Television was relatively slow to follow suit. Over the course of these ten years, the number of women portrayed as housewives on network shows encouragingly fell from 53% to 36% (Dominick, 1979, p. 408), but there were still ample illustrations of women's role as window dressing on the set (to borrow a popular phrase in the literature).

Women made up only 14% of the female leads in top ten shows, compared to the nearly 70% of shows that featured male leads (see Tables 1 and 3). These six series included Lucille Ball's two new shows, *Here's Lucy* (1968-1974) and *The Lucy Show* (1962-1968), plus *Hazel* (1961-1966), *Bewitched* (1964-1972), *Julia* (1968-1971), and *The Doris Day Show* (1968-1973). Another notable show of the decade that never appeared in this top ten was *That Girl* (1966-

1971), which is especially important to mention because of its influence on the later “single professional woman” shows in later decades (such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, 1970-1977).

*Hazel* (1961-1966), the earliest of these shows to appear, was about a live-in maid, played by Shirley Booth. In a way, the show had similarities to *December Bride*. Both characters were older, and though neither was particularly progressive, they were take-charge, single women. At the same time, Hazel was pigeon-holed into a stereotypical female role and would often get her way by withholding dessert from the man of the house – not exactly a model the modern woman would want to replicate.

*Bewitched* (1964-1972) featured Samantha, the witch who married a mortal, was constantly trying to ignore her powers to conform to her husband’s (and society’s) expectations of the proper role of a housewife. Despite this traditional backdrop, there were also signs of the significant societal evolution for women’s roles in the real world. In fact, Lucille Ball’s leadership in portraying her character on *I Love Lucy* as aspiring to an equal marriage carried over in *Bewitched*. In the series premier, Darrin, Samantha’s spouse, remarks “So my wife's a witch. Every married man has to make some adjustments," prompting one critic to describe the show’s central theme as the idea that “marriage may not be what it appears on the surface and...means confronting male fears about women's sexuality and otherness, women's power, and the changing social and cultural significance of domestic institutions” (Lane, n.d.).

*Julia* (1968-1971), a show about an African-American widow who worked as a nurse in a doctor’s office, also transcended its portrayal of traditional professional gender roles. This was the first time a black woman appeared as a nondomestic worker on network television. As Tom Hill, creative director of Nick at Nite and TV Land said, "Her character was not so much about being African American as it was about being a woman whose husband had died and she was

trying to raise her child” (Hall, 2005). The first season the show was on television, its audience equaled that of *Gunsmoke* (Hall, 2005).

*The Doris Day Show* (1968-1973) was a prime example of the evolving landscape for female characters in primetime during the 1960s. In the first season, Doris’ character, Doris Martin, was a widow with young children who moved out of the city. Later seasons brought her first to work as a secretary, then as a writer, and later as a single, career woman. This show was a microcosm of the changes taking place in other shows. Previous standards had held that women were either old, widowed, or married housewives or domestic and support staff workers. Doris’ beginning as a widow, progression to supportive work, and evolution into a successful working woman mirrored many women’s paths during this time, including those of other television characters. Indeed, it is likely that *That Girl* (1966-1971) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) had some influence on Doris’ changing roles – she took on the role of a staff writer at her magazine in the 1970-71 season – four years after the *That Girl* premier and simultaneously with Mary Tyler Moore’s show’s premier.

*That Girl* (1966-1971), starring Marlo Thomas as Ann Marie, the naïve small-town girl hoping to make it big as an actress in New York City, is thought by many to be the forerunner of such iconic hits as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977). It was the first of the ‘independent girl takes on the world’ genre that would prove to be so popular during the 1970s. At the same time, others question the show’s qualifications as a feminist proto-type due to Ann Marie’s dependence on her father and boyfriend. Denise Lowe (1999) also targets the show as rarely showing the character working on her chosen career path, rather putting her in typically feminine temp jobs such as secretarial positions. Lowe posits that Ann Marie is really just a vestige of the screwball wives of the 1950s, the scatterbrained good girl. She was an aspiring actress, which

was not the most likely of careers to actually prove successful. She was also living in New York, a “dangerous” place for women, which might offer some background on why her parents were so protective of her.

At the same time, Lowe’s criticisms do not take into consideration the extreme obstacles that the network executives were placing over the show; Marlo Thomas claims that the networks were “terrified” of a show that portrayed a woman a “just...somebody, not an offshoot” of somebody else (Nichols, 1999). Indeed the fact that her father was very much present reflected what many women might encounter in a similar situation; “her fretful parents, watching from their suburban lair, seemingly bear the burden of a nation reluctantly embarked on a great social experiment” (Nicholas, 1999). Regardless of the limitations of the series, it seems likely that it had some effect on the independent woman genre that followed.

### *An Era of Women: 1970s Television*

In 1977, the U.S. government began to focus in earnest on the lack of minority representation in the media. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a report, “Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television,” in response to the persistent sexism faced by women both in their portrayal on screen and their treatment behind the camera. This was an era of change and a medium that so many accessed seemed a good place to target. Dominick (1979) writes that in the years from 1956 to 1978, women had rarely been featured in shows, appearing in generally less than 10% of starring roles (p. 410). Leonard Gross (1973) reports that the early 1970s saw considerable reluctance on behalf of network executives to break out of their pattern of women as mothers. A CBS official rejected a proposal for a dramatic series about female nurses with the comment, “Who wants to see a prime-time series about a woman?” (p.7).

The Commission's report aimed to gather anecdotes, statistics, and other information on the bias against women in order to make recommendations of where the industry could improve. It also offered some encouraging examples of ways that television was changing during the mid-1970s. In fact, a whole new kind of television show in the form of Norman Lear's *All in the Family* (1971-1979) was introduced in 1970. It spawned many spin-offs, including one of the most popular woman-led shows of the decade, *Maude* (1972-1978). *One Day at a Time* (1974-1984), another women-centered series, was also developed under Lear's leadership. *All in the Family's* (and Lear's) leadership in bringing ground-breaking television into primetime, featuring issues of interracial relationships, classism, and other forms of discrimination, was hugely influential to the women-centered shows of the decade.

The 1970s was the first real era of women-led television. Excluding repeats, 13 out of 53 total series that appeared in the top ten in this decade were shows with female leads. This might seem like a small number, but the increase in female-led shows from the 1960s to the 1970s was nearly 11% (see Table 1). These shows, *Maude* (1972-1978), *One Day at a Time* (1974-1984), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), *Here's Lucy* (1968-1974), *Funny Face* (1971-1972), *Rhoda* (1974-1978), *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981), *Alice* (1976-1985), *Phyllis* (1975-1977), *Flo* (1980-1981)<sup>7</sup> and *Angie* (1979-1980), reflected the growing women's movement and the increased attention to the status of women on television. It is also important to note that several prominent female actors of the time were also instrumental in women's rights in the real world. Marlo Thomas (*That Girl*), Esther Rolle (*Maude* and *Good Times*, 1974-1979) and Mary Tyler Moore were all ardent supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment. These women would bring this leadership to their

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<sup>7</sup> Though the show didn't premier until 1980, it was introduced in the 1979-1980 season, thus making it necessary to include it in the 1970s ratings data.



progressive roles on the small screen (and would take their progressive activism reputations on screen into the real world.

The influence of *That Girl* could clearly be seen in *Funny Face*, a 1971 show about Sandy Stockton, who though not an aspiring actress, made money for school by appearing in TV commercials. She was a young UCLA student from Illinois – again carrying on the tradition of the single small-town girl in the big city. The show only lasted three months, despite its strong ratings, due to the lead actress, Sandy Duncan’s medical issues. It was followed by *The Sandy Duncan Show*, which also featured the Stockton character.

