2.

THE SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION OF WOMEN BY THE MASS MEDIA

Gaye Tuchman

Americans learn basic lessons about social life from the mass media, much as hundreds of years ago illiterate peasants studied the carvings around the apse or the stained glass windows of medieval cathedrals. As Harold Lasswell (1948) pointed out almost thirty years ago, today's mass media have replaced yesterday's cathedrals and parish churches as teachers of the young and of the masses. For our society, like any other society, must pass on its social heritage from one generation to the next. The societal need for continuity and transmission of dominant values may be particularly acute in times of rapid social change, such as our own. Then, individuals may not only need some familiarity with the past, if the society is to survive, but they must also be prepared to meet changing conditions. Nowhere is that need as readily identifiable as in the area of *sex roles*—sex roles are social guidelines for sex-appropriate appearance, interests, skills, behaviors, and self-perceptions.

It is in this area, in the past few decades, where social expectations and social conditions have been changing most rapidly. In 1920, twenty-four percent of the nation's adult women worked for pay outside the home and most of them were unmarried. Fifty years later, in 1976, over half of all American women between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four were in the labor force, most of them married and many of them with children who were of preschool age. One-third of all women with children between the ages of three and five were employed in 1970. Such a transformation not only affects women: it affects their families as members make adjustments in their shared life; and as working men in the factory and office increasingly encounter economically productive women who insist on the abandonment of old prejudices and discriminatory behaviors. In the face of such change, the portrayal of sex roles in the mass media is a topic of great social, political, and economic importance.

This book* concerns the depiction of sex roles in the mass media and the effect of that portrayal on American girls and women. In each chapter [in *Hearth and Home*], social science researchers ask, What are the media telling us about ourselves? How do they say women and men should behave? How women should treat men? How women should view themselves? What do the media view as the best way for a woman to structure her life? What do they tell a little girl to expect or hope for when she becomes a woman?

Based on original research, each [chapter in *Hearth and Home*] helps break a new path in communications research. Not surprisingly, little research appeared on these topics until the modern women's movement gained strength in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Until then, psychology, sociology, economics, and history were mainly written by men, about men, and for

* Tuchman's chapter is the introduction to *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, eds. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benét (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

men. As Jessie Bernard (1973) points out, the interactions of men were viewed as the appropriate subject for social science research, and upwardly mobile male researchers were fascinated with the topics of power and social stratification. No one considered the way women experienced the world. Instead, they were seen as men's silent or unopinionated consorts. (The term "unopinionated" is used, because studies of attitudes by survey researchers frequently neglected to ask women their opinions, concentrating instead upon the attitudes of men. The most well-known exception to this role is a study of influences upon women's consumer habits, funded by a women's magazine in the 1940s [Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955].)

These generalizations are, unfortunately, equally true of communications researchers. Generations of researchers studied the impact of the media upon political life. In the past, the main topic of concern was male voting behavior. (It was assumed women voted like their husbands; women were swayed by a husband's or father's personal influence [see McCormack, 1975].) More recently, researchers have become fascinated by agenda setting—the way the media structure citizens' priorities and definitions of political issues. Since the women's movement is not a top priority for the news media, little is known about its place in citizens' political agendas. Nobody seemed to care about the effect of the mass media upon the generation and maintenance of sex-role stereotypes. And why should they? Before the advent of the women's movement these stereotypes seemed natural, "given." Few questioned how they developed, how they were reinforced, or how they were maintained. Certainly the media's role in this process was not questioned.

But the importance of stereotyping was not lost on the women's movement; for stereotypes are confining. Sex-role stereotypes are set portrayals of sex-appropriate appearance, interests, skills, behaviors, and self-perceptions. They are more stringent than guidelines in suggesting persons *not* conforming to the specified way of appearing, feeling, and behaving are *inadequate* as males or females. A boy who cries is not masculine and a young woman who forswears makeup is not feminine. Stereotypes present individuals with a more limited range of acceptable appearance, feelings, and behaviors than guidelines do. The former may be said to limit further the human possibilities and potentialities contained within already limited sex roles.

This volume hopes to delineate a national social problem—the mass media's treatment of women. It is a crucial problem, because as Lasswell (1948) points out, the mass media transmit the social heritage from one generation to the next. In a complex society, such as ours, the mass media pass on news from one segment of society, classes, regions, and subcultures to another. Additionally, they enable societal institutions to coordinate activities. Like the Catholic Church in the middle ages—"that great broadcasting center of medieval Europe" (Baumann, 1972, p. 65), the mass media can disseminate the same message to all classes at the same time, with authority and universality of reception, in a decidedly one-directional flow of information. But, if the stereotyped portrayal of sex roles is out-of-date, the media may be preparing youngsters—girls, in particular—for a world that no longer exists.

