MEDIA AND THE FAMILY: IMAGES AND IMPACT

An overview paper prepared for the National Research Forum on Family Issues sponsored by the White House Conference on Families, Washington D.C., April 10-11, 1980

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Given its lasting influence on individuals and society, it is not surprising that the family is emerging as a major battleground in the struggle to set the norms of personality, conduct, and the social order. It may be more surprising that this emergence, or our recognition of it, is so recent.

There is no scarcity of theories and of discourse about the family. Cultural portrayals of family life surround us in great abundance. Research of an historical and social scientific nature has recently focused on the family. The principle contribution of recent studies has been to show the romantic and mythical nature of much theorizing about the family. Indeed, despite obvious changes in family life--stemming mostly from economic, demographic, and mobility pressures--most theorizing about a Golden Age of family life, or a Dark Age of family life, or the rise of the "nuclear family," of the disintegration of the family, or the decline of the

significance of the family in the lives of individuals is based more on fiction than on fact, and tends to exploit (and thus to exacerbate) public anxieties and insecurities.

"The growing child experiences the influence of reality according as the latter is reflected in the mirror of the family circle" (Horkheimer, 1972:98). This seems to be the prevailing view of the role of the family held by those who decry as well as by those who favor the privileged position of the family as the primary agent of socialization.

But does this view reflect the way things are? It would seem not, for what is obscured in the simple credo of the family as crucible of socialization is the erosion--over the past two centuries at least-- of the family's control over the enculturation process.

In a general sense what has occurred in this period is the diminution of a community-based system in which the family controlled economic resources and the placement of the young into a material and social context. In tandem with religious institutions the family once served as the nexus of a reasonably stable community whose world view and values it maintained and transmitted to succeeding generations (Shorter, 1977). The rise of industrialism and the modern nation state coincide with/and contribute to the weakening of the family's role as buffer and mediator between the individual and the larger community.

A primary manifestation of this pattern is the movement of the state into the enculturation process. Where at one time the church was the only extra-familial institution that had a legitimate right of access to children, the state now claims that right in the form of government mandated and certified schooling. During the 19th century the school came to rival the family and the church as an agent of primary socialization. The process of preparing

the young for participation in an economic, social and political order was largely given over to educational institutions.

At the same time the family was left in a relatively privatized and isolated state and more vulnerable to another agent of outside influence --the mass media. In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries the mass media, first through print and then through radio, film, records and finally television, have steadily enlarged the range and depth of their penetration into the once private sphere of the family.

Unlike the schools which gain familial authority through the exercise of state certification and power (e.g. compulsory schooling and truancy laws), the mass media have gained even more impressive access without any formal authority or special certification. Television in particular has achieved virtually universal access to the most protected audience of all: children. Moreover, this access takes the form of an almost seamless web of information, entertainment and persuasion--all serving to embody and cultivate opinions, beliefs and values which maintain the "natural" order of things as they are.

In this way the mass media do not differ substantially from the institutions whose enculturating roles they have supplanted. As Clarence Darrow wrote in 1893, speaking of an earlier age, "all forms of art were the exclusive property of the great and strong; and the artist, then, like most today, was retained to serve the great and maintain the status of the weak!"

As the mass media have come to absorb many socializing functions of the family they have offered us images of the family which may act as touchstones by which we gauge our own experiences. The seductively realistic portrayals of family life in the media may be the basis for our most common

and pervasive conceptions and beliefs about what is natural and what is right.

Just as many current social theories of the family are best seen as myths contending for influence over social conduct and social policy, most popular cultural portrayals of the family are best seen as models or norms rather than mere "reflections" of reality. Our task is to highlight research on the mass media, sketchy though it is, illuminating not only what these portrayals are but also what they reveal about the institutions that mass-produce them and what functions they may serve in society. A second purpose is to examine what we know about the impact of the media upon family life, and to review the evidence about sexually explicit media fare.

IMAGES OF THE FAMILY

Families and family life make up an intergral part of the world of the mass media. The mass-produced and mass-distributed images are shaped and constrained by other characteristics of the media world, and stem from the institutional needs, interests, and policies of major media. Although many different media have been examined by researchers, some critical features of the ways in which families are portrayed are consistent across media.

We shall survey these studies in two parts. First we shall summarize a number of studies focusing on different aspects of different media at different times, offering glimpses of the family that may or may not be generalizable to other media and times. Secondly, we shall present research findings pertaining to the portrayal of the family in network television drama. Television has come to absorb many characteristics of other media portrayals, and its versions of the family have been shown to exhibit a

generality and stability that could not be ascertained from the fragmentary studies of other media.

Varied Media Portrayals

In the world of the mass media (with the partial exceptions of women's magazines and some daytime television serials) men outnumber women about three or four to one. That fact alone makes the world of major media a "man's world" in which much action revolves around questions of power. This world is largely ruled by violent demonstrations of power, in the traditional symbolic arenas of authority and control--which are typically outside of home and family. Although in fact most real-life personal violence occurs in the home, the domestic setting does not lend itself to the social message of violence (Gerbner and Gross, 1980).

Home and family belong to that more restricted area of the media world where women can and do play a major part. Its symbolic functions may be to cultivate conventional sex-roles and relationships, as well as other values and expectations that fit the media's marketing needs and interests.

Women's Magazines

We will look at family images in a number of media, including movies, comic strips, and children's books. But women's magazines may be the best illustrations of the roles, relationships, and values popular media present. John-Heine and Gerth (1949) analyzed fiction published between 1921 and 1940 in the Ladies Home Journal and True Story. The fundamental and underlying appeal of these stories was love. The stories present love as life's major reward--the best and most worthy thing that can happen--particularly to women. The status of the housewife or prospective bride was directly

related to the person she loved. Marriage was essential for happiness and intrinsic to the role of "woman." Women were admonished to marry so they could bring out--by influence or inspiration--a male's laten qualities. The woman's traditional role was granted considerable status, especially when compared to that of the "career girl" heroine. These authors note that such a heroine

> is never punished in the sense that she loses all she has struggled to achieve; but she is pictured as bearing extraordinary burdens. The heroine models may be eminently successful but they must suffer for that success, and of course they suffer in that sphere in which the housewife and mother is presumably most secure, namely in love and affectional relationships (p.109).

According to John Heine and Gerth, the career woman does not fare well in either of the magazines they studied. But in True Story, contravention of the moral code results in extraordinary suffering. Another difference between the magazines is that, "In the one the positive symbols of safety and security predominate; in the other, negative and harshly punitive symbols. It is the difference between threatened loss of social position ('what will people think'), of such vast symbolic import for the middle-class reader, and threatened physical injury where not status but physical and moral intergrity are imperiled."

In a study of the confession magazine aimed at lower-class women, Schramm (1955) found these perils of life involving the characters in endless trouble and misery, most of it focused on family life. While "the most frequently stated goal in these stories is a happy and secure family life," he also observed that "Family life...is--to put it mildly --troubled. Broken homes played significant parts in the family history of 38 percent of the narrators, and 44 percent of them reported their own

marriage...on the verge of breaking up...21 percent of the narrators remembered unpleasant scenes in the marital relationship of their parents."

"...The world of confessions seems to operate under a stern code of justice," Schramm observed, "which demands punishment for every transgression, but will accept repentance, and reward it with peace...The goal of self-respect and marital happiness...can only be attained by making peace with a puritanical judge, who is neither spiritual nor legal, but seems to operate through the structure of social relations. This is the most common dynamic of the stories."