*The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), as mentioned above, could also be seen as a natural evolution of *That Girl*. It centered on Mary Richards, a thirty-something single woman. The show continued the “independent woman” genre by introducing the character as recently out of a relationship and setting out on her own in a fictional newsroom in Minneapolis. Lowe (1999) again questions the real feminist implications of the show, claiming that the show set up the work environment as a quasi-family with Mary in the role of the mother (p. 208). She also points out that Mary rarely engaged in professional activities outside the secretarial realm and rarely addressed her boss by his first name (though her male colleagues always did) (p. 208-209). Though this is all true and certainly points to the advances that still needed to be made at the time, *Mary* was an important bridge between *That Girl*’s relative ditzy attitude and the more professional Murphy Brown-type characters to come in the 1980s and 1990s. Importantly, Mary showed that a professional woman could date and be attractive to men (if that’s what she preferred), and could even live with these men if she so chose. It was an important advancement for the establishment of unconventional families and living situations on television.

*Rhoda* (1974-1978) and *Phyllis* (1975-1977) were both spin-offs of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. *Rhoda* featured the spunky former sidekick of Mary Richards who moved from Minneapolis back to New York to be a window decorator. Though *Rhoda* was married early in the first season, later in the series the producers decided her appeal was in her single status and *Rhoda* and her husband divorced. Part of her characterization in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was that she could never seem to get a boyfriend. *Phyllis* was the story of Mary's former landlady. Recently widowed, *Phyllis* moved to San Francisco. Several of the storylines were focused on her re-entry into the working world. Both of these series emphasized the popularity of the single woman in the city genre.

If the characters of *Rhoda*, *Phyllis* and *Mary* were progressive, than *Maude Findlay* on the eponymous *Maude* (1972-1978) certainly was. The comedy/drama, a spin-off of *All in the Family*, starred Bea Arthur as the polar opposite of Archie Bunker. Her politically liberal character was an avowed feminist, and though her political views were often the source of humor, the show was one of the most progressive to ever air on network television. In fact, it is arguable that many of the episodes would not be permitted on network TV today. Though certainly ground-breaking simply because of the matriarchal role played by Arthur, the show also addressed issues important to women not typically shown on television, such as abortion, domestic violence, and menopause.

The abortion episodes centered on *Maude's* decision to terminate her pregnancy due to her relatively advanced age; the procedure had just been legalized in New York. The episodes aired before the historic Supreme Court decision *Roe v Wade* and prompted widespread protest. Later, in the final season, *Maude* runs for the New York state senate, prompting her husband's disapproval. She ultimately decides to give him the choice to leave instead of backing down from

her decision (Fry, n.d.) The show was very much a product of its time; as mentioned, many topics, such as abortion and domestic violence, are rarely dealt with in such a straight-forward way even today.

Lasting nine seasons, *One Day at a Time* (1974-1984) was arguably one of the most successful of Norman Lear's comedy-dramas. The show featured Ann Romano, a divorced, single mother struggling with the issues that real-life women in her situation experienced. Her daughters faced such teenage issues as the use of birth control and drugs and she often had money woes. Like all of Lear's work, the show was realistic - dramatically portraying real-life situations, but still maintaining a humorous attitude.

*Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983) was a popular series about two best friends and roommates working in a brewery in Milwaukee. It was a spin-off *Happy Days* (1974-1984), a show set in an idealized 1950s America. The characters were both "good girls," though Laverne was considerable more outspoken and adventurous than Shirley. One of the central themes to the show was the expected role that unmarried women had to play in pre-feminist times, including their treatment in their jobs and the expectations that were on them to remain chaste until marriage.

*Alice* (1976-1985), a show based on the 1974 movie *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, featured a widow starting her life over. After her husband was killed, she took a waitressing job in Arizona. *Flo* (1980-1981) was a spin-off from *Alice*, in which former waitress Florence leaves to take a hostess job and ends up buying her own business. *Angie* (1979-1980) was about a formerly poor waitress who had recently married into a much wealthier family. It offered a look at class differences in America and was a nod to the very different lives women could and did lead depending on their economic status. Both *Flo* and *Angie* were popular in their first seasons,

but experienced a sharp ratings decline in the second, leading to early cancellations. All three shows featured women who either were currently in or formerly held a traditional woman's job. Though they provided realistic examples to the millions of women who had similar careers, this was also a trend that was ignoring the effects of Title IX, including the increasing numbers of women entering the professional world and attending higher education.

There were some shows that featured women in non-traditional roles. *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) featured three women as undercover private investigators. Though it ostensibly offered an expansion of the types of careers available for women on television, the show's main claim to fame was the sexual attractiveness of the female-leads. Its predecessor, *Police Woman* (1974-1978), never appeared in the top ten, but was actually one of the first to feature a female lead in the role of a police officer. It was far more overtly sexual than *Charlie's Angels*. The show was a favorite of President Gerald Ford and starred Angie Dickinson as Sergeant Suzanne "Pepper" Anderson. In both programs, the women used their appearances to perform their undercover duties. Dickinson, not known for her particularly feminist career moves (she won Hollywood's Golden Garter Award in 1962 for her well-toned legs), even became somewhat exasperated by the inherent sexism in a supposedly ground-breaking role; she admitted that toward the end of the series, she had "had it with scenes 'where the phone rings while I'm taking a bath. I always want to look as sexy, beautiful and luscious as I can, but I'd prefer scripts where the sensuality is pouring out naturally for the whole 60 minutes' (Ames, 1978).

*The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978) began as a spin-off from *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978). It was one of the few "superhero" shows to feature a woman as its heroine. Jaime Sommers, the bionic woman, had almost identical strengths as her counterpart, Steve, the six million dollar man. She could run at incredibly fast speeds and had enormous upper body

strength. The show was almost diametrically opposed to the messages imparted by *Charlie's Angels*. Jaime was much more used to getting what she wanted through her strength than through her sexuality. The metaphor of the equal (male and female) fighting superhumans was a powerful one for the 1970s – a decade in which equality was a central theme of many primetime shows in a way not seen before or since. At the same time, Jaime and the women of *Charlie's Angels* all took their orders from men, displaying the still-present limitations placed on female characters.

### ***Backlash: 1980s Television***

Though there were some significant advances for women during the 1980s and 1990s both on screen and in real life, the topic of gender discrimination in both worlds was a victim of backlash coming out of the radical decades of the 1960s and 1970s. With the election of Ronald Reagan, the death of the Equal Rights Amendment, and the rise of the conservative Christian movement, television largely took a step back from showing strong female characters, such as Mary Richards and Maude. Though the actual percentage of women-led programs increased from 11% in the 1970s to 18% in the 1980s, the number of programs fell from 13 to 7. There was less variety of shows in the top ten in the 1980s due to the continued top-ten popularity of some shows, which led to inflated percentages (see Tables 1 and 2).

Many of the top-rated shows of the decade virtually shut women out of primetime, including *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1985), *Magnum P.I.* (1980-1988), *Simon & Simon* (1981-1989), *Miami Vice* (1984-1989) and *The A-Team* (1983-1987). Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found during their six-week study of network programming that although women were 57% of the U.S. civilian work force in 1988, they made up only 35% of organizational workers on all network television programs (para. 99). The women who were shown in occupational roles

were also far more likely to perform personal functions than their male counterparts, such as taking on the role of the caretaker at work (Vande Berg, et al, p. 199). At the same time, women were also being shut out of their roles on family focused series; Lowe (1999) points to the portrayal of new types of families with men as the main caretakers such as *Full House* (1987-1995), *My Two Dads* (1987-1990) and *Who's the Boss* (1984-1992) (para. 25). Of course the latter could also be spun as a good thing; women were no longer the sole purveyors of the home. Also, *Who's the Boss* did feature a mother who was a successful professional. However, the main problem goes back to the statistics found in Vande Berg and Streckfuss' study – women were not as present in television in any type of role.