Suppose for a moment that children's television primarily presents adult women as housewives, nonparticipants in the paid labor force. Also, suppose that girls in the television audience "model" their behavior and expectations on that of "television women." Such a supposition is quite plausible for

> what psychologists call "modeling" occurs simply by watching others, without any direct reinforcement for learning and without any overt practice. The child imitates the model without being induced or compelled to do so. That learning can occur in the absence of direct reinforcement is a radical departure from earlier theories that regarded reward or punishment as indispensable to learning. There now is considerable evidence that children do learn by watching and listening to others even in the absence of reinforcement and overt practice. . . .
>
> (Lesser, quoted in Cantor, 1975, p. 5)

And psychologists note that "opportunities for modeling have been vastly increased by television" (Lesser, quoted in Cantor, 1975, p. 5). It is then equally plausible that girls exposed to "television women" may hope to be homemakers when they are adults, but not workers outside the home. Indeed, as adults these girls may resist work outside the home unless necessary for the economic well-being of their families. Encouraging

such an attitude in our nation's girls can present a problem in the future: As noted, over forty percent of the labor force was female in 1970, and married women dominate the female labor force. The active participation of women in the labor force is vital to the maintenance of the American economy. In the past decade, the greatest expansion of the economy has been within the sectors that employ women. Mass-media stereotypes of women as housewives may impede the employment of women by limiting their horizons.

The possible impact of the mass media sex-role stereotypes upon national life seems momentous. As the studies collected here demonstrate, this supposition may accurately predict the future. As an illustration of that possibility, the following sections of this introduction examine the media used by an American girl as she completes school, then becomes a worker and, probably, a spouse and mother.[1] Following the format of this book, this introduction starts with an examination of the dominant medium American children and adults watch—television—and then turns to two media especially designed for women—the women's pages of newspapers and women's magazines. But because of the plethora of research about television, we concentrate upon that medium. Finally, we review studies of the impact of the media upon girls and women, again stressing studies of television.

Two related ideas are central to our discussion. These are *the reflection hypothesis* and *symbolic annihilation.* According to the reflection hypothesis, the mass media reflect dominant societal values. In the case of television (see Tuchman, 1974, 1976), the corporate character of the commercial variety causes program planners and station managers to design programs for appeal to the largest audiences. To attract these audiences (whose time and attention are sold to commercial sponsors), the television industry offers programs consonant with American values. The pursuit of this aim is solidified by the fact that so many members of the television industry take those very values for granted: Dominant American ideas and ideals serve as resources for program development, even when the planners are unaware of them, much as we all take for granted the air we breathe. These ideas and ideals are incorporated as *symbolic representations of American society, not as literal portrayals.* Take the typical television family of the 1950s: mother, father, and two children living in an upper middle-class, single-residence suburban home. Such families and homes were not the most commonly found units in the 1950s, but they were the American ideal. Following George Gerbner (1972a, p. 44), we may say that "representation in the fictional world," such as the 1950s ideal family, symbolizes or "signifies social existence"; that is, representation in the mass media announces to audience members that this kind of family (or social characteristic) is valued and approved.

Conversely, we may say that either condemnation, trivialization, or "absence means symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner, p. 44). Consider the symbolic representation of women in the mass media. Relatively few women are portrayed there, although women are fifty-one percent of the population and are well over forty percent of the labor force. Those working women who are portrayed are condemned. Others are trivialized: they are symbolized as child-like adornments, who need to be protected or they are dismissed to the protective confines of the home. In sum, they are subject to *symbolic annihilation.*

The mass media deal in symbols and their symbolic representations may not be up-to-date. A time lag may be operating, for nonmaterial conditions, which shape symbols, change more slowly than do material conditions. This notion of a time lag (or a "culture lag," as sociologists term it) may be incorporated into the reflection hypothesis. As values change, we would expect the images of society presented by the media to change. Further, we might expect one medium to change faster than another. (Because of variations in economic organization, each medium has a slightly different relationship to changing material conditions.)

The reflection hypothesis also includes the notion that media planners try to build audiences, and the audiences desired by planners may vary from medium to medium. For instance, television programmers may seek an audience of men and women, without distinguishing between women in the labor force and housewives. But the executives at women's magazines may want to attract women in the labor force in order to garner advertisements designed for those women. (Magazine ads essentially support that medium, since each copy costs much more to produce than it does to purchase.) Accordingly, we might expect the symbolic

annihilation of women by television to be more devastating than that of *some* women's magazines.

Without further ado, then, let us turn to images of women in the mass media.

Television: Symbolic Annihilation of Women

To say television is the dominant medium in American life is a vast understatement. In the average American household, television sets are turned on more than six hours each winter day. More American homes have television sets than have private bathrooms, according to the 1970 census. Ninety-six percent of all American homes are equipped with television, and most have more than one set. As Sprafkin and Liebert note in Chapter 15 [of *Hearth and Home*], by the time an American child is fifteen years old, she has watched more hours of television than she has spent in the classroom. And since she continues watching as she grows older, the amount of time spent in school can never hope to equal the time invested viewing television.