Another study (Gerbner, 1958) concluded that the social appeal of the confession story pivots around the heroine's human frailties in a bewildering and punitive world she cannot fully understand. The "truth" of this world is brought home through the inevitable encounter and the final coming to terms--resigned or tragic--with the code of society.

Newkirk (1977) studied non-fictional content in three popular women's magazines (Ms., Redbook and Mademoiselle) and isolated three types of roles in which a woman was pictured or toward which she was urged to strive: Domestic Roles (women are wives, mothers and/or homemakers), Non-domestic Roles (women are employed, volunteers, activists), and Self-identity Roles (women are pursuing their own goals and ambitions). The findings revealed that from 1966 to 1974, Mademoiselle presented the most consistently balanced image of woman as homemaker, career person and individual. Ms. (analyzed only between 1972 and 1974) offered considerable support for employed women, social change and self-identity. While Redbook was the most conservative and the most supportive of motherhood, it also presented the strongest treatment of the self-identity role.

Thus, while there may be some recent changes in the non-fictional

content of these magazines, it is the heritage of the stories that marriage is essential to a woman's fulfillment.

Comic Strips

The relegation of women to family matters has also been found in Sunday comic strips. A study by Saenger (1955) revealed that women were primarily interested in social life, love, and the home. In the comics, marriage has deleterious consequences for men; for one thing married male characters were physically different from their unmarried counterparts. In adventure strips, 86 percent of the single men were taller than their female partners, while in the domestic strips only 50 percent of the married men were taller than their wives. On the whole, married men were portrayed as weaker, smaller, and less powerful than unmarried men. The author concludes that while "the unmarried adventurer lives up to the cultural ideals, is masterful, 'up to all situations' -- in the family strips the wife rather than the husband is able to cope with all situations (p.199).

Yet, there is a double-edge to the competence that comes to married women. A comparison of single and married women in Sunday comic strips published in 1943, 1948, 1953 and 1958 found that females were portrayed as less attractive after marriage (Barcus, 1963).

Interactions between parents and children also provide important lessons about families. A study focusing on "The Depiction of Parents and Children in Sunday Newspaper Comic Strips" (Shipley, 1972) found that both mothers and fathers appear with sons twice as often as with daughters--a consequence of skewed mass media casting, even in a family setting. Nine out of ten families are of the middle class, all live in suburbs, and all use nothing but cars for transportation. Fathers tend to

criticize daughters and mothers are irritated by sons. On the other hand, parents of the same sex are frequently shown in mutually pleasurable situations. Mothers compliment their daughters, fathers spend leisure time with their sons.

In these Sunday strips, male children are shown as independent, aggressive and capable of helping parents. While they are often a menace, especially for mothers, they receive less vocal criticism than do their female counterparts. Mothers exhibit concern for them, fathers offer them approval.

Female children are not as aggressive or helpful as male children. Often they receive advice from their mothers and criticism from their fathers. In addition, they receive more approval or compliments from their parents than do their male counterparts.

Male parents are shown as both disciplinarians and playmates. Fathers entertain sons and criticize daughters. Both children, however, turn to the male parent for heart-to-heart talks and answers to puzzling questions.

Female parents are more often irritated than pleased with their children, yet they compliment their children and display affection for them more often than do their husbands. Mothers are also the targets of deceptions or tricks. Male children, however, are especially willing to help their mothers and they voice concern for their mothers' welfare.

Portrayals in Other Media

Wolfenstein and Leites (1950) analyzed family images in American films, finding that both heroes and heroines are without family ties in over half the cases. When a family is shown, it is more often the family one makes than the family one comes from. In particular, the wives in movie families tend to be more closely tied to their families of origin. Termeer's (1953) study of children's picture books shows that the family is usually portrayed as consisting of father, mother, and one or two children. The father is the leader, and is

the highest goal-model for the son. There are more males in the pictures than females, across all ages. (Only two Blacks were portrayed in 36 books.) Boys are very active and have interesting lives, while the lives of little girls are routine, close-at-hand, and familiar.

Fisher (1950) studies 43 children's books for every reference to family life of main characters. Parent-child warmth and the fostering of independence were found in some form in all stories. Direct verbal and physical expressions of love were relatively rare, occurring in only 23 percent of the stories. Indirect expressions of love in the form of reassurance, defense, praise, and approval were the most frequent, depicted in 76 percent of the stories analyzed. The most frequently shown form of play involving parents and children was entertainment away from home. With respect to the fostering of independence, the parents in 83.7 percent of the stories showed acceptance of approved or even disapproved child behavior. Verbal punishment appeared in 39.3 percent of the stories, physical punishment in 23.3 percent, and punishment by rejection in 11.6 percent. In 41.9 percent, the parent explained to the child why the parent disapproved of his action.

It is clear, then, that selectively used mass media have offered a variety of images to their specialized audiences. Still, these portrayals are related by a few important common characteristics. Among these are the skewed nature of casting (or "demography") of media characters, the conventionality of their roles and values, the message of adjustment, and a restricted view of family life (especially for husbands).

We shall now turn to television for a view of images of the family that most Americans observe in a relatively non-selective fashion.

The Family on Television

Over the past 30 years, television has come to play an increasingly important role in our society. Television is the wholesale distributor of

images and the mainstream of our popular culture. It is on in the average home for over six hours each day. Unlike the media discussed above, television presents a world that most people experience with little selectivity or deviation--and for an average of 30 hours each week. It is our nation's most common, constant and vivid learning environment.

From its earliest days television has been the focus of a considerable number of content analyses. Two independent studies of television programming of the early 1950's yielded remarkably similar results about basic dimensions of content, including the importance of home and family as dominant program themes (Smythe, 1954; Head, 1954).

Home and family are especially important features of daytime serials. Katzman (1972) analyzed conversations in television serials and found that love and the home were the predominant themes in 32.8 percent of all recorded conversations. Specifically, he found that females were more likely to discuss family and romantic relationships, domestic matters, and health. Turow's (1974) analysis of advising and ordering episodes between the sexes revealed that in daytime television, males and females initiated almost the same number of between-sex directives and usually focused upon "neutral" topics (especially the men). In this program genre, however, males and particularly females initiated more directives relating to "feminine" categories (family, home, romance) than "masculine" categories.

Wander (1979) presents a qualitative analysis and discussion of soap operas, suggesting some change in the extent to which the soaps are dominated by themes of love and marriage. He notes that although the family remains central to most of these stories, over the last thirty years its role has diminished in both size and importance:

> Earlier shows like "One Man's Family," "Ma Perkins," and "Stella Dallas" were likely to take place in the home and involve blood relatives, mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts. In today's soaps, doctors and nurses, lawyers, secretaries, clients, and patients form the personal networks. The scene has shifted from home and relatives to office and professional acquaintances (p.85).

In the world of the soap opera, personal happiness anchored in marriage and the family is presented as the basis for human relationships. Love itself,however, is very "realistic". It is not presented as a "wild sophomoric yearning;" rather, it manifests itself in "open, authentic true relationships, the lack of which portend not only unhappiness, but also infertility" (p.87). Wander concludes that the world of the daytime serial

> makes modern life appear coherent and relatively secure. The old religion of love, family life, and God enters the symbolic world of the soaps and is rejuvenated. We see the consequences of violating tradition. Playboys are shallow and untrustworthy; adultery is invariable punished; divorce always tears apart the children. Professional women, freed from motherhood by choice and the Pill, are plagued by fears and sterility. Liberation in the soaps is not sudden; it is a fearful process often confused by desperate attempts to reestablish the world of our fathers and mothers (p.88).