Some of the few shows that did feature women portrayed them in melodramatic fashion, such as the primetime soaps *Dallas* (1978-1991) and *Dynasty* (1981-1989). *Dynasty* in particular, featured women in the classic good versus evil dichotomy (Press, 1990, p. 165). Though many women claimed these shows were their “vice” and that they did not take them seriously, others did view them as somewhat realistic. Susan Douglas (1995) posits that the catfights and competitions between women on these shows was a reaction to the fights between women in real life over such controversial topics as the Equal Rights Amendment (p. 221). In her eyes, these soaps implicitly aimed to “put the lie to feminists’ claims about sisterhood” (p. 222).

Putting aside the messages of the shows however, the fact that a genre of show typically resigned to daytime was now being aired in primetime was significant. It showed that network executives were embracing their female audience. So, while it is important to consider the relatively negative position of women in primetime during the 1980s, just as in earlier decades there were exceptions to the rule. *Cagney and Lacey* (1982-1988), *Kate and Allie* (1984-1989),

*Murphy Brown* (1988-1998), *Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996), and *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992) all offered different, generally stronger portrayals of women.

*Cagney and Lacey* (1982-1988) continued the progression of women into the typically male police world in a much stronger fashion than did *Police Woman*. When Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey were shown working, they were able to handle their own cases, rather than becoming victims like many women in law-enforcement shows. The show also highlighted controversial women's issues much in the same vein as *Maude*; abortion, abuse, cancer, and date rape were all included in the show's story lines (Lowe, 1999). In the date rape episode, it is one of the leads, Cagney, who is violated by her date. She faces the all too common situation of a skeptical investigating officer and "unintentional insensitivity" on behalf of her coworkers about her "submission" (O'Connor, 1988). The show had a small band of devoted fans who had to fight to keep the show on the air after the network continually moved it around the schedule and even briefly cancelled it. Indeed the network played a hand in casting as well, replacing Meg Foster with Sharon Gless after the first season in the role of Cagney, due to Foster's "unattractiveness." They wanted a more feminine lead for the role, proving that even in a ground-breaking professionalized series, women were still marginalized.

*Kate and Allie* (1984-1989) was an untraditional take on the nuclear family drama so popular during the 1950s and 1960s. Instead of the usual relationship of husband and wife raising the children, *Kate and Allie* was about two divorcees who decided to raise their children together. The women dated men, but also were successful outside of their relationships, which would prove to be a popular theme in the 1990s when unlucky in love professional women were a key demographic. The two characters represented both sides of the problems real women were

having during the 1980s – the struggle to be respected in the workforce and the issues that came with staying at home with children.

*Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) was less focused on family and more concerned with the professional world. It centered around the title character's life as a journalist on a national weekly news show, *FYI*. Murphy (played by Candice Bergen) was professionally successful and the show almost always portrayed her as competent and self-sufficient. Some say she was almost too masculine, though that itself brings the double-edged sword for women in professional careers – how does one remain “feminine” while still achieving success and what is the true meaning of being “feminine?” Despite the workplace setting, probably the most famous episodes of the series center on Murphy's pregnancy, her anguish over what to do about the pregnancy, and her role as a single mother, suggesting the popularity (and beginning) of discussions regarding women's balance between family and work. Then Vice President Dan Quayle made remarks disparaging Murphy for contributing to the breakdown in family values and the dissolution of the two-parent home. The writers responded in the episode "You Say Potatoe, I Say Potato,"<sup>8</sup> with the message that diversity in American families is a good thing and is in fact one of the hallmarks of the national culture. This incident is one of the most obvious examples of how television transcends its role as entertainment and enters the national dialogue surrounding politics, culture and values.

*Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996) and *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992) were different both for the fact that they were successful series featuring older women (itself a rarity), and that these women were independent and relatively happy with their lives. Though Susan Faludi (1992) suggests that these programs were able to sustain popularity during the 1980s because they

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<sup>8</sup> The title was a play on Vice President Quayle's famous blunder over the spelling of 'potato' at a school spelling bee in 1992.



showed unthreatening women who deserved pity not fear (unlike the portrayal of young, single women), other critics praise the shows. Indeed Faludi's criticisms seem a little condescending. There are many possible readings of these particular series (the first featuring Angela Lansbury as Jessica Fletcher, a mystery writer who often finds herself at the center of crimes and the latter starring four single friends, Blanche, Dorothy, Sophia, and Rose, living out their retirement in Miami), but pity does not seem to be the most apparent feeling for these particular characters. Jessica, though somewhat dangerous for her attraction to criminals, is independent and seemingly content. Likewise, *The Golden Girls* portrays a relatively normal, and enviable, close group of friends.

It is disappointing that older women are still so often neglected on networks. In a 1996 University of Pennsylvania report on the status of older women on television from the years 1973 to 1994, researchers found that "while older male characters tend to be defined by their occupation, older women are defined by their marital status and their relationship to family" (Gardner, 1996). In addition, only one fourth of women over age 65 appearing on television were found to be portrayed in a positive light (Gardner, 1996).

### ***Beyond the Second Wave: 1990s Television***

The 1990s brought more diversity to the screen as the concept of third wave feminism or "post-feminism" entered the mainstream. This idea went beyond the backlash; it attempted to reconcile the fact that women had come a long way since the 1950s and 1960s, but also that there was still sexism throughout society. Overall the 1990s offered a greater number of women-led shows than ever before. Much like the 1970s, the decade was a significant improvement for female characters. 40% of the shows in the top ten were women-led. Though this number is

somewhat inflated due to the several series that only lasted one season<sup>9</sup>, even comparing female-led shows to male-led shows for all top ten entries, including repeats, shows a significant increase from the 1980s (see Table 2). For the first (and only) time ever, female-led shows outranked male-led shows (14 compared to 11).

In addition, these female-led shows attempted to rectify the fact that for most of the women's movement, activists were focused on issues affecting middle-class white women. This new wave of feminism recognized that characteristics like race and sexual orientation are also central to women's lives and their problems with discrimination. Characters on screen in the 1990s wrestled with these issues just as women did in the real world. Shows such as *Roseanne* (1988-1997) and *Grace Under Fire* (1993-1998) focused on women in working class homes. *Touched by an Angel* (1994-2003) offered a Christian perspective on the networks. The popular (but not top ten ranked) *Ellen* (1994-1998) brought the issue of homosexuality to the networks.

There was also a trend of single, neurotic female professionals as lead characters. Though, like *Ellen*, *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) never appeared in the top ten Nielsen rankings, the lead character was perhaps the quintessential post-feminist heroine, offering a view of a professional woman struggling with her personal relationships, sexuality in the workplace, and the very idea of what defines success. During this era, several top ten series were similar, including *Caroline in the City* (1995-1999), *Suddenly Susan* (1996-2000), *Fired Up* (1997-1998), *Veronica's Closet* (1997-2000), *The Naked Truth* (1995-1998), and *Jesse* (1998-2000). More than any other genre, these shows probably saw the most benefit from the leadership of the strand of professional women running throughout this study – Ann Marie, Mary, and Murphy. Another series, *Designing Women* (1986-1993) found popularity in the 1990s, and was both a

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<sup>9</sup> Often these one-season shows had the benefit of a popular show as a lead-in, but could not sustain their popularity throughout the season.

look at professional women and what could almost be referred to as a younger version of *Golden Girls*.

*Roseanne* (1988-1997) focused on the blue-collar Conner family. It was differentiated from earlier family sitcoms by both the socio-economic status of the home and by the depiction of often coarse interactions between the family members. Roseanne, the mother played by Roseanne Barr, was the central character. She was a true matriarch of the family, but was significantly different from earlier sitcom mothers. She was often shown as unhappy, cynical, and lacking in domestic prowess. Many viewers might get the impression that she resented her family in some way, but throughout the series there was an ever-present feeling of familial love. Though all of the characters were rather negative, the unhappy family life the show displayed was probably a lot closer to most American homes than such perfect households as *Leave It to Beaver* presented. In addition, it gave women an example of an imperfect mother and wife.