The use of television by children is encouraged because of parental use. The average adult spends five hours a day with the mass media, almost as much time as she or he spends at work. Of these five hours, four are occupied by the electronic media (radio and television). The other hour is taken up with reading newspapers, magazines, and books. Television consumes forty percent of the leisure time of adult Americans. To be sure, despite increased economic concentration there are still 1,741 daily newspapers in this country. And studies indicate that 63,353,000 papers are sold each day. But the nation's nine hundred-odd television stations reach millions more on a daily basis. In 1976, over seventy-five million people watched one event via television, football's annual Super Bowl spectacular (Hirsch, 1978); and when "All in the Family" first appeared on Saturday night, it had a weekly audience of over 100,000,000, more than half the people in the nation. Each year, Americans spend trillions of hours watching television.

What are the portrayals of women to which Americans are exposed during these long hours? What can the preschool girl and the school girl learn about being and becoming a woman?

From children's shows to commercials to prime-time adventures and situation comedies, television proclaims that women don't count for much. They are underrepresented in television's fictional life—they are "symbolically annihilated." From 1954, the date of the earliest systematic analysis of television's content, through 1975, researchers have found that males dominated the television screen. With the exception of soap operas where men make up a "mere majority" of the fictional population, television has shown and continues to show two men for every woman. Figure 2.1

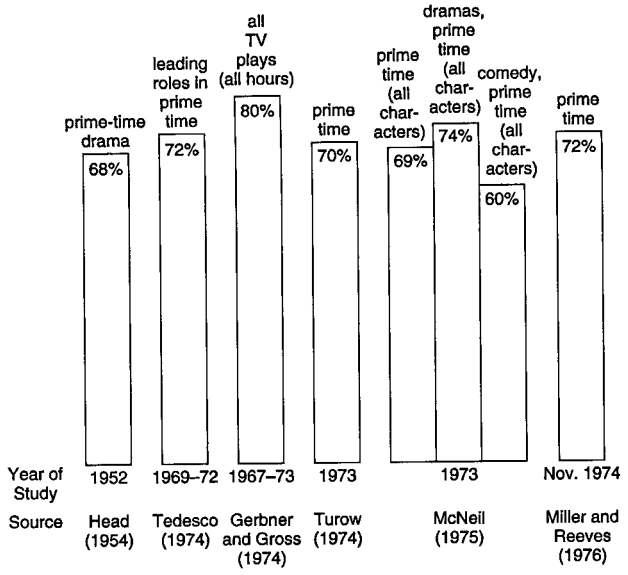

Fig 2.1 Percentage of Males in TV Programs, 1952–1974

indicates that proportion has been relatively constant. The little variation that exists, occurs between types of programs. In 1952 sixty-eight percent of the characters in prime-time drama were male. In 1973, seventy-four percent of those characters were male. Women were concentrated in comedies where men make up "only" sixty percent of the fictional world. Children's cartoons include even fewer women or female characters (such as anthropomorphized foxes or pussy-cats) than adult's prime-time programs do. The paucity of women on American television tells viewers that women don't matter much in American society.

That message is reinforced by the treatment of those women who do appear on the television screen. As seen in Figure 2.2, when television shows reveal someone's occupation, the worker is most likely to be male. Someone might object that the pattern is inevitable, because men constitute a larger share of the pool of people who can be professionals. But that objection is invalidated by the evidence presented by soap operas, where women are more numerous. But the invariant pattern holds there too, despite the fact that men have been found to be only about fifty percent of the characters on the "soaps" (see Downing, 1974; Katzman, 1972).

Additionally, those few working women included in television plots are symbolically denigrated by being portrayed as incompetent or as inferior to male workers. Pepper, the "Police-woman" on the show of the same name (Angie Dickinson) is continually rescued from dire and deadly situations by her male colleagues. Soap operas provide even more powerful evidence for the portrayal of women as incompetents and inferiors. Although Turow (1974) finds that soap operas present the most favorable image of female workers, there too they are subservient to competent men. On "The Doctors," surgical procedures are performed by male physicians, and although the female M.D.'s are said to be competent at their work, they are primarily shown pulling case histories from file cabinets or filling out forms. On other soap operas, male lawyers try cases and female lawyers research briefs for them. More generally, women do not appear in the same professions as men: men are doctors, women, nurses; men are lawyers, women, secretaries; men work in corporations, women tend boutiques.

The portrayal of incompetence extends from denigration through victimization and trivialization. When television women are involved in violence, unlike males, they are more likely to be victims than aggressors (Gerbner, 1972a). Equally important, the pattern of women's involvement with television violence reveals approval of married women and condemnation of single and working women. As Gerbner (1972a) demonstrates, single women are more likely to be victims of violence than married women, and working women are more likely to be villains than housewives. Conversely, married women who do not work for money outside the home are most likely to escape television's mayhem and to be treated sympathetically. More generally, television most approves those women who are presented in a sexual context or within a romantic or family role (Gerbner, 1972a; cf. Liebert *et al.*, 1973). Two out of three television-women are married, were married, or are engaged to be married. By way of contrast, most television men are single and have always been single. Also, men are seen outside the home and women within it, but even here, one finds trivialization of women's role within the home.