Courtney and Whipple's (1974) comparative analysis of four studies of television commercials reveals a striking consistency in the portrayal of women within families. They live in a domestic world as young housewives serving husbands and children concerned excessively with cleanliness and food. On the other hand, men in television commercials are older and authority figures; they are the ones who advise and demonstrate, and are shown in a wider range of settings and roles.

A study of women in television programs designed for children and/or

focusing upon family life (Long and Simon, 1974) found that most females are portrayed as either wives or mothers and that married characters are not otherwise employed. Most women in children's shows are home-oriented and concerned with physical appearances. They are responsible for all cooking and cleaning, while authority is relegated to male characters.

In another study, Hashell (1979) examined five episodes of each of 13 prime-time dramatic programs in which women were the principal characters (eg. "Alice," "One Day at a Time," "Charlie's Angels"). Although the women in this specically focused sample hold jobs and support households without male assistance, most of the topics of discussions are "traditionally female," dealing with romance, personal appearances, dating and divorce.

Lemon (1977) analyzed dominance patterns in two-person interactions (men-women and white-black) in a sample of prime-time television programming. She reports considerable differences in these dominance patterns between family and "non-family context" programs. For one thing, men are more likely to be dominant (to influence, control, persuade, dictate, lead, direct, etc.) than women, especially in crime dramas. The author also notes that although the research was carried out on a small sample "the family context in situation comedies provided the most egalitarian patterns of interactions between men and women." In the family-context programs, the dominance patterns were almost symmetric: there were about the same number of interactions between males as between females and about the same number of males dominating females as females dominating males. In these programs there was also the largest number of egalitarian male-female interactions. In non-family context programming, however, 65 percent of all interactions were between males and only 3 percent between females. Moreover, males dominated females more than twice as much as the reverse.

One other analysis adds some additional information about the portrayal of marriage in television programming. Manes and Melnyk (1974) analyzed prime time dramatic programming (eliminating old movies) and found that full-time housewives have more successful marriages than working wives. Furthermore, working women, as compared to working men, are more likely to be unmarried. Moreover, the few successfully married working women often are not independent or "true" workers; these characters appear to be ready to quit their jobs or are willing to work for their husbands.

A number of people have written about specific programs, such as "The Waltons" (Wander, 1976). They are a very special type of television family: a white, anglo-saxon family, a farm family. But they are politically insulated and culturally provincial in the tradition of television families--"One Man's Family," "Father Knows Best," "The Nelsons," "The Brady Bunch."

The "Waltons" differ from real life families, however, in that the kids are almost always good; they are never wholly unreasonable and they never seem to learn bad habits from their friends. Finally, most of the action of this program is structured in a way that serves to maintain family solidarity.

A major study of prime time network television family series 1947-1977 by Butsch and Glennon (1978) found that 90 percent have been situation comedies and that more than half of all the heads of television households have had middle-class occupations. As Table 1 shows, professionals alone constitute 43 percent of television heads of households in television family drama but only 14 percent of the labor force. Among television professionals in family series, lawyers (11 percent), writers, editors, and publishers (8 percent) and entertainers (6 percent) predominate.

"The grossest discrepency between television and reality," write Butsch and Glennon (1978, p.7), is in the representation of the working

Table 1
Occupations of Heads of Household
in Television Family Series
Cumulative Totals 1947-1977

Occupation	No. of Series	Percent of Series	Percent of Labor Force, 1970[1]
Middle Class			
Professional[2]	89	42.6	14.2
Salaried managers	23	11.0	7.7
Sales, excl. retail	8	4.0	3.9
Protective Service[3]	3	1.4	1.2
Clerical[4]	5	2.4	17.5
Self-employed	28	13.4	2.9
Working Class			
Blue collar	7	3.3	35.3
Retail sales clerks[5]	1	0.5	3.8
Service	4	1.9	11.1
Farmers	9	4.3	2.2
Other			
Retired	4	1.9	
Independently wealthy	5	2.4	
Occupation unidentified[6]	23	10.6	
Total	209	100.0	

1. Census data is recalculated from table 569 of the Statistical Abstracts, 1974.

2. This census category includes technicians as well. However no technicians appeared on television as heads of household. The overrepresentation of professionals is therefore is even greater than these figures indicate.

3. These are sheriffs and detectives, and more appropriately considered middle class. The one policeman portrayed (Hey Mulligan, 1954) is included in service workers as working class.

4. Clerical workers' lifestyles and incomes are portrayed as middle class.

5. The retail sales clerk's lifestyle was portrayed as working class.

6. This includes those characterized simply as "businessmen" and could not be identified as self employed or as salaried managers.

(From: Butsch and Glennon, 1978)

class. Although working class occupations constitute almost 70 percent of the actual labor force, only 6 percent of the 209 family series have heads of household employed in such occupations...

> Exaggerated images of widespredd affluence appears in other forms as well in the family series. For example, the importance of overtime and multiple incomes for working class families to make ends meet is seldom presented. The working wife--appearing in only 13 series--appears almost exclusively in the new middle class series and works not out of necessity but in pursuit of a professional career. The prevalence and level of affluence even in middle class series also tends to be exaggerated. Professionals and business-persons are either "successful" or youthful beginners with promising futures. More lucrative professions, such as lawyers, far out-number lower income professions such as nurses. Particularly noticeable is the prevalence of servants: 48 series have a servant of some sort. Almost half of all single parent series include a servant. Television makes it appear that affluence is widespread and thus easily obtainable... The effect is to give the impression that most people are affluent, successful, and middle class.

The authors' analysis of the working class family series appearing on prime time network television from 1947 to 1977 (6 percent of the total number of family series) revealed two recurrent themes. In the first (predominant from 1949 to 1966), the working class husband-father appears as a bumbling fool. The next five years (from 1966 to 1971) saw no working class series on television. But a second theme has been dominant since 1971: children as easily upwardly mobile. Whenever a working class family has been given any dignity in a series this dignity has been associated with themes of upward mobility. Dignity is thus attached not to being working class but to becoming middle class (Glennon and Butsch, 1978).

Thus, researchers have examined daytime serials, television commercials, children's programs, programs with leading female characters, family series, and programs about specific families. Few studies have looked at aggregate patterns presented in regular, prime-time drama--which is the locus of symbolic environment most people experience most often.

Although our ongoing research project--Cultural Indicators--has published only one small analysis of the portrayal of home and family in dramatic programming (Jeffries-Fox and Gerbner, 1977) many of our other analyses include data relevant to this topic.

Cultural Indicators is an ongoing research project that has been examining trends in television content and conceptions of social reality since 1967-68. The research consists of two interrelated parts: (1) message system analysis--monitoring the world of television drama and (2) cultivation analysis--determining the conceptions of social reality that television trends to cultivate in different groups of viewers. Our research and reports have focused upon many varied topics including violence and power (Gerbner, et al.1979) images of aging (Gerbner et al 1980) and sex-role and occupational portrayals (Gerbner and Signorielli, 1979; Signorielli, 1979). The following discussion will focus on the results of some of these analysis that relate specifically to the notions of home and family.

Echoing the results of many other studies (cf. Busby, 1975) one of the most important findings of our research is that the world of prime-time (and weekend-daytime) network dramatic television programming is predominently male. Our research also points to a substantial amount of consistency and stability. In the ten-year period from 1969 to 1978, prime-time programs have been populated by approximately three males for every female. Detailed analyses of year-by-year trends in programming reveal that there are basically no changes. Year in and year out, for each female portraying a major role, there are three males similarily cast.