*Grace Under Fire* (1993-1998) was similar to *Roseanne* in the non-traditional family it featured. The show centered on the character of Grace Kelly, a domestic abuse survivor, divorcee, and mother. It followed in the tradition of *Julia* as being a realistic look at life for a single parent. It, along with *Roseanne*, was a product of Carsey-Werner Productions, which was a key supporter of many of these realistically-themed shows of the period (much in the way that Norman Lear had been in the 1970s.) Carsey-Werner is also significant because it is co-headed by Marcy Carsey, frequently heralded as one of the most influential women in television.<sup>10</sup>

*Touched by an Angel* (1994-2003) is another example of the diversity on television in the 1990s. It was something of an anomaly of the shows of the period and was probably a precursor to many of the spiritual shows to follow (*7<sup>th</sup> Heaven*, 1996-2007; *Joan of Arcadia*, 2003-2005;

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<sup>10</sup> Carsey-Werner Productions produced many hit TV shows of the 1980s and 1990s, including *The Cosby Show*, *Mork and Mindy*, *Happy Days*, *A Different World*, and *Cybill*. Carsey was also one of the chief proponents and backers of the creation of Oxygen, a cable channel for women.

etc.). The show had a distinctly Christian message. Three of the four main angels on the show were played by women. It offered a very different type of environment and characterization for these female leads, but they did show (often morally driven) leadership examples during the show. *Designing Women* (1986-1993) was also about a group of women, though in a vastly different setting than *Touched by an Angel*. The four leads were professionals in the interior design business in Atlanta, Georgia. All opinionated and strong-willed, the comedy offered a topical look at issues such as homosexuality, body image, and abuse.

Homosexuality as a theme of primetime shows was a particularly new development in the 1990s. Of the shows that presented lesbian characters *Ellen* was probably the most famous, though such popular shows as *Friends* (1994-2004) and *ER* (1994-2009), among others, presented lesbians as minor characters. Ellen Morgan, played by comic Ellen DeGeneres, slowly (over the course of the 1996-1997 season) began to question her sexuality and eventually came out as a gay woman. The decision was questioned by the network and was the source of fierce controversy among many viewers and conservative groups. The episodes that introduced a girlfriend for the character were protested heavily; Ellen DeGeneres was forced to “go slow” with the lesbian issues (Lowe, 1999, p. 103). The show was cancelled soon after the story line was introduced. Though DeGeneres has enjoyed considerable success in the subsequent years as a daytime talk show host, issues of sexuality on network television have been slow to enter the mainstream even ten years after *Ellen*.

*Caroline in the City* (1995-1999), *Suddenly Susan* (1996-2000), *Fired Up* (1997-1998), *Veronica's Closet* (1997-2000), *The Naked Truth* (1995-1998), and *Jesse* (1998-2000) and *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) are prime examples of post-feminist thought. *Caroline in the City* featured a woman as a man-obsessed, but professionally successful cartoonist. *Suddenly Susan* revolved

around a newly single editor, again professionally successfully and romantically challenged.

*Veronica's Closet* centers on a business owner and “romance expert” who is stuck in an unhappy marriage. *The Naked Truth* was about a divorced woman who refused to take a million-dollar settlement from her husband, deciding instead to work as a photographer at a tabloid (she was a Pulitzer-nominated photographer.) *Jesse* featured a single mother working for her father as a bartender in the big city. *Fired Up* was about two female coworkers who got fired from their jobs and decided to start their own business. While these female leads were all in somewhat different professional situations, for the most part they had the neurotic, single woman characteristic in common.

Ally herself, the lowest ranked but most enduring of these characters, is portrayed as relationship-obsessed, insecure, but also a smart, Harvard educated attorney. Many feminists decried the drama, suggesting Ally was portrayed as whiny and weak (Hammers, 2005), as well as overly-sexual (particularly in how Ally dressed – her short skirts and high heels were not necessarily the norm in most conservative law firms.) Others, however, suggest that perhaps the fact that she could be a successful professional woman and still experience moments of weakness was a good thing. As a way to bridge the gap between these schools of thought, Kristyn Gorton (2004) suggested that “we should ask why women enjoy a character like Ally McBeal?” (160) Perhaps “some women enjoy Ally’s fantasies, in part, because the demands of the second wave have *not* yet been met...while *Ally McBeal's* success has generally been read within the academy as a representation of the triumph of postfeminism, the contention here is that it demonstrates the continuing salience of the demands of second wave feminism to modern women” (162). In other words, have we come full circle?

***New Age, Same Problems: Female Characterization in the New Millennium***

Keeping in mind that *Ally McBeal* has been off the air for seven years, one must ask the question, where are we now? Post-*Ally* (and *Murphy* and *Mary*), have things changed? Probably the biggest change from the early days of television is the variety of shows available to audiences today. The rise of cable in the mid-1980s has only increased television's influence on the nation. This paper has addressed network TV, but issues surrounding women's leadership are certainly found in such shows as *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *Big Love* (2006-present) on HBO and *The L Word* (2004-2009) on Showtime. Channels devoted to women, such as Lifetime, Oxygen, Style, HGTV, and others, also have considerable influence on how women are portrayed and how they view television. There is an issue of access to some of these shows, however. Though 60% of Americans subscribe to cable (as of 2005), only 31% of these users pay to upgrade to a premium channel (Arbitron, 2006). This makes many of the most progressive shows about women available only to middle and upper class Americans.

Even without the majority of Americans viewing premium channels, basic cable has certainly had an impact on the networks, though not necessarily a positive one for women. With these niche stations filling the void for women's entertainment, the four major networks are free to fill their program line-ups with less ground-breaking series. Of the top ten network shows by season, only two scripted series had women as leads.<sup>11</sup> *Desperate Housewives* (2004-present) and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present) are hardly the best examples of women leaders on television. While the former is not quite as stereotypically a soap opera as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were, it does have "soap-y" elements to it. The show's depictions of unhappy housewives who often find themselves in overly-sexual situations is arguably entertaining, but fails to offer the ground-breaking qualities that earlier women-led shows did. For example, while one of the lead

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<sup>11</sup> The other top ten show that could be considered woman-led, due to its female host, is *Joe Millionaire*. Because this study has focused on scripted television, it won't be discussed. It is important to note however that out of the 58 years studied, this is the only show with a solo female host to appear in the top ten season rankings.

characters, Lynette, does struggle with many of the same issues as working mothers in real life (such as the realization that being a stay-at-home mother is not for everyone), the situations the show places her in are melodramatic – including hostage situations, shootings, and long-lost children. *Grey's Anatomy*, the popular medical drama on ABC, has turned into more of an ensemble show. Despite the original intention of the show's creators to center the stories on the character of Meredith Grey, Patrick Dempsey has been the break-out star. In addition, the supporting cast increasingly has held much of the screen-time.

Of course reality TV has also contributed to the decline of women-focused programs. While a subject much too expansive for the limits of this paper, reality shows such as *American Idol* (2002-present), *Dancing with the Stars* (2005-present), *Survivor* (2000-present), *The Apprentice* (2004-present), and others have all but taken over the top ten rankings in the new millennium. They might seem relatively benign – they are “ensemble” shows, after all – but there are problems with their portrayal of women (Fairclough, 2004; Graham-Bertolini, 2004; Hendershot, 2006). It is also interesting to note that all of the shows have male hosts (though *Dancing* does have a female co-host.) If nothing else, they take away air time from what could be women-led shows.

Another significant change for television in the new millennium is the rise of the ensemble sitcom and drama. 55% of network shows in the top ten Nielsen ratings were ensemble-led, an increase of nearly 30% from the 1990s (see Table 3). Several of these ensemble dramas allowed significant leadership opportunities for female characters, including C.J. Cregg on *The West Wing* (1999-2006), Catherine Willows on *CSI* (2000-present), and Samantha Spade or Vivian Johnson on *Without a Trace* (2002-present). That said, even without a male lead per

se, each of these shows' central character is a man, whether it be Jed Bartlet, Gil Grissom (replaced with the character of Ray Langston) or Jack Malone.