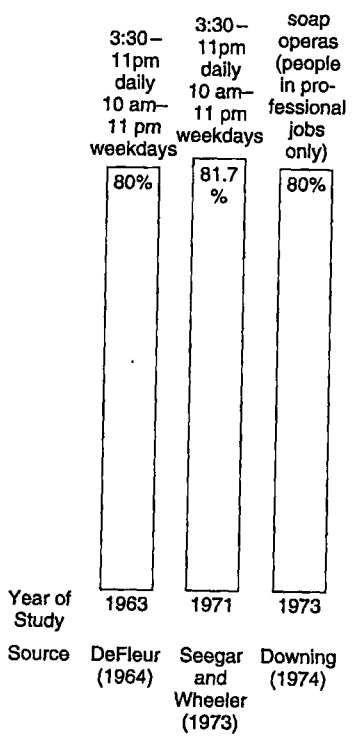

Fig 2.2 Percentage of Males Among Those Portrayed as Employed on TV, 1963–1973

According to sociological analyses of traditional sex roles (such as Parsons, 1949), men are "instrumental" leaders, active workers and decision makers outside the home; women are "affective" or emotional leaders in solving personal problems within the home. But television trivializes women in their traditional role by assigning this task to men too. The nation's soap operas deal with the personal and emotional, yet Turow (1974) finds that on the soap operas, the male sex is so dominant that men also lead the way to the solution of emotional problems. In sum, following the reasoning of the reflection hypothesis, we may tentatively conclude that for commercial reasons (building audiences to sell to advertisers) network television engages in the symbolic annihilation of women.

Two additional tests of this tentative conclusion are possible. One examines noncommercial American television; the other analyzes the portrayal of women in television commercials. If the commercial structure of television is mainly responsible for the symbolic annihilation of women, one would expect to find more women on public than on commercial television. Conversely if the structure of corporate commercial television is mainly responsible for the image of women that is telecast, one would expect to find even more male domination on commercial ads. To an even greater extent than is true of programs, advertising seeks to tap existing values in order to move people to buy a product.

Unfortunately, few systematic studies of public broadcasting are available. The best of these is Caroline Isber's and Muriel Cantor's work (1975), funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the source of core programming in the Public Broadcasting System. In this volume [*Hearth and Home*], in an adaptation of her report for the CPB, Cantor asks, "Where are the women in public television?" Her answer, based on a content analysis of programming is "in front of the television set." Although a higher proportion of adult women appear on children's programming in public television than is true of commercial television, Cantor finds "both commercial and public television disseminate the same message about women, although the two types of television differ in their structure and purpose." Her conclusion indicates that commercialism is not solely responsible for television's symbolic annihilation of women and its portrayal of stereotyped sex roles. Rather, television captures societal ideas even when programming is partially divorced from the profit motive.[2]

Male domination has not been measured as directly for television commercials, the other kind of televised image that may be used to test the reflection hypothesis. Since so many of the advertised products are directed toward women, one could not expect to find women neglected by commercials. Given the sex roles commercials play upon, it would be bad business to show two women discussing the relative merits of power lawn mowers or two men chatting about waxy buildup on a kitchen floor. However, two indirect measures of male dominance are possible: (1) the number of commercials in which only men or only women appear; and (2) the use of males and females in voice-overs. (A "voice-over" is an unseen person speaking about a product while an image is shown on the television screen; an unseen person proclaims "two out of three doctors recommend" or "on sale now at your local. . . .")

On the first indirect measure, all-male or all-female commercials, the findings are unanimous. Schuetz and Sprafkin [in *Hearth and Home*], Silverstein and Silverstein (1974) and Bardwick and Schumann (1967), find a ratio of almost three all-male ads to each all-female ad. The second indirect measure, the use of voice-overs in commercials, presents more compelling evidence for the acceptance of the reflection hypothesis. Echoing the findings of others, Dominick and Rauch (1972) report that of 946 ads with voice-overs, "only six percent used a female voice; a male voice was heard on eighty-seven percent." The remainder use one male and one female voice.

The commercials themselves strongly encourage sex-role stereotypes. Although research findings are not strictly comparable to those on television programs because of the dissimilar "plots," the portrayals of women are even more limited than those presented on television dramas and comedies. Linda Busby (1975) summarized the findings of four major studies of television ads. In one study,

- 37.5% of the ads showed women as men's domestic adjuncts
- 33.9% showed women as dependent on men
- 24.3% showed women as submissive

- 16.7% showed women as sex objects
- 17.1% showed women as unintelligent
- 42.6% showed women as household functionaries.

Busby's summary of Dominick and Rauch's work reveals a similar concentration of women as homemakers rather than as active members of the labor force:

- Women were seven times more likely to appear in ads for personal hygiene products than not to appear [in those ads]
- 75% of all ads using females were for products found in the kitchen or in the bathroom
- 38% of all females in the television ads were shown inside the home, compared to 14% of the males
- Men were significantly more likely to be shown outdoors or in business settings than were women
- Twice as many women were shown with children [than] were men
- 56% of the women in the ads were judged to be [only] housewives
- 43 different occupations were coded for men, 18 for women.