Overall, the notions of home and family as well as close personal relationships between the sexes are the two most frequently appearing themes in network prime-time and weekend-daytime network dramatic programming. (See Tables 2 and 3.) Only crime and violence appear as consistently. A special

Table 2

Themes and Aspects of Life in Prime-Time Programs:
Appearance and Rank
(1969-1978)

	69-70		71-72		73-74		1975		1976		1977		1978		1969-1978	
	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Total	125		122		177		134		61		68		63		750	
Nature	66.4	3.5	38.5	10.0	39.5	11.0	32.8	14.0	78.7	7.0	73.5	6.0	87.3	4.0	52.9	10.0
Supernatural	16.8	19.0	17.2	17.5	14.7	19.0	6.7	21.0	9.8	20.0	17.6	19.0	25.4	20.0	14.8	20.0
Science	48.8	10.0	45.9	9.0	54.8	8.0	62.7	5.0	86.9	4.0	75.0	5.0	77.8	8.0	60.1	7.0
Politics	27.2	15.0	23.0	15.0	30.5	15.0	38.8	11.0	47.5	14.0	38.2	12.5	34.9	16.0	32.7	15.0
Law Enforcement	51.2	8.0	49.2	6.0	64.4	5.0	55.2	9.0	77.0	8.0	60.3	8.0	66.7	13.0	58.9	8.0
Crime	49.6	11.0	56.6	4.0	58.8	7.0	60.4	7.0	70.5	11.0	57.4	10.5	60.3	15.0	58.1	9.0
Mass Communications, the Arts	50.4	9.0	48.4	7.0	52.5	9.0	59.7	8.0	90.2	2.0	83.8	1.0	98.4	1.0	62.5	6.0
Business	62.4	5.0	52.5	5.0	59.3	6.0	70.1	3.0	88.5	3.0	79.4	3.5	85.7	5.5	67.1	4.0
Schools	35.2	13.0	26.2	13.5	33.9	14.0	34.3	13.0	49.2	13.0	58.8	9.0	69.8	12.0	39.5	13.0
Religion	24.8	17.0	21.3	16.0	32.8	15.0	21.6	17.0	36.1	16.0	38.2	12.5	76.2	9.0	32.0	16.0
Financial Success	60.8	6.0	47.5	8.0	74.0	3.0	61.9	6.0	73.8	9.5	57.4	10.5	85.7	5.5	64.8	5.0
Relationships: male-female	70.4	2.0	75.4	1.0	85.3	1.0	77.6	1.0	91.8	1.0	80.9	2.0	96.8	2.0	80.9	1.0
Home, Family	83.2	1.0	72.1	3.0	81.9	2.0	76.1	2.0	82.0	5.0	79.4	3.5	95.2	3.0	80.4	2.0
Minority Groups	54.4	7.0	26.2	13.5	36.2	13.0	27.6	15.0	73.8	9.5	27.4	17.0	84.1	7.0	45.1	12.0
Armed Forces	25.6	16.0	17.2	17.5	15.3	18.0	10.4	19.0	27.9	18.0	27.9	16.0	27.0	18.5	19.6	18.0
Physical Handicap	10.4	21.0	11.5	20.0	12.4	20.0	8.2	20.0	4.9	21.0	7.4	21.0	19.0	21.0	10.7	21.0
Physical Illness	36.8	12.0	34.4	12.0	38.4	12.0	35.8	12.0	39.3	15.0	29.4	15.0	61.9	14.0	38.3	14.0
Mental Illness	19.2	18.0	16.4	19.0	11.9	21.0	12.7	18.0	24.6	19.0	13.2	20.0	27.0	18.5	16.4	19.0
Drugs	11.2	20.0	9.8	21.0	26.6	17.0	25.4	16.0	32.8	17.0	22.1	18.0	33.3	17.0	21.7	17.0
Alcohol	28.0	14.0	37.7	11.0	49.2	10.0	54.5	10.0	65.6	12.0	36.8	14.0	74.6	10.5	47.1	11.0
Violence	66.4	3.5	73.8	2.0	67.8	4.0	68.7	4.0	80.3	6.0	66.2	7.0	74.6	10.5	70.1	3.0

Table 3

Weekend Daytime Themes and Aspects of Life in Weekend Daytime Programs:
Appearance and Rank
(1969-1978)

	69-70		71-72		73-74		1975		1976		1977		1978		1969-1978	
	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Total	107		81		114		92		49		53		48		544	
Nature	95.3	2.0	84.0	2.0	74.6	2.0	82.6	2.0	91.8	2.0	94.3	1.0	97.9	1.5	86.9	2.0
Supernatural	29.9	7.0	32.1	10.0	38.6	7.5	38.0	5.0	28.6	12.0	22.6	12.0	39.6	8.0	33.5	8.5
Science	64.5	3.0	49.4	3.0	64.0	3.0	65.2	3.0	81.6	3.0	84.9	3.0	81.3	3.0	67.3	3.0
Politics	10.3	14.0	11.1	14.5	7.9	16.0	14.1	12.5	16.3	15.0	18.9	13.5	16.7	14.5	12.5	14.0
Law Enforcement	28.0	9.0	29.6	11.0	38.3	9.0	39.1	4.0	30.6	10.5	49.1	5.0	27.1	11.0	33.5	8.5
Crime	26.2	11.0	33.3	8.5	30.7	11.0	33.7	8.0	32.7	9.0	45.3	7.0	35.4	10.0	32.7	10.0
Mass Communications, the Arts	36.4	6.0	39.5	6.0	44.7	5.0	31.5	9.5	61.2	4.0	62.3	4.0	70.8	4.0	45.6	4.0
Business	37.4	5.0	33.2	8.5	38.6	7.5	37.0	6.0	44.9	6.0	47.2	6.0	56.3	5.0	40.3	6.0
Schools	6.5	16.0	11.1	14.5	14.9	12.5	14.1	12.5	22.4	13.0	10.9	13.5	10.4	17.0	13.2	13.0
Religion	4.7	17.0	3.7	18.0	1.8	19.5	8.7	15.5	12.2	16.0	1.9	18.5	12.5	16.0	5.7	17.0
Financial Success	42.1	4.0	40.7	5.0	50.0	4.0	31.5	9.5	42.9	7.0	43.4	8.0	43.8	7.0	42.1	5.0
Relationships: male-female	16.8	13.0	37.0	7.0	31.6	10.0	22.8	11.0	30.6	10.5	26.4	10.5	22.9	12.0	26.7	11.0
Home, Family	28.0	9.0	45.7	4.0	40.4	6.0	35.9	7.0	59.2	5.0	32.1	9.0	45.8	6.0	39.3	7.0
Minority Groups	28.0	9.0	16.0	12.0	14.9	12.5	8.7	15.5	36.7	8.0	26.4	10.5	37.5	9.0	21.7	12.0
Armed Forces	9.3	15.0	6.2	16.0	11.4	14.0	13.0	14.0	18.4	14.0	11.3	15.0	20.8	13.0	11.9	15.5
Physical Handicap	3.7	18.0	1.2	20.0	4.4	17.0	2.2	20.5	2.0	20.0	5.7	16.0	8.3	18.5	3.7	18.0
Physical Illness	21.5	12.0	13.6	13.0	9.6	15.0	6.5	17.0	8.2	17.5	3.8	17.0	16.7	14.5	11.9	15.5
Mental Illness	2.8	19.5	4.9	17.0	3.5	18.0	3.3	19.0	2.2	20.0	0.0	20.5	2.1	21.0	2.9	19.5
Drugs	1.9	21.0	0.0	21.0	1.8	19.5	2.2	20.5	8.2	17.5	0.0	20.5	4.2	20.0	2.2	21.0
Alcohol	2.8	19.5	2.5	19.0	0.9	21.0	4.3	18.0	2.0	20.0	1.9	18.5	8.3	18.5	2.9	19.5
Violence	97.2	1.0	88.9	1.0	93.9	1.0	90.2	1.0	100.0	1.0	90.6	2.0	97.9	1.5	93.8	1.0

analysis of Cultural Indicators message analysis data archives reveals that these two themes have been among the top three in prime-time every year since 1969 (except for 1976, when home and family was fifth). Over the past eleven years, they have appeared in eighty percent of all prime-time programs.