Two shows that offered significant opportunities for women to show leadership, *Judging Amy* (1999-2005) and *Commander in Chief* (2005-2006), failed to get a top ten ranking. *Judging Amy* continued in the tradition of the popular legal genre in primetime. It was one of the only shows to feature a woman as a judge (who in the final season would quit that career to run for the Senate.) Though often described as superficial and saccharin by critics, the show did feature a woman in a leadership role that has traditionally been the realm of men. It also featured Amy's meddling, though strong-willed, mother, played by Tyne Daly of *Cagney and Lacey*, as another female lead.

*Commander in Chief* was a short-lived drama about the (fictional) first U.S. female president. It highlighted many dilemmas women experience in professional life. In the pilot, the president, Mackenzie Allen, played by Geena Davis, is shown struggling with how to handle women's issues, her husband's feelings of inadequacy relating to her powerful position, and her children's roles. The show proved unpopular and was cancelled after only one season.

In essence, regardless of the reasons why, there is an overwhelming lack of leading women in primetime. Lauzen, Dozier and Horan (2008) point out that shows featuring women in "gender-inconsistent social roles" must still constantly concentrate on how these characters "navigate this less-traveled road," as well as others' reactions to their advancement (6). In other words, women still have to justify their roles as leaders, professional and otherwise.

### ***Still Waiting for the Revolution?: Conclusion***

There is still rich debate over how much television should change to accommodate feminist ideals. Should television equally and accurately reflect the society in which it is present?



Even with a more relaxed view of what women can and cannot and should and should not enjoy, there are concerns over how fictional stories affect real women's lives. Through all of this theoretical debate, the big question seems to be the classic problem of the chicken and the egg: Do women watch misogynistic or unrealistic shows because they are the only thing that is available to watch or do they watch them because they get something out of them?

One television scholar has expressed concern over the idea that isolated moments of success for women on television are creating a false sense of security that equality has been achieved. Christina Lucia Stasia (2004) hypothesizes that (for example) female action heroes provide "images of an equality that has not been achieved, and...mitigate their viewers' interests in exploring inequalities...These images capitalize on a basic belief in feminism evacuated of any consciousness of why girls still need to 'kick ass'" (p. 181-82). In other words, while it is good that there are strong models of women on television, this might not be enough. While Mackenzie Allen on *Commander in Chief* was an example of a woman in a nontraditional role, she "represented just one character out of thousands" (Lauzen, Dozier & Horan, 2008).

With almost 60 years of progress behind us, how can women finally achieve parity in representation? One suggestion is to bring more women into the behind-the-scenes production of television. Though this paper started with Lucille Ball's remarkable contributions to television production, women have not seen such success in the intervening years. Martha Lauzen (2008) found that, in a random sample of primetime television shows from the major networks in 2007-08, women made up only 23% of television writers, 37% of producers, and 11% of directors. Only 1% of directors of photography were women. These numbers are significant not only for women attempting to break into the television industry but also for what the audience sees on screen. In 1997-98, when the numbers of behind the screen women were remarkably similar to

the numbers of 2007-08, more female characters appeared on programs with at least one female executive producer (Women in Film, 1999). Some of the most influential women-led shows of the period were created or produced by women, such as Diane English's *Murphy Brown* and the previously mentioned *Marcy Carsey*.

While this paper has attempted to offer both examples of how far women in television have come through the leadership of iconic female characters, it has also tried to highlight how far there is left to go. For example, men on TV are more likely to have an identifiable job and are more likely to be represented by a range of ages than are women, who as a group are significantly younger than their male counterparts on screen (Lauzen, 2008). The disturbing statistics about how few women-focused series are in the recent top ten are also cause for concern. Unfortunately, it seems that though there are intermittent periods of success for women's representation in primetime, seen especially in the numbers of the 1970s and 1990s, recent history shows that in many respects women are no better off than they were in the 1950s. This makes it even more important to study the leadership of female-led shows of the past. If networks would realize that historically women bring ratings success, and real-life women could infiltrate television's behind-the-scenes old boy's network, perhaps there would be more opportunities for viewers to see a diversity of female characters.

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## Tables

**Table 1**

***Number and Percentage of Female-led Shows by Decade  
(counting each show appearing on the top ten list only once)***

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Percent
1950-1959	47	3	6%
1960-1969	43	6	14%
1970-1979	53	13	24.5%
1980-1989	39	7	18%
1990-1999	35	14	40%
2000-2008	20	3	15%

**Table 2**

***Number and Percentage of Female-led Shows in the Top 10 by Decade  
(counting each show appearing on the top ten list each time it made the list)***

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Including Repeats)	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Including Repeats)	Percent
1950-1959	100	11	11%
1960-1969	100	14	14%
1970-1979	100	26	26%
1980-1989	100	18	18%
1990-1999	100	28	28%
2000-2008	100	9	9%

**Table 3**

**Number of Male vs. Female vs. Ensemble Shows by Decade**  
*(counting each show appearing on the top ten list only once)*

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	47	3	42	2	0
1960-1969	43	6	30	5	2
1970-1979	53	13	22	15	5
1980-1989	39	7	10	21	1
1990-1999	35	14	11	9	1
2000-2008	20	3	7	10	0

**Table 4**

**Number of Male vs. Female vs. Ensemble Shows by Genre by Decade**  
*(counting each show appearing on the top ten list only once)*

#### 4.1 Reality/Variety/Game Show

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	19	0	19	0	0
1960-1969	9	0	9	0	0
1970-1979	3	0	1	2	0
1980-1989	1	0	1	0	0
1990-1999	2	0	2	0	0
2000-2008	6	1	4	1	0

#### 4.2 Sitcoms/Comedies

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	5	2	3	0	0
1960-1969	21	6	12	3	0
1970-1979	24	12	3	9	0
1980-1989	24	5	4	15	0
1990-1999	25	12	6	7	0
2000-2008	3	0	1	2	0

**4.3 Dramas/Soaps/Action**

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	4	1	3	0	0
1960-1969	8	0	6	2	0
1970-1979	16	1	10	5	0
1980-1989	13	2	4	7	0
1990-1999	6	3	1	2	0
2000-2008	11	2	1	8	0

**4.4 Anthologies/Movies**

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	7	0	6	1	0
1960-1969	2	0	0	0	2
1970-1979	5	0	1	0	4
1980-1989	1	0	0	0	1
1990-1999	1	0	0	0	1
2000-2008	0	0	0	0	0

**4.5 Talk Show/News/Sports**

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	2	0	2	0	0
1960-1969	0	0	0	0	0
1970-1979	2	0	2	0	0
1980-1989	2	0	2	0	0
1990-1999	2	0	2	0	0
2000-2008	1	0	1	0	0

**4.6 Western**

Decade	Total Number of Shows Appearing in Top 10 (Excluding Repeats)*	Total Number of Female-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Male-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	Total Number of Ensemble-led Shows (Excluding Repeats)	No Lead (Different Movies)
1950-1959	11	0	11	0	0
1960-1969	5	0	5	0	0
1970-1979	3	0	3	0	0
1980-1989	0	0	0	0	0
1990-1999	0	0	0	0	0
2000-2008	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 5**

**% of Total Women-led Shows by Genre by Decade**  
*(counting each show appearing on the top ten list only once)*

	Anthology/ Movie	Comedy/ Sitcom	Western	News/Sports /Talk Show	Dramas/Soaps/ Action	Reality/ Variety/Game Show
	0%	67%	0%	0%	33%	0%
1960-1969	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
1970-1979	0%	92%	0%	0%	8%	0%
1980-1989	0%	71%	0%	0%	29%	0%
1990-1999	0%	86%	0%	0%	14%	0%
2000-2008	0%	0%	0%	0%	66%	33%