As Busby notes, reviews of the major studies of ads (such as Courtney and Whipple, 1974) emphasize their strong "face validity" (the result of real patterns rather than any bias produced by researchers' methods), although the studies use different coding categories and some of the researchers were avowed feminist activists.

In sum, then, analyses of television commercials support the reflection hypothesis. In voice-overs and one-sex (all male or all female) ads, commercials neglect or rigidly stereotype women. In their portrayal of women, the ads banish females to the role of housewife, mother, homemaker, and sex object, limiting the roles women may play in society.

What can the preschool girl, the school girl, the adolescent female and the woman learn about a woman's role by watching television? The answer is simple. Women are not important in American society, except *perhaps* within the home. And even within the home, men know best, as the dominance of male advice on soap operas and the use of male voice-overs for female products, suggests. To be a woman is to have a limited life divorced from the economic productivity of the labor force.

Women's Magazines: Marry, Don't Work

As the American girl grows to womanhood, she, like her counterpart elsewhere in industrialized nations, has magazines available designed especially for her use. Some, like *Seventeen*, whose readers tend to be young adolescents, instruct on contemporary fashions and dating styles. Others, like *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*, teach about survival as a young woman—whether as a single woman hunting a mate in the city or a young married coping with hearth and home.

This section reviews portrayals of sex roles in women's magazines, seeking to learn how often they too promulgate stereotypes about the role their female readers may take—how much they too engage in the symbolic annihilation of women by limiting and trivializing them. Unfortunately, our analyses of images of women in magazines cannot be as extensive as our discussion of television. Because of researchers' past neglect of women's issues and problems, few published materials are available for review.

Like the television programs just discussed, from the earliest content analyses of magazine fiction (Johns-Heine and Gerth, 1949) to analyses of magazine fiction published in the early 1970s, researchers have found an emphasis on hearth and home and a denigration of the working woman. The ideal woman, according to these magazines, is passive and dependent. Her fate and her happiness rest with a man, not with participation in the labor force. There are two exceptions to this generalization: (1) The female characters in magazines aimed at working-class women are a bit more spirited than their middle-class sisters. (2) In the mid-1970s, middle-class magazines seemed less hostile toward working women. Using the reflection hypothesis, particularly its emphasis upon attracting readers to sell advertisements, we will seek to explain the general rule and these interesting exceptions to it.

Like other media, women's magazines are interested in building their audience or readership. For a

magazine, attracting more readers is *indirectly* profitable. Each additional reader does not increase the magazine's profit margin by buying a copy or taking out a subscription, because the cost of publication and distribution per copy far exceeds the price of the individual copy—whether it is purchased on the newsstand, in a supermarket, or through subscription. Instead a magazine realizes its profit by selling advertisements and charging its advertisers a rate adjusted to its known circulation. Appealing to advertisers, the magazine specifies known demographic characteristics of its readership. For instance, a magazine may inform the manufacturer of a product intended for housewives that a vast proportion of its readership are homemakers, while another magazine may appeal to the producer of merchandise for young working women by lauding its readership as members of that target group. Women's magazines differentiate themselves from one another by specifying their intended readers, as well as the size of their mass circulation. Additionally, they all compete with other media to draw advertisers. (For example, *Life* and *Look* folded because their advertisers could reach a larger group of potential buyers at a lower price per person through television commercials.) Both daytime television and women's magazines present potential advertisers with particularly appealing audiences, because women are the primary purchasers of goods intended for the home.

Historically, middle-class women have been less likely to be members of the labor force than lower-class women. At the turn of the century, those married women who worked were invariably from working-class families that required an additional income to assure adequate food, clothing, and shelter (Oppenheimer, 1970). The importance of this economic impetus for working is indicated by the general adherence of working-class families to more traditional definitions of male and female sex roles (Rubin, 1976). Although middle-class families subscribe to a more flexible ideology of sex roles than working-class families, both groups of women tend to insist that the man should be the breadwinner. The fiction in women's magazines reflects this ideology.

Particularly in middle-class magazines, fiction depicts women "as creatures . . . defined by the men in their lives" (Franzwa, 1974a, p. 106; see also Franzwa, 1974b, 1975). Studying a random sample of issues of *Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's,* and *Good Housekeeping* between the years 1940 and 1970, Helen Franzwa found four roles for women: "single and looking for a husband, housewife-mother, spinster, and widowed or divorced—soon to remarry." All the women were defined by the men in their lives, or by their absence. Flora (1971) confirms this finding in her study of middle-class (*Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*) and working-class (*True Story* and *Modern Romances*) fiction. Female dependence and passivity are lauded; on the rare occasions that male dependence is portrayed, it is seen as undesirable.

As might be expected of characterizations that define women in terms of men, American magazine fiction denigrates the working woman. Franzwa says that work is shown to play "a distinctly secondary part in women's lives. When work is portrayed as important to them, there is a concomitant disintegration of their lives" (1974a, p. 106). Of the 155 major female characters depicted in Franzwa's sample of magazine stories, only 65 or forty-one percent were employed outside the home. Seven of the 65 held high-status positions. Of these seven, only two were married. Three others were "spinsters" whose "failure to marry was of far greater importance to the story-line than their apparent success in their careers" (pp. 106–7). One single woman with a high status career was lauded: She gave up her career to marry.