Home, family and romance are also important aspects of the way characters are portrayed, in a traditional and sterotypical direction. For one thing, notions of home, family and romance are much more developed in female characters. That is, the proportion of females who cannot be observed as married or unmarried tends to be considerably smaller than the corresponding proportion of male characters. On prime-time network dramatic programs from 1969 to 1979, only 9.2 percent of the females could not be coded on marital status; 45.2 percent are classified as not married, and 45.6 percent are married or formerly married. In contrast, one quarter of the male characters (24.3 percent) could not be coded on marital status; 45.3 percent are not married, and less than a third (30.4 percent) are married.* These are ten-year figures; the year-to-year differences are slight.

Thus, females are more likely to be explicity shown as married. Romantic involvement in prime-time tells a similar story; about half of the women, but only one-third of the men, are portrayed as being involved in some romantic situation or behavior. These patterns do not vary for male and female characters of different races. (Although the themes of home and family appear far less frequently on weekend-daytime programs, there is an important parallel with prime-time

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*By comparison, in 1975, among all men, only 26.1 percent were single and 73.8 percent were or had been married; among women, 20.6 percent were single and 79.4 percent were married or formerly married (Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1978, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, p.80).

in the characterization of the sexes: explicit information about marital status is rarely given for males and is more often given for females.)

We also find in prime-time that more than one-quarter of the women but only 4.1 percent of the men are shown performing some type of homemaking activity; proportionately more women than men are portrayed as having children, or as caring for children under 18 years of age. Finally, the concept of family life is portrayed as more important for female characters than male characters; it is important for 59.3 percent of the women as compared to only 38.3 percent of the men.

Home and family are also related to aging. We have examined aging by looking at four age-related groups of television characters: children-adolescents, young adults (few responsibilities), settled adults, and older adults (those past the prime years). These analyses have generally revealed that home and family are an important part of characterization in all age-groups except young adults. In each age group, the proportion of married characters remains greater among women; the married include 20 percent of the young women and only 8 percent of the young men; 33 percent of middle-aged men as compared to half of the middle-aged women; and 62 percent of the older men as compared to 71 percent of older women.

When we look at the relationship between romance and aging, we get a different picture. While home and family are important aspects of the characterization of the older adult, romance is not. Of the four age-groups older people, and especially older women, are the least likely to be portrayed as involved in a romantic relationship--from 1973 to 1978 only one older woman and three older men had romantic relationships. Thus, we find that marriage in the television world is the domain of older people and

generally appears to be almost devoid of romance. Older characters are married but not involved romantically, while the opposite is true for younger characters--they are involved romantically but not married.

The results of all these analyses are remarkably similar and offer little more than a rather sterotypical and traditional portrayal of home and family. Yet, the studies present only a small amount of information about home and family--information that is usually focused upon the marital and/or romantic status of a character. The picture that emerges is that home and family, marriage and romance are important themes in the media and are usually presented as the domain of the female. In general, proportionately more women than men are portrayed as married, as having children, as being involved romantically, and as interested in family-related issues. Women are not generally presented as able to successfully mix home-making activities with other interests and activities such as succeeding in a job. If anything, the employed woman usually is characterized as unsuccessful on the home front. These conflicts are almost never part of male characterizations--males are both married and employed and seem to succeed in both. One negative aspect of male portrayals, however, is that married men are somewhat more likely to be portrayed as less important and powerful than their unmarried counterparts.

Despite all this research, essentially we know very little about how home and family are portrayed in most mass media, especially in television programs. We do know about special, selected television families, which may not be representative of the larger ongoing stream of messages about families. We do not know the prevalent family structures (intact families, one-parent families) or how each structure is portrayed. We do not know

about family size, or how television children interact with television parents. Do family series differ from other genres of programming? What patterns of family interactions are successful and which are not? These are some of the questions that should be set up as future research priorities.

IMPACT OF MEDIA ON FAMILIES

We have been examining how the mass media portray families. We now turn to a consideration of the impact media have on families. First, we will summarize research on the uses and functions of television within the family. This is closely related to the next section, which reviews research on the family viewing context. Then, we will look at the consequences of this family viewing environment on television's effects. Finally, we discuss the kinds of family life expectations television may cultivate.

How Families Use Television

Bryce (1980) provides a rich source of qualitative, ethnographic data about the roles television may play in the family. She describes a large set of activities, functions, and consequences that derive from the way families live with television. For one thing, television can play a role in the way families organize their time. "It can set a schedule according to which the other activities of the group are planned...." Television can also become a clock", punctuating the hours with recognized and patterned programs against which the individual regularly schedules his use of time." In some homes it provides a backdrop for other activities, or it can draw attention away from conversation or distract family members from other activities.

Bryce also argues that the medium has implications for the use of the physical environment. "It can draw families together into a viewing setting, and it can isolate them as well. It interacts with the social and physical spaces of the home to influence who does what with whom, and even the postural or kinetic features of that interaction."

She points out a number of other important processes:

> Television may also act as an agenda setter for families. Topics of conversation, plans for future activities (including

> television viewing), questions, play activities, life goals and reading interests may be inserted into the family context through exposure to the medium, whether by viewing directly or through interaction with others who have come in contact with television related topics.

Finally, Bryce notes that television can mediate the ways families talk to one another in the home. "It can change the channels of information flow in the home, and create situations where young children have control of information which their elders then request of them."

This type of research is an excellent way to focus closely upon underlying processes, or to generate suggestions and hypotheses for further research. But the small sample size (five families) precludes confident generalizations. Larger, quantitative studies provide important findings which touch on many of the issues Bryce raises. A number of survey-type studies have examined the ways in which families use television, as well as the functions television may serve within the family. LoScituo (1972) notes that television often serves as a topic of conversation among family members, and Lyle and Hoffman (1972) suggest that this occurs more often for girls. Jeffries-Fox (1977) found that adolescents probably talk about media -- both reading and TV content -- far more with friends than with family. She also found that relatively little of this discussion represented critical treatment of the content; most consisted of referring to specific incidents in a story (e.g., the "good parts" or the "scarey parts") or was simply of the "Did you see Laverne and Shirley last night?" variety. She also argues that children and adolescents may in some sense be held "responsible" for being aware of certain aspects of media, in that one's family and friends could expect him or her "to know what happened on the latest episode of a favorite TV program."

Despite the popular myth that children are commonly punished by depriving them of television, Lyle and Hoffman found that mothers use television more often as a reward than as punishment. The extension of viewing hours is often

the prize for some approved behavior or performance.

We will deal below with the extent to which families argue over certain aspects of television, such as program choices. Before that, however, it is important to understand whether television in general represents a source of increased conflict in the family, or whether it might actually help reduce tension.