**Appendix: Top 10 Nielsen Shows: 1950-2008**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Show</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Host</b>
1950-1951				
1	The Texaco Star Theater	Variety	Male	
2	Fireside Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Male
3	Philco Television Playhouse	Drama - Anthology		Male
4	Your Show of Shows	Variety		Male
5	The Colgate Comedy Hour	Variety		Male
6	Gillette Cavalcade of Sports	Sports		Male
7	The Lone Ranger	Western	Male	
8	Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts	Competitive Reality	Male	
9	Hopalong Cassidy	Drama	Male	
10	Mama	Drama	Female	
1951-1952				
1	Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts	Competitive Reality	Male	
2	The Texaco Star Theater	Variety		Male
3	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
4	The Red Skelton Show	Variety		Male
5	The Colgate Comedy Hour	Variety		Male
6	Arthur Godfrey and His Friends	Variety		Male
7	Fireside Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Male
8	Your Show of Shows	Variety		Male
9	The Jack Benny Show	Variety		Male
10	You Bet Your Life	Game Show		Male
1952-1953				
1	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
2	Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts	Competitive Reality		Male
3	Arthur Godfrey and His Friends	Variety		Male
4	Dragnet	Drama	Male	
5	The Texaco Star Theater	Variety		Male
6	The Buick Circus Hour	Variety		Male
7	The Colgate Comedy Hour	Variety		Male
8	Gangbusters	Reality		Male
9	You Bet Your Life	Game Show		Male
10	Fireside Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Male
1953-1954				

1	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
2	Dragnet	Drama	Male	
3	Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts (tie)	Variety		Male
3	You Bet Your Life (tie)	Game Show		Male
5	The Milton Berle Show	Variety		Male
6	Arthur Godfrey and His Friends	Variety		Male
7	Ford Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Ensemble
8	The Jackie Gleason Show	Talk Show	Male	
9	Fireside Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Male
10	The Colgate Comedy Hour	Variety		Male
1954-1955				
1	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
2	The Jackie Gleason Show	Talk Show	Male	
3	Dragnet	Drama	Male	
4	You Bet Your Life	Game Show		Male
5	Toast of the Town	Variety		Male
6	Disneyland	Anthology		Male
7	The Jack Benny Program	Variety		Male
8	The George Gobel Show	Variety		Male
9	Ford Theatre	Drama - Anthology		Ensemble
10	December Bride	Sitcom	Female	
1955-1956				
1	The \$64,000 Question	Game Show		Male
2	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
3	The Ed Sullivan Show	Variety		Male
4	Disneyland	Anthology		Male
5	The Jack Benny Program	Variety	Male	
6	December Bride	Sitcom	Female	
7	You Bet Your Life	Game Show		Male
8	Dragnet	Drama	Male	
9	The Millionaire	Drama - Anthology		Male
10	I've Got a Secret	Game Show		Male
1956-1957				
1	I Love Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
2	The Ed Sullivan Show	Variety	Male	
3	General Electric Theater	Drama/Comedy - Anthology		Male

4	The \$64,000 Question	Game Show		Male
5	December Bride	Sitcom	Female	
6	Alfred Hitchcock Presents	Drama - Anthology		Male
7	I've Got a Secret (tie)	Game Show		Male
7	Gunsmoke (tie)	Western	Male	
9	The Perry Como Show	Variety		Male
10	The Jack Benny Program	Variety		Male
1957-1958				
1	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
2	The Danny Thomas Show	Sitcom	Male	
3	Tales of Wells Fargo	Western	Male	
4	Have Gun, Will Travel	Western	Male	
5	I've Got a Secret	Game Show		Male
6	The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp	Drama	Male	
7	General Electric Theater	Drama/Comedy - Anthology		Male
8	The Restless Gun	Western	Male	
9	December Bride	Sitcom	Female	
10	You Bet Your Life	Game Show		Male
1958-1959				
1	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
2	Wagon Train	Western	Male	
3	Have Gun, Will Travel	Western	Male	
4	The Rifleman	Western	Male	
5	The Danny Thomas Show	Sitcom	Male	
6	Maverick	Western	Male	
7	Tales of Wells Fargo	Western	Male	
8	The Real McCoys	Sitcom	Male	
9	I've Got a Secret	Game Show		Male
10	The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp	Western	Male	
1959-1960				
1	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
2	Wagon Train	Western	Male	
3	Have Gun, Will Travel	Western	Male	
4	The Danny Thomas Show	Drama	Male	
5	The Red Skelton Show	Variety		Male
6	Father Knows Best (tie)	Sitcom	Male	

6	77 Sunset Strip (tie)	Drama	Male	
8	The Price Is Right	Game Show		Male
9	Wanted: Dead or Alive	Western	Male	
10	Perry Mason	Drama	Male	
1960-1961				
1	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
2	Wagon Train	Western	Male	
3	Have Gun, Will Travel	Western	Male	
4	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
5	The Real McCoys	Sitcom	Male	
6	Rawhide	Western	Male	
7	Candid Camera	Reality		Male
8	The Untouchables (tie)	Sitcom	Male	
8	The Price Is Right (tie)	Game Show		Male
10	The Jack Benny Program	Variety		Male
1961-1962				
1	Wagon Train	Western	Male	
2	Bonanza	Western	Male	
3	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
4	Hazel	Sitcom	Female	
5	Perry Mason	Drama	Male	
6	The Red Skelton Show	Variety		Male
7	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
8	The Danny Thomas Show	Sitcom	Male	
9	Dr. Kildare	Drama	Male	
10	Candid Camera	Variety		Male
1962-1963				
1	The Beverly Hillbillies	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Candid Camera (tie)	Variety		Male
2	The Red Skelton Shown (tie)	Variety		Male
4	Bonanza (tie)	Western	Male	
4	The Lucy Show (tie)	Sitcom	Female	
6	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
7	Ben Casey (tie)	Drama	Male	
7	The Danny Thomas Show (tie)	Sitcom	Male	
9	The Dick Van Dyke Show	Sitcom	Male	



10	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
1963-1964				
1	The Beverly Hillbillies	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Bonanza	Western	Male	
3	The Dick Van Dyke Show	Sitcom	Male	
4	Petticoat Junction	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
6	The Lucy Show	Sitcom	Female	
7	Candid Camera	Variety		Male
8	The Ed Sullivan Show	Variety		Male
9	The Danny Thomas Show	Sitcom	Male	
10	My Favorite Martian	Sitcom	Male	
1964-1965				
1	Bonanza	Western	Male	
2	Bewitched	Sitcom	Female	
3	Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.	Comedy	Male	
4	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
5	The Fugitive	Drama	Male	
6	The Red Skelton Hour	Variety		Male
7	The Dick Van Dyke Show	Sitcom	Male	
8	The Lucy Show	Sitcom	Female	
9	Peyton Place II	Soap	Ensemble	
10	Combat	Drama	Male	
1965-1966				
1	Bonanza	Western	Male	
2	Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.	Comedy	Male	
3	The Lucy Show	Sitcom	Female	
4	The Red Skelton Hour	Variety		Male
5	Batman (Thursday)	Comedy/Action Adventure	Male	
6	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
7	Bewitched (tie)	Sitcom	Female	
7	The Beverly Hillbillies (tie)	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	Hogan's Heroes	Sitcom	Male	
10	Batman (Wednesday)	Comedy/Action Adventure	Male	
1966-1967				