From 1940 through 1950, Franzwa found, working mothers and working wives were condemned. Instead, the magazines emphasized that husbands should support their spouses. One story summary symbolizes the magazines' viewpoint: "In a 1940 story, a young couple realized that they couldn't live on his salary. She offered to work; he replied, 'I don't think that's so good. I know some fellows whose wives work and they might just as well not be married' " (p. 108). Magazines after 1950 are even less positive about work. In 1955, 1960, 1965, and 1970 not one married woman who worked appeared in the stories Franzwa sampled. (Franzwa selected stories from magazines using five-year intervals to enhance the possibility of finding changes.)

Since middle-class American wives are less likely to be employed than their working-class counterparts, this finding makes sociological sense. Editors

Table 2.1 Female Dependence and Ineffectuality by Class, by Percentage of Stories*

	Female Dependence			*Female Ineffectuality*		
	Undesirable	*Desirable*	*Neutral*	*Undesirable*	*Desirable*	*Neutral*
Working Class	22	30	48	38	4	58
Middle Class	18	51	31	18	33	49
Total	20	41	40	28	19	53

* Adapted from Flora (1971).

and writers may believe that readers of middle-class magazines, who are less likely to be employed, are also more likely to buy magazines approving this lifestyle. More likely to work and to be in families either economically insecure or facing downward mobility, working-class women might be expected to applaud effective women. For them, female dependence might be an undesirable trait. Their magazines could be expected to cater to such preferences, especially since those preferences flow from the readers' life situations. Such, indeed, are Flora's findings, presented in Table 2.1.

However, this pattern does not mean that the literature for the working-class woman avoids defining women in terms of men. All the women in middle-class magazines dropped from the labor force when they had a man present; only six percent of the women in the working-class fiction continued to work when they had a man and children. And Flora explained that for both groups "The plot of the majority of stories centered upon the female achieving the proper dependent status, either by marrying or manipulating existing dependency relationships to reaffirm the heroine's subordinate position. The male support—monetary, social, and psychological—which the heroine gains was generally seen as well worth any independence or selfhood given up in the process" (1971, p. 441).

Such differences as do exist between working-class and middle-class magazines remain interesting, though. For they indicate how much more the women's magazines may be responsive to their audience than television can be. Because it is the dominant mass medium, television is designed to appeal to hundreds of millions of people. In 1970, the circulation of *True Story* was "only" 5,347,000, and of *Redbook*, a "mere" 8,173,000. Drawing a smaller audience and by definition, one more specialized, the women's magazines can be more responsive to changes in the position of women in American society. If a magazine believes its audience is changing, it may alter the content to maintain its readership. The contradictions inherent in being women's magazines may free them to respond to change.

A woman's magazine is sex-typed in a way that is not true of men's magazines (Davis, 1976). *Esquire* and *Playboy* are for men, but the content of these magazines, is, broadly speaking, American culture. Both men's magazines feature stories by major American writers, directed toward all sophisticated Americans, not merely to men. Both feature articles on the state of male culture as American culture or of male politics as American politics. Women's magazines are designed in opposition to these "male magazines." For instance, "sports" are women's sports or news of women breaking into "men's sports." A clear distinction is drawn between what is "male" and what is "female."

Paradoxically, though, this very limitation can be turned to an advantage. Addressing women, women's magazines may suppose that some in their audience are concerned about changes in the status of women and the greater participation of women in the labor force. As early as 1966, before the growth of the modern women's movement, women who were graduated from high school or college assumed they would work until the birth of their first child. Clarke and Esposito (1966) found that magazines published in the 1950s and addressed to these women (*Glamour, Mademoiselle,* and *Cosmopolitan*) stressed the joys of achievement and power when describing working roles for women and identifying desirable jobs. Magazines addressed to working women were optimistic about these women's ability to combine work and home, a message that women who felt that they should or must

work would be receptive to. Indeed, in 1958 Marya and David Hatch criticized *Mademoiselle, Glamour,* and *Charm* as "unduly optimistic" in their "evaluation of physical and emotional strains upon working women." Combining work and family responsibilities may be very difficult, particularly in working-class homes, since working class husbands refuse to help with housework (Rubin, 1976). But even working-class women prefer work outside the home to housework (Rubin, 1976, Vanek, forthcoming) since it broadens their horizons. Wanting to please and to attract a special audience of working women, magazine editors and writers may be freed to be somewhat responsive to new conditions, even as these same writers and editors feature stereotyped sex roles in other sections of their magazines.

Additional evidence of the albeit limited responsiveness of women's magazines to the changing status of women in the labor force is provided by their treatment of sex-role stereotypes since the advent of the women's movement. The modern women's movement is usually said to begin in the mid-1960s with the founding of the National Organization for Women. The date is of consequence for the study of sex roles in women's magazines because of Betty Friedan's involvement in the National Organization for Women. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique,* published in 1963, provided much of the ideology for the young movement. And, its analysis of sexism ("the problem with no name") was based in part on an analysis of the portrayal of sex roles in women's magazines. In an undated manuscript cited in Busby (1975), Stolz and her colleagues compared the image of women in magazines before and after the advent of the women's movement. Like others, they found no changes between 1940 and 1972. However, a time lag ("culture lag") is probably operating since nonmaterial conditions (ideas and attitudes) change more slowly than do material conditions (such as participation in the labor force).