Maccoby (1954) found a relationship between how much television kindergarteners watch and their level of adjustment in the family. This relationship varied in an interesting way along social class lines. Among the upper middle class, at least in 1954, neither children nor parents watched a great deal of television -- except for poorly adjusted children who evidently used television to get away from their parents. Among those of lower class, however, there was no such relationship, because the parents watched a good deal of television; consequently, viewing provided no escape from potentially disturbing and conflict-laden interactions.

More recently, Rosenblatt and Cunningham (1976) report that the more hours the television is turned on, the higher the level of family tension. This held in both large and small families, but was particularly pronounced in larger households. (Curiously, there appeared to be more arguing over television *per se* in smaller families.)

Dunn, *et al* (1976) took advantage of a natural experiment by comparing two areas in Iceland. One had television for four years, and the other was just beginning to get it; only 12% of the children in the second area had any exposure at all, and the maximum exposure was six months. Children from the two areas showed virtually no overall differences in family adjustment. Yet, within the community that had television, there was a clear tendency for higher levels of viewing to go with lower levels of family adjustment.

The data from these three studies -- covering a wide historical and cultural range and utilizing different methodologies -- are consistent with the

notion that television may be often used by family members as a way of avoiding or preventing conflicts and tense interactions. Of course, it is possible that extensive viewing makes its own contribution to the level of tension within the family, but there has not been much direct investigation of this hypothesis.

The little that does exist focuses on the potential role played by television commercials in generating family conflict. One implication from these studies is that by third grade, children become less accepting of parents' refusals to purchase a product and more likely to respond to their frustration in an aggressive manner (Sheikh and Moleski, 1977).

However, in a small experimental study of fifteen Hispanic parent-child dyads, Williams, et al. (1979) investigated the possibility that television could stimulate and facilitate parent-child interactions more than other methods alone. They compared three groups: one had to interact in terms of something seen on the experimental stimulus, another could not base conversations on television, and a third served as a control. In the TV group, parents were more likely to initiate interaction, while children usually began the interaction in the non-TV group. Television content seemed to be easily integrated into interaction, and led to interactions that were slightly longer.

Generalizing these results is problematic, due to both the artificiality of the situation and the sample size. Furthermore, our own studies have consistently revealed strong relationships between amount of viewing and levels of alienation and interpersonal mistrust, among children, adolescents, and adults. We have argued that television cultivates these negative outlooks above and beyond the influence of other important social variables. It seems reasonable to assume that if this is indeed the case, then some of this mistrust and pessimism might be reflected in strained relations within the family.

At the same time, studies examining the uses to which families put television suggest that a central function of viewing may be to escape and avoid tense and conflict-laden family interaction. Television may thus appear to be both a cause and a cure of intra-family hostility and frustration. However, to the extent that it is a cure of sorts, it only alleviates the superficial symptoms. At best, it is only used to avoid problems, and not to resolve them.

Family Viewing Context

The social context within which families watch television has been treated extensively in the literature; here we will only deal with some of the major findings. Despite the proliferation of multi-set homes (only 10% of those in our adolescent samples report having only one set in the home), it is not the case that most children usually watch television by themselves, isolated from the rest of the family. Our studies indicate that only about a third of adolescents are "usually alone" when they watch, while well over half watch with their families. Several studies (e.g., Lyle and Hoffman, 1972) have found that children spend far more time watching with their siblings than with their parents.

Accordingly, most of the conflicts and arguments that arise about viewing -- such as disagreements over what programs to watch -- occur between siblings (Streicher and Bonney, 1974).

Wand (1968) suggested that families watch as a group only when the program appeals to common interests. Chaffee and Tims (1976) report that adolescents watch shows containing violence with their parents more often than they watch humorous shows together. Further, when children watch with parents (as opposed to with siblings or peers), they tend to percieve television as being more realistic.

In general, it appears that a minority of parents have rules about their children's viewing. Mohr (1979) reports that most parents do not give advice to their children, of either a positive or negative nature. Positive guidance implies that parents actively encourage children to watch specific shows, and negative guidance includes explicit prohibitions or discouragements about specific shows. While guidance is rare, the extent of its occurrence can be predicted by demographic factors.

Martin and Benson (1970) found that working class fathers and lower class mothers are more likely to impose rules upon children's viewing. Jeffries-Fox and Gerbner (1977) report a negative correlation between parents' media exposure and the tendency to impose rules upon viewing; the more parents watch, the less likely they are to have rules about their children's viewing. At the same time, there is no relationship between how much children watch and whether or not their parents have rules. The most commonly expressed rules include making sure that homework is completed before viewing, prohibitions of specific programs or generalized unsuitable content, and the imposition of time limits and curfews. Interestingly, about 15% of the families have rules that might be termed trivial and irrelevant; some examples of these are not turning the dial too quickly, keeping the volume of the set down, and maintaining proper lighting conditions.

Many families have elaborate rules for settling disputes over which program to watch. Dimmick (1976) found that the ways in which these conflicts are settled systematically reflects other aspects of the communication style of the specific family. So-called "pluralistic" families tend to vote or negotiate over program choices, while in "protective" families, the parents -- or no one -- decides.

While the family context of viewing is of some interest in and of itself, we feel that the real value of studying this context lies in the extent to

which it may diminish/or enhance other media effects. It is the nature and extent of this mediation by the family that is ultimately more important for theory, practice, and policy.

The Influence of the Family Context on Media Effects

Liefer (1976) argues that the family socializes children through (at least) five distinct strategies. First, the family provides examples of behavior, attitudes, and values. Second, the patterning and power of the examples gives them relative salience and impact. A third strategy is reinforcement and punishment. Fourth, the family provides opportunities to practice the behaviors it encourages. Finally, the family can modify and adapt these strategies to the particular child and the specific moment. She also points out that the first three of these -- providing examples, patterning the examples, and (at least vicariously) the demonstration of reward and punishment -- can be achieved by television. Thus, the potential power of television as an agent of socialization derives from its unprecedented "intrusion" into the formerly "private" affairs of the family, its status as an invisible but ubiquitous "family member," and its ability to perform several of the socialization techniques utilized by families.

A growing number of studies suggest that various media effects can be modulated by the family context of viewing, but others cannot. One obvious way this mediation can occur is by parents limiting exposure; as we saw, however, this is far from common practice.

There has been some research on the interaction between media and families, in the areas of political socialization, advertising, learning, and violence and aggression. Adoni (1979) examined the roles of family and media in the political socialization of Israeli adolescents. She found that mass media contribute to the structuring of social contexts in

which political value orientations are exercised, in a way that reinforces ties with parents and peers. Media, she argues, provide a direct linkage to certain content which is essential for the development of political values. Students high on media consumption attributed greater utility to the media for developing these values; this profile is also associated with greater integration within the family. (See also Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Hess and Torney, 1967; Jackson-Beeck, 1978).

In the area of advertising and consumer learning, Reid (1979) claims that not only the general tone of the viewing context, but actual behavior that occurs during viewing in a family situation, influences children's reactions to advertising. Ward and Wackman (1971) assert that the presence or absence of family communication concerning consumer behavior determines the extent of consumer learning from media advertising. Prasad, Rao, and Sheikh (1978), however, found that when children deem a product to be attractive and desirable, then counter-information from the mother has no effect, regardless of whether the mother's argument is of a "power-assertive" nature or based on reasoning.