1	Bonanza	Western	Male	
2	The Red Skelton Hour	Variety		Male
3	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
4	The Lucy Show	Sitcom	Female	
5	The Jackie Gleason Show	Variety		Male
6	Green Acres	Sitcom	Ensemble	
7	Daktari (tie)	Children's Drama	Ensemble	
7	Bewitched (tie)	Sitcom	Female	
7	The Beverly Hillbillies (tie)	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C. (tie)	Sitcom	Male	
1967-1968				
1	The Andy Griffith Show	Sitcom	Male	
2	The Lucy Show	Sitcom	Female	
3	Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.	Sitcom	Male	
4	Gunsmoke (tie)	Western	Male	
4	Family Affair (tie)	Sitcom	Male	
4	Bonanza (tie)	Western	Male	
7	The Red Skelton Hour	Variety		Male
8	The Dean Martin Show	Variety/Comedy		Male
9	The Jackie Gleason Show	Variety		Male
10	NBC Saturday Night Movie	Movie		
1968-1969				
1	Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In	Variety	Male	
2	Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.	Sitcom	Male	
3	Bonanza	Western	Male	
4	Mayberry R.F.D.	Sitcom	Male	
5	Family Affair	Sitcom	Male	
6	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
7	Julia	Sitcom	Female	
8	The Dean Martin Show	Variety/Comedy		Male
9	Here's Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
10	The Beverly Hillbillies	Sitcom	Ensemble	
1969-1970				
1	Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In	Variety	Male	
2	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
3	Bonanza	Western	Male	

4	Mayberry R.F.D.	Sitcom	Male	
5	Family Affair	Sitcom	Male	
6	Here's Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
7	The Red Skelton Hour	Variety		Male
8	Marcus Welby, M.D.	Drama	Male	
9	Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color	Anthology		
10	The Doris Day Show	Sitcom	Female	
1970-1971				
1	Marcus Welby, M.D.	Drama	Male	
2	The Flip Wilson Show	Variety		Male
3	Here's Lucy	Sitcom	Female	
4	Ironside	Western	Male	
5	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
6	ABC Movie of the Week	Movie		
7	Hawaii Five-O	Drama	Male	
8	Medical Center	Drama	Male	
9	Bonanza	Western	Male	
10	The F.B.I.	Drama	Male	
1971-1972				
1	All in the Family	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	The Flip Wilson Show	Variety		Male
3	Marcus Welby, M.D.	Drama	Male	
4	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
5	ABC Movie of the Week	Movie		
6	Sanford and Son	Sitcom	Male	
7	Mannix	Drama	Male	
8	Funny Face	Sitcom	Female	
9	Adam 12	Drama	Male	
10	The Mary Tyler Moore Show	Sitcom	Female	
1972-1973				
1	All in the Family	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Sanford and Son	Sitcom	Male	
3	Hawaii Five-O	Drama	Male	
4	Maude	Sitcom	Female	
5	Bridget Loves Bernie	Comedy	Ensemble	
6	The NBC Sunday Mystery Movie	Movie		

7	The Mary Tyler Moore Show	Sitcom	Female	
8	Gunsmoke	Western	Male	
9	The Wonderful World of Disney	Anthology		
10	Ironside	Western	Male	
1973-1974				
1	All in the Family	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	The Waltons	Drama	Ensemble	
3	Sanford and Son	Sitcom	Male	
4	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
5	Hawaii Five-O	Drama	Male	
6	Maude	Sitcom	Female	
7	Kojak	Drama	Male	
8	The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour	Variety	Ensemble	
9	The Mary Tyler Moore Show	Sitcom	Female	
10	Cannon		Male	
1974-1975				
1	All in the Family	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Sanford and Son	Sitcom	Male	
3	Chico and The Man	Sitcom	Male	
4	The Jeffersons	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
6	Rhoda	Sitcom	Female	
7	Good Times	Sitcom	Ensemble	
8	The Waltons	Drama	Ensemble	
9	Maude	Sitcom	Female	
10	Hawaii Five-O	Drama	Male	
1975-1976				
1	All in the Family	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Rich Man, Poor Man	Mini-Series		Male
3	Laverne and Shirley	Sitcom	Female	
4	Maude	Sitcom	Female	
5	The Bionic Woman	Sitcom	Female	
6	Phyllis	Sitcom	Female	
7	Sanford and Son	Sitcom	Male	
8	Rhoda	Sitcom	Female	

9	The Six Million Dollar Man	Action	Male	
10	ABC Monday Night Movie	Movie		
1976-1977				
1	Happy Days	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Laverne and Shirley	Sitcom	Female	
3	ABC Monday Night Movie	Movie		
4	M*A*S*H	Drama	Male	
5	Charlie's Angels	Action	Female	
6	The Big Event	Sports		Male
7	The Six Million Dollar Man	Action	Male	
8	ABC Sunday Night Movie	Movie		
9	Baretta	Drama	Male	
10	One Day at a Time	Sitcom	Female	
1977-1978				
1	Laverne and Shirley	Sitcom	Female	
2	Happy Days	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	60 Minutes	News		Male
5	Charlie's Angels	Drama	Female	
6	All in the Family	Drama	Ensemble	
7	Little House on the Prairie	Drama	Ensemble	
8	Alice	Sitcom	Female	
9	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
10	One Day at a Time	Sitcom	Female	
1978-1979				
1	Laverne and Shirley	Sitcom	Female	
2	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Mork & Mindy	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Happy Days	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Angie	Sitcom	Female	
6	60 Minutes	News		Male
7	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
8	The Ropers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	All in the Family	Drama	Ensemble	
10	Taxi	Sitcom	Ensemble	

1979-1980				
1	60 Minutes	News		Male
2	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	That's Incredible	Reality		Ensemble
4	Alice	Sitcom	Female	
5	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
6	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
7	Flo	Sitcom	Female	
8	The Jeffersons	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	The Dukes of Hazzard	Comedy	Male	
10	One Day at a Time	Sitcom	Female	
1980-1981				
1	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
2	The Dukes of Hazzard	Comedy	Male	
3	60 Minutes	News		Male
4	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
5	The Love Boat	Sitcom	Ensemble	
6	The Jeffersons	Sitcom	Ensemble	
7	Alice	Sitcom	Female	
8	House Calls	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	Little House on the Prairie	Drama	Ensemble	
1981-1982				
1	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
2	60 Minutes	News		Male
3	The Jeffersons	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Alice	Sitcom	Female	
6	The Dukes of Hazzard	Comedy	Male	
7	Too Close for Comfort	Sitcom	Ensemble	
8	ABC Monday Night Movie	Movie		
9	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
10	One Day at a Time	Sitcom	Female	
1982-1983				
1	60 Minutes	News		Male
2	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	

3	M*A*S*H	Drama	Ensemble	
4	Magnum, P.I.	Drama	Male	
5	Dynasty	Soap	Ensemble	
6	Three's Company	Sitcom	Ensemble	
7	Simon & Simon	Sitcom	Male	
8	Falcon Crest	Soap	Ensemble	
9	The Love Boat	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	The A-Team	Action	Male	
1983-1984				
1	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
2	60 Minutes	News		Male
3	Dynasty	Soap	Ensemble	
4	The A-Team	Action	Male	
5	Simon & Simon	Drama	Male	
6	Magnum, P.I.	Drama	Male	
7	Falcon Crest	Soap	Ensemble	
8	Kate and Allie	Sitcom	Female	
9	Hotel	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	Cagney and Lacey	Drama	Female	
1984-1985				
1	Dynasty	Soap	Ensemble	
2	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
3	The Cosby Show	Comedy	Ensemble	
4	60 Minutes	News		Male
5	Family Ties	sitcom	Ensemble	
6	The A-Team	Action	Male	
7	Simon & Simon	Drama	Male	
8	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
9	Knot's Landing	Soap	Ensemble	
10	Cagney and Lacey	Drama	Female	
1985-1986				
1	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Family Ties	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
4	60 Minutes	News		Male
5	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	