Several very recent studies affirm that women's magazines may be introducing new conceptions of women's sex roles that are more conducive to supporting the increased participation of women in the labor force. Butler and Paisley[3] note that at the instigation of an editor of *Redbook,* twenty-eight women's magazines published articles on the arguments for and against the Equal Rights Amendment, a constitutional change prompted by the women's movement and the increased participation of women in the labor force. Franzwa's impression of the women's magazines she had analyzed earlier is that they revealed more sympathy with working women in 1975.[4] Sheila Silver (1976) indicates that a "gentle support" for the aims of the women's movement and a "quiet concern" for working women may now be found in *McCall's.* By the terms "gentle support" and "quiet concern," she means to indicate that the magazine approves equal pay for equal work and other movement aims, although it does not approve of the women's movement itself. That magazine and others, such as the *Ladies' Home Journal,* continue to concentrate upon helping women as housewives: They still provide advice on hearth and home. The women's magazines continue to assume that every woman will marry, bear children and "make a home." They do not assume that every woman will work some time in her life.

In sum, the image of women in the women's magazines is more responsive to change than is television's symbolic annihilation and rigid typecasting of women. The sex roles presented are less stereotyped, but a woman's role is still limited. A female child is always an eventual mother, not a future productive participant in the labor force.

Newspapers and Women: Food, Fashion, and Society

Following the argument developed thus far, one might expect the nation's newspapers to be even more responsive than magazines to the changing status of women in American society. With smaller circulations than the magazines and supposedly more responsive to a local population rather than a national one, newspapers might cater to their female readers in order to maintain or even increase the base of their circulation. Such an expectation seems particularly plausible because contemporary newspapers face increased costs and are suffering from the economic competition of the electronic media. But this expectation flies in the face of the actual organization of news-work, for newspapers are *not, strictly speaking, local media.* Rather, local newspapers' dependence upon national news services is sufficiently great for them to be

considered *components of a national medium*, designed to appeal to as many Americans as possible. As we have just seen, such a design encourages a rigid treatment of sex roles. An historical review of newspapers' treatment of news about women makes this result clearer.

Unlike the women's magazines, newspapers seek to appeal to an entire family. Historically, they have sought to attract female readers by treating them as a specialized audience, given attention in a segregated women's page, an autonomous or semi-autonomous department whose mandate precludes coverage of the "hard news" of the day. Although women's magazines have been published in the United States since the early nineteenth century, it took the newspaper circulation wars of the 1880s to produce the notion of "women's news." At that time, it appeared that every man who would buy a newspaper was already doing so. To build circulation by robbing each other of readers and attracting new readers, newspapers hired female reporters to write about society and fashion, as well as to expand "news" to include sports and comic strips. Items of potential interest to women were placed near advertisements of goods that women might purchase for their families. The origin of women's news reveals how long newspapers have traditionally defined women's interests as different from men's and how items of concern to women have become non-news, almost oddities. That view continues today. The budget for women's pages rarely provides for updating those pages from edition to edition, as is done for the general news, sports, and financial pages, sections held to be of interest to men. Finally, as is true of other departments as well, women's page budgets are sufficiently restricted to force that department's dependence upon the wire services.

During the nineteenth century's circulation wars, newspapers banded into cooperative services intended to decrease the costs of total coverage for each participating newspaper. A reporter would cover a story for newspapers in different cities, decreasing the need for scattered newspapers to maintain extensive bureaus in a variety of cities, such as Washington and New York. Furthermore, a newspaper in a small out-of-the-way town could be requested to share its story about an important event with newspapers from distant places that would not, under normal circumstances, have a reporter on hand. Aside from playing a limited role in the development of journalistic objectivity (Schudson, 1976), since stories were designed to meet the political-editorial requirements of diverse news organizations, the news services encouraged the expansion of definitions of news. Some provided features, such as comics and crossword puzzles. Others provided sports items, financial stories, and features of concern to women, as well as "hard news." Sometimes the women's items were scandalous revelations of the activities of "Society." More often, they were advice for the homemaker, such as recipes and articles about rearing children. In this century, syndicated and wire-service features include gossip columns about the celebrated and the notorious and advice to the lovelorn, such as that fictionalized in Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* or that represented by "Dear Abby."