In terms of learning from television, Salomon (1977) found that when lower-class mothers watched Sesame Street with their kindergarten-age children it increased both enjoyment and comprehension. While the effect did not hold for middle-class subjects, the findings suggest that parental co-observation may increase children's attention, which in turn enhances learning.

Families do seem to have a consistent mediating effect in studies of television and violence or aggression. In two laboratory studies (Hicks, 1968; Grusec, 1973) children were exposed to a violent stimulus in three conditions: an adult either praised, or criticized, or ignored the media violence. The treatment condition determined whether or not the violent behavior was imitated; imitation occurred most when the violence was sanctioned.

Dominick and Greenberg (1972) found a more generalizable result out in the

field. In middle class families, exposure to television violence interacts with family attitudes towards violence. When parents attitudes are not well defined, heavy violence viewers are highly likely to approve of aggression, to be willing to use violence, and to suggest the use of violence as a means of solving problems. Thus, television plays the most prominent role when families are less active in children's socialization.

Some of our recent analyses have looked into this question, particularly in terms of the role of the family viewing context per se (i.e., rather than at the effects of the family environment in general). We have reported (Gross and Morgan, in press) data on the extent to which four aspects of this viewing context mediate the cultivation of images of violence and the "mean world syndrome" among adolescents. The four dimensions are: "Protectiveness," indicating the extent to which parents restrict children's viewing, in terms of what, when and how long they watch; "Utility," reflecting the parents' tendency to see television as providing good information for their children and to encourage the viewing of specific programs; "Conflict," which is the extent of intra-family arguing about numerous aspects of television behavior; and "Independence," measuring the student's ability to select his or her own programs. Of course, all these relationships are examined with social class variables held constant.

The most striking finding (and consistent with Dominick and Greenberg's conclusions) is that the less parents are involved in their children's viewing -- either positively or negatively -- the stronger the effects. Whether parents are restrictive and protective, or whether they actively perceive television as teaching their children important lessons about reality and encouraging viewing, the relationships between viewing, fear, and mistrust are essentially zero. When parental involvement in viewing -- again, either positively or negatively -- is absent, the effects are exacerbated.

In contrast, controlling for degree of conflict over viewing and students' independence of program choice makes far less difference. Television is strongly related to images of violence and fear regardless of conflict over viewing, but the cultivation of the "mean world" syndrome only appears to hold for those who argue often. Finally, there is a consistent tendency for those who pick their own shows to manifest stronger patterns of association between television viewing, fear, and mistrust.

These results support Brown and Linné's (1976) contention that "the family acts as a filter to the child's experience of television. Furthermore, this filtering process actually affects the type of influence television has on a child." At the same time, we agree with Bryce (1980):

> Television has commonly been conceived of as a 'cause', with resultant 'effects' on individual behavior....(I)t seems far more productive and realistic to consider television as a mediator, and as a mediator which is also mediated by the contexts in which it is viewed....(W)hile the emphasis is on the many ways in which television use in the home seems to influence behavioral patterns in family groups, it should be kept firmly in mind that this is only a part of the story, while the family is another part, and the interlocking web of mutual influence among the many individuals, institutions, and settings in any given life is the whole.

Family Life Expectations

We have begun to examine television's influence upon the development of adolescents' plans and expectations for the kinds of families they will have. Our theoretical premise for this research is that television functions primarily to stabilize and maintain the status quo, rather than to transform or disrupt.

Television portrayals are unlikely to present radical departures from traditional concepts of the family. The age distributions of characters in the world of television makes it reasonable to assume that the messages that "families are good" and "single is bad" (especially for women, who are less likely to be victimized on television if they are married), and that "families

are large" may be incorporated by heavy viewers into their own expectations.

The results of these analyses (Morgan and Harr-Mazer, 1980) indeed suggest that television cultivates these outlooks. The correlations between amount of viewing, projected age of marriage and childbirth, and desired family size are all positive and significant, over and above the effects of social class, IQ and other factors. Furthermore, the intensity of these relationships tends to increase as students get older. There are some interesting exceptions; for example, these associations are stronger for girls whose mothers did not go to college, and tend to decrease over time for girls of college educated mothers. The educational attainment of the mother may emerge as a significant factor, negating television's contribution to family expectations, when the girls themselves begin to plan for education and career.

Overall, however, we find a fairly consistent pattern. Adolescents who watch more television are more likely to be eager to get married and have children at a relatively early age, as well as to express the desire to have more children. More importantly, longitudinal examination of these data reveals that early television viewing has a significant independent influence upon later family expectations, above and beyond the effects of earlier family expectations. This strengthens the possibility of making a causal inference; amount of viewing in early adolescence significantly relates to that part of family expectations in later adolescence which is not explained by early plans, and thus influences "new information" or change in family plans.

Television seems to cultivate attitudes about when to form a family and how many children to have. But we need to know more about the portrayal of family relationships, both in terms of the nature of interactions within the family and the nature and scope of the functions served by family members. In addition, we need to understand the role television may play in cultivating

images and expectations regarding continuities and disruptions in family life for other age groups. Beyond its influence on adolescents, the representation of families and family behaviors on television may contribute to adults' conceptions, both as they form families and as their children grow up.

DEPICTION OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY

There are basically three major sources of sexual knowledge in our society -- peer groups, schools and the mass media. Parents, who would be expected to be the major source of sexual information for children, apparently play minimal as well as mythical roles in this process. It has been noted that a person's peer group is often the most important source of information, as well as misinformation, about sex (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). Schools, if local predilictions permit, provide dissemination of "accurate" biological information about sex that is generally divorced from both social and emotional contexts. The third, and potentially the most important, source of sexual information is the mass media.

Bandura and Walters (1963) have noted that because our norms of privacy permit direct or personal viewing of only the most mild and peripheral forms of sexual behavior, American adolescents and children have few opportunities to observe adult sexual behavior. And, as a result, adolescents usually depend upon mass media portrayals, including television, to learn about sexual behavior.

Gagnon and Simon (1973) add that much of the training in how to be sexual comes from mass media portrayals.

> (I)t is left to the mass media, whose representation of sexual experience is the least trustworthy, to provide the young with an imagery that is at all correlated with how they will experience their own sexual selves -- that is, in terms of fear, passion, pleasure and pain (p. 123).

Moreover, in an experiment with male college undergraduates, Walters, Bruen and Parke* found that sex values and behaviors could be acquired by watching

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*cited in Bandura and Walters, 1963.

media portrayals.

Baran (1976) has argued that mass media portrayals of sexual behavior that raise adolescents' expectations of what sex should be like may contribute to the general frustration or dissatisfaction of most adolescents with their own sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Finally, Saunders and Robinson (1978) found persistent reticence among young men, and especially young women, to use specific terms for genitals and intercourse. Specifically, they found that the female subjects were more likely to respond, when they did respond, in terms and contexts that were clinical and/or impersonal. The males were somewhat more verbal, exhibited more variety in sexual terminology, and used more sexual "slang."

There have been, however, very few studies that have specifically and sytematically focused upon portrayal of sex, sexuality and pornography in mass media worlds (cf. Smith, 1976; Amoroso and Brown, 1973). According to Smith, even the National Commission on Pornography and Obscenity essentially neglected this area. The only content studies among the massive amount of research that was commissioned (and published in ten large volumes of research reports) were of confession magazines (Sonenschein, et al., 1971) and the counter-culture underground press (Levin, 1971).