6	Dallas	Soap	Ensemble	
7	Dynasty	Soap	Ensemble	
8	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
9	Miami Vice	Drama	Male	
10	Who's the Boss?	Sitcom	Male	
1986-1987				
1	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Family Ties	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
5	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
6	60 Minutes	News		Male
7	Night Court	Sitcom	Male	
8	Growing Pains	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	Moonlighting	Comedy	Ensemble	
10	Who's the Boss?	Sitcom	Male	
1987-1988				
1	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	A Different World	Soap	Ensemble	
3	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Growing Pains (Tuesday)	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Night Court	Sitcom	Male	
6	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
7	Who's the Boss	Sitcom	Male	
8	60 Minutes	News	News	
9	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
10	The Wonder Years	Sitcom	Ensemble	
1988-1989				
1	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
3	A Different World	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	60 Minutes	News		Male
6	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
7	Who's the Boss?	Sitcom	Male	
8	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	



9	Empty Nest	Sitcom	Male	
10	Anything But Love	Sitcom	Ensemble	
1989-1990				
1	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
3	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	A Different World	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	America's Funniest Home Videos	Variety		Male
6	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
7	60 Minutes	News		Male
8	The Wonder Years	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	Empty Nest	Sitcom	Male	
10	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
1990-1991				
1	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	60 Minutes	News		Male
3	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
4	A Different World	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	The Cosby Show	Sitcom	Ensemble	
6	Murphy Brown	Sitcom	Female	
7	Empty Nest	Sitcom	Male	
8	America's Funniest Home Videos	Variety		Male
9	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
10	The Golden Girls	Sitcom	Female	
1991-1992				
1	60 Minutes	News		Male
2	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
3	Murphy Brown	Sitcom	Female	
4	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
6	Designing Women	Sitcom	Female	
7	Full House	Sitcom	Ensemble	
8	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
9	Major Dad	Sitcom	Male	
10	Coach	Sitcom	Male	

1992-1993				
1	60 Minutes	News		Male
2	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
3	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
4	Murphy Brown	Sitcom	Female	
5	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
6	Coach	Sitcom	Male	
7	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
8	CBS Sunday Night Movie	Movie		
9	Cheers	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	Full House	Sitcom	Ensemble	
1993-1994				
1	60 Minutes	News		Male
2	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
3	Seinfeld	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
5	Grace Under Fire	Sitcom	Female	
6	Coach	Sitcom	Male	
7	Frasier	Sitcom	Male	
8	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
9	Murphy Brown	Drama	Female	
10	CBS Sunday Night Movie	Movie		
1994-1995				
1	Seinfeld	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
3	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
4	Grace Under Fire	Sitcom	Female	
5	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
6	60 Minutes	News		Male
7	N.Y.P.D. Blue	Drama	Male	
8	Murder, She Wrote	Drama	Female	
9	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	Roseanne	Sitcom	Female	
1995-1996				
1	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
2	Seinfeld	Sitcom	Ensemble	

3	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
4	Caroline in the City	Sitcom	Female	
5	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
6	The Single Guy	Sitcom	Male	
7	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
8	Boston Common	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	60 Minutes	News		Male
10	N.Y.P.D. Blue	Drama	Male	
1996-1997				
1	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
2	Seinfeld	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Suddenly Susan	Sitcom	Female	
4	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	The Naked Truth	Sitcom	Female	
6	Fired Up	Sitcom	Female	
7	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
8	The Single Guy	Sitcom	Male	
9	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
10	Touched by an Angel	Drama	Female	
1997-1998				
1	Seinfeld	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
3	Veronica's Closet	Sitcom	Female	
4	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
6	Touched by an Angel	Drama	Female	
7	60 Minutes	News		Male
8	Union Square	Sitcom	Female	
9	CBS Sunday Night Movie	Movie		
10	Frasier	Sitcom	Male	
1998-1999				
1	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
2	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
3	Frasier	Sitcom	Male	
4	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
5	Veronica's Closet	Sitcom	Female	

6	Jesse	Sitcom	Female	
7	60 Minutes	News		Male
8	Touched by an Angel	Drama	Female	
9	CBS Sunday Night Movie	Movie		
10	Home Improvement	Sitcom	Male	
1999-2000				
1	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	Game Show		Male
2	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Thursday)	Game Show		Male
3	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Sunday)	Game Show		Male
4	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
5	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
6	Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
7	Frasier	Sitcom	Male	
8	60 Minutes	News		Male
9	The Practice	Drama	Ensemble	
10	Touched by an Angel	Drama	Female	
2000-2001				
1	Survivor: The Australian Outback	Competitive Reality		Male
2	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
3	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	Game Show		Male
4	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Sun)	Game Show		Male
6	Everybody Loves Raymond	Sitcom	Male	
7	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Tues)	Game Show		Male
8	NFL Monday Night Football	Sports		Male
9	The Practice	Drama	Ensemble	
10	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
2001-2002				
1	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
2	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
3	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
4	Survivor: Marquesas	Competitive Reality		Male
5	Survivor: Africa	Competitive Reality		Male
6	Everybody Loves Raymond	Sitcom	Male	

7	Law & Order	Drama	Ensemble	
8	Friends (8:30p)	Sitcom	Ensemble	
9	Will and Grace	Sitcom	Ensemble	
10	The West Wing	Drama	Ensemble	
2002-2003				
1	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
2	Joe Millionaire	Competitive Reality		Female
3	American Idol (Wed)	Competitive Reality		Male
4	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
5	American Idol (Tues)	Competitive Reality		Male
6	Survivor: Thailand	Competitive Reality		Male
7	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
8	Survivor: Amazon	Competitive Reality		Male
9	Everybody Loves Raymond	Sitcom	Male	
10	Law & Order	Drama	Ensemble	
2003-2004				
1	American Idol (Tues)	Competitive Reality		Male
2	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
3	American Idol (Wed)	Competitive Reality		Male
4	Survivor: All-Stars	Competitive Reality		Male
5	Friends	Sitcom	Ensemble	
6	Survivor: Pearl Islands	Competitive Reality		Male
7	The Apprentice	Competitive Reality		Male
8	ER	Drama	Ensemble	
9	CSI: Miami	Drama	Ensemble	
10	Everybody Loves Raymond	Sitcom	Male	
2004-2005				
1	American Idol (Tues)	Competitive Reality		Male
2	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
3	American Idol (Wed)	Competitive Reality		Male
4	Desperate Housewives	Drama	Female	
5	Survivor: Palau	Competitive Reality		Male
6	Survivor: Vanuatu	Competitive Reality		Male
7	CSI: Miami	Drama	Ensemble	
8	Without a Trace	Drama	Ensemble	
9	Everybody Loves Raymond	Sitcom	Male	
10	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	Ensemble	

2005-2006				
1	American Idol (Tues)	Competitive Reality		Male
2	American Idol (Wed)	Competitive Reality		Male
3	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
4	Desperate Housewives	Drama	Female	
5	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	Ensemble	
6	Dancing with the Stars	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
7	Without a Trace	Drama	Ensemble	
8	Survivor: Guatemala	Competitive Reality		Male
9	CSI: Miami	Drama	Ensemble	
10	House	Drama	Male	
2006-2007				
1	American Idol (Results)	Competitive Reality		Male
2	American Idol	Competitive Reality		Male
3	Dancing with the Stars - season 3	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
4	CSI: Miami	Drama	Ensemble	
5	Dancing with the Stars - season 4	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
6	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	Ensemble	
7	House	Drama	Male	
8	Dancing with the Stars Results - season 3	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
9	Dancing with the Stars Results - season 4	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
10	Desperate Housewives	Drama	Female	
2007-2008				
1	American Idol (Tues)	Competitive Reality		Male
2	American Idol (Wed)	Competitive Reality		Male
3	Dancing with the Stars (Mon)	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
4	Dancing with the Stars	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
5	Dancing with the Stars (Tues Results)	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
6	Desperate Housewives	Drama	Female	
7	Dancing with the Stars (Results)	Competitive Reality		Ensemble
8	House	Drama	Male	
9	CSI	Drama	Ensemble	
10	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	Ensemble	