More recently, however, several sex/pornography related content studies have been completed. Smith (1976) examined "adults only" paperback fiction; that is, books easily accessible to the general American public, and not adult book store and/or plain wrapper literature. He found that each book is usually built around a series of sex episodes that are tied together by transition pages of non-sexual activity. The analysis revealed that while this is a predominantly macho world, female characters tend to be more fully developed than male characters.

The portrayal of sex on television has been examined in two recent studies. Franzblau, Sprafkin and Rubinstein (1977) analyzed a sample of 61 prime-time programs (excluding movies and specials) aired during October of 1975. They found that kissing, embracing, aggressive and non-aggressive touching were the behaviors that appeared most often in television drama, while sexual intercourse, rape and homosexual behavior virtually did not appear. Moreover, rape and other sex crimes were only referred to verbally and usually in the context of discussing the crimes that were to be solved in a specific drama or crime adventure program.

An interesting finding of this analysis is that there were more (97.2 per hour) physically intimate overt behaviors* (primarily non-aggressive touching) during the early evening hours (8 to 9 p.m. EST) than during the late evening viewing hours (9 - 11 p.m. EST) (69.4 per hour). Generally the situation comedies contained more kissing, embracing, non-aggressive touching and innuendoes -- usually accompanied by canned laughter. Finally, physical intimacy usually appeared in situation comedies and variety programs but was not usually portrayed in a sensuous manner.

> The striking lack of physical intimacy on dramatic programs further identifies sex as a taboo topic for serious consideration and conveys an incomplete picture of the lifestyles of policemen, detectives and doctors. Although heroes and heroines are portrayed as leading exciting and rewarding professional lives, they appear to have austere private lives, lacking in physical or verbal expressions of tenderness (p. 170).

Fernandez-Collado and Greenberg (1978) analyzed portrayals in 77 prime-time and Saturday morning dramatic television series aired during the 1976-77 television season. These authors found, however, many more intimate sexual

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*kissing, embracing and touching

acts* -- approximately 1.72 per hour. They also found that intercourse between unmarried partners was implied or occurred seven times as often as intercourse between a husband and wife.

There is, however, a problem in comparing the findings of these two content analyses of television drama. And, the apparent conflict (that is, Franzblau et al., found virtually no acts of intercourse or other very intimate behaviors while Fernandez-Collado et al., found just under two such acts per hour) can probably be attributed to definitional/conceptual differences. Specifically, it appears that Fernando-Collado et al. include innuendo as an intimate sexual behavior, while Franzblau et al. have a separate category for innuendo. Moreover, each study defines the term "intimate sexual behavior" very differently and consequently in each study very different types of actions are categorized in what appears to be the same category.

Our continuing study of network television drama and viewer conceptions of social reality has examined sexual portrayals and found the following changes from the 1977 to 1978 television season:

Some depiction and discussion of sexual behavior increased its prevalence from 8 to 9 out of every 10 prime time programs.

Some reference to homosexual or bisexual behavior increased from 7 percent to 10 percent of programs.

Comic treatment of sex, still most prevalent three years ago, decreased from 57 percent to 44 percent of programs, while serious treatment increased correspondingly. However, the mixing of sex with violence also increased from zero in 1977 to 10 percent of all programs in 1978.

Publicly acceptable sexual behavior such as kissing and embracing became

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*includes rape, homosexual acts, intercourse (married and unmarried partners), prostitution, and other intimate behaviors.

more explicit as well as more frequent. More controversial matters such as premarital and extramarital sex just became more frequent, with references to such behavior rising from 21 percent of prime-time programs in 1977 to 43 percent in 1978. Reference to nudity climbed from 2 to 14 percent of programs, and depiction of nudity from 3 to 6 percent of programs.

So much for simple counts. But sex is not a simple act. It is a social relationship structured in particular ways and for particular purposes. We have no evidence to suggest that the dramatic change in verbal or pictorial depiction of sex has been accompanied by a similar change in the social structure of sex. Most nudity and other forms of dependency depicted on television is still female; most demonstration of power is still male. Although the proportion of female leads has increased in the past three years, men still outnumber women 3 to 1 in prime-time television drama, and women are still cast in more restricted and vulnerable roles.

These social constraints are stable and pervasive; audiences take them for granted. They are more aware, however, of the surface changes in the sexual depictions. How have they responded to them?

Despite criticism and complaints, viewers seem to have taken the changes in stride. Surveys show that almost half of all viewers questioned agree that more openness about sex on television has some positive social value. Only about one-third consider the changes damaging to public morality. Still, the majority want close controls kept on both the timing and nature of sexual portrayals.

More interesting, however, is the pattern of differential responses within the general population. The younger, better educated, more affluent groups tend to favor liberalization while the older viewers and those with more limited means and cultural opportunities are the most apprehensive of changes in traditional norms. It is in the latter groups, groups that are also the most depen-

dent on television, that the television norms of sexual representation are likely to have their greatest influence.

Our studies show this to be the case. With all the recent changes -- whether because or despite them -- television seems to be at the center of current mainstream sexual morality. Viewing makes little difference in the responses of the "average viewer" to questions about sex. Viewing may even moderate the outlook of those who have the most liberal views on sex. On the other hand, television does make a significant difference in the responses of those who hold the most restricted and traditional views on sex. The role of television appears to be to bring these groups into the mainstream.

These results have come from the General Social Surveys of 1975, 1977 and 1978 conducted by the National Opinion Research Corporation that we have subjected to secondary analysis.

Favoring sex education has always been an indicator of a more open and enlightened approach to sex. Today 8 out of all 10 people favor sex education (9 out of all 10 young people between 18 and 29) regardless of whether they view little or much television. So for them television viewing makes little difference. However, only 55 percent of older viewers, 57 percent of nonwhites, and 61 percent of those who earn less than $10,000 a year favor sex education -- provided they are light viewers of television. For these groups, viewing makes a significant difference. Heavy viewers in the same groups approve sex education 7 or 8 to 10, near to or the same as the general average.

The pattern is similar for those who voice some approval of premarital sex, although the general average is not nearly as high. About half of all respondents agree that premarital sex is sometimes or always all right. Television viewing makes a difference among those who are the least likely to approve of premarital sex: the low income and less educated groups. Among the light viewers in these groups, only 40 percent approve premarital sex. Heavy viewers in the same groups are at the general average rate of approval.

Extramarital sex is seldom portrayed approvingly on television. In general, about 3 out of 10 respondents and 4 out of 10 college educated or high income respondents, voice some acceptance of extramarital sex. In these groups, television viewing reduces the rate of acceptance. However, among low income and less educated groups only 2 out of 10 are likely to approve; heavy viewing brings their approval rate up to the general average.

The pattern is similar for other presentations of sex. Television cultivates broad mainstream norms and tends to bring both more advanced and more traditional groups into the mainstream. Recent changes in sexual depiction may have detected and then standardized a change in the mainstream itself.

Not so for the social structure of sex. As we have suggested before, despite changes in society and the greater visibility of women in prime-time drama, there has been no systematic evidence of change in their overall percentage, occupations, victimization, and power. Resistance to change in the social relationship of the sexes is what viewers seem to learn from the world of television. Our research shows that the more television most people watch, the more sexist their views are, even after we account for other differences between light and heavy viewers. It is also true, however, that, as before, some groups of viewers are so far behind the times that even television's male dominated dramatic world is relatively enlightening to them. But these are in a minority compared to those who learn the lesson of sexism from their viewing.

So, to conclude: television is becoming more sexy but not less sexist. It sets a norm that is or becomes acceptable to most, and it brings other viewers up or down to that level. Openness and enjoyment of sex are all to the good; equity and justice would be even better.

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