For women's pages, items like these represent more than an economic investment purchased by a newspaper on behalf of its women's department. They are also an investment of space in the paper. Expected by readers to appear on a Monday, the column inches set aside for advice or gossip cannot be withdrawn for news of the women's movement. Similarly, it may be difficult to turn aside essentially prepaid feature stories about clothing and fashions supplied by the Associated Press or some other news syndicate in order to hire additional women's page staff interested in covering the changing status of women in American society. Commitments like these "nationalize" the local media, because the news syndicate or wire service reaches virtually every daily newspaper in the United States. Because the wire services *as businesses* are necessarily committed to pleasing all (or as many as possible) of their subscribing newspapers, they must shrink from advocating vast social changes. As in the case of television, what goes in New York may not go in Peoria, Illinois or Norman, Oklahoma. National in scope, syndicated and wire-service items for the women's page must seek an American common denominator. For the sex stereotyping of the women's pages to cease, the leadership of the Associated Press and the syndicates would have to be convinced that most of their subscribing papers wanted a different kind of story for their women's pages. Only then, it seems safe to say, would the papers serviced by the syndicates run the kinds of news about changes in the status of women

that may be found in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times,* whose women's pages develop their own stories through independent staffs.

For now, a characterization of women's pages provided by Lindsay Van Gelder (1974) seems apt. She speculates thus: Suppose a Martian came to earth and sought to learn about American culture by reading the women's pages. Bombarded by pictures of wedding dresses, the Martian might suppose that American women marry at least once a week. After all, a Martian might reason that newspapers and their women's pages reflect daily life. That view, we might add, would seem justified by the women's pages' intense involvement with the social life of the upper class, because upper-class power is a daily aspect of American life. Women's pages feed upon the parties, marriages, engagements, and clothing and food preferences of the wealthy and the celebrated. In this, like newspapers in general (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948), the women's pages encourage all citizens to emulate the upper class and to chase after positions of high status and institutionalized importance.

Newspapers' very emphasis upon established institutions and those with institutionalized power may account in part for their denigration of women and the women's movement (Morris, 1974). Most information in the general sections of newspapers concerns people in power, and newspapers justify this emphasis by stressing that such people work in or head societal institutions that regulate social intercourse. But communications researchers view the matter somewhat differently. They argue that newspapers exercise social control: By telling stories about such people, newspapers lend status to approved institutions and chastise lawbreakers. Historically, those few women mentioned in the general news pages belonged to the powerful groups in society. Gladys Engel Lang (Chapter 8 [in *Hearth and Home*]) suggests "the most admired woman" list probably reflects the publicity given to specific women. They are mainly wives of the powerful, celebrities and stars, and the few women who are heads of state. But women are mainly seen as the consorts of famous men, not as subjects of political and social concern in their own right.

This situation appears to be changing. Once ignored or ridiculed (Morris, 1974), the women's movement has received increasing coverage as it has passed through the stages characteristic of any social movement. As the women's movement became sufficiently routinized to open offices with normal business hours, some newspapers established a "women's movement beat" that required a reporter to provide at least periodic coverage of new developments (Chapter 11 [in *Hearth and Home*]). When increased legitimation brought more volunteers and more funds to wage successful law suits against major corporations and to lobby for the introduction of new laws, newspapers concerned with major institutions were forced to cover those topics (Chapter 12 [in *Hearth and Home*]). In turn, these successes increased the movement's legitimation. Legitimation also brought support of sympathizers within other organizations who were not movement members (Carden, 1973). Reporters having those other organizations as their beats are being forced to write about the ideas of the women's movement and women's changing status. For instance, the position of women and minorities in the labor force is becoming a required topic for labor reporters and those who write about changing personnel in the corporate world.

On the whole, though, despite coverage of women forcibly induced by the legitimation of the women's movement, newspapers continue to view women in the news as occasional oddities that must be tolerated. Attention to women is segregated and found on the women's page. As a recent survey of women's pages demonstrates (Guenin, 1975), most women's pages continue to cater to a traditional view of women's interests. They emphasize home and family, only occasionally introducing items about women at work. And those items are more likely to concern methods of coping with home and office tasks than they are with highlighting problems of sex discrimination and what the modern women's movement has done in combatting it. Like the television industry, appealing to a common denominator encourages newspapers to engage in the symbolic annihilation of women by ignoring women at work and trivializing women through banishment to hearth and home.

The Impact of the Media

As of this writing, women continue to enter the labor force at a faster rate than in the past—a rate that has far

exceeded the predictions of demographers and specialists on the labor force. What are we to make of this discrepancy between the sex-role stereotypes reflected in the media and the employment pattern of women? Does the discrepancy mean that because of culture lag, the mass media reflect attitudes discarded by the population and that the mass media have no effect on the behavior of women? That conclusion seems quite seductive, given the patterns we have described. By entering the labor force at increasing rates, women seem to be ignoring the media's message. But that conclusion flies in the face of *every* existing theory about the mass media. Communications theorists agree that the mass media are the cement of American social life. They are a source of common interest and of conversation. Children and adults may schedule their activities around favorite television programs. And the mass media serve to coordinate the activities of diverse societal institutions. To paraphrase Gerbner and Gross (1976), the mass media in general and television in particular have replaced religion as a source of social control in American life. Like the medieval church that broadcast one message to all social classes, all the mass media disseminate the same theme about women to all social classes: They announce their symbolic annihilation and trivialization.

Equally important, all available evidence about the impact of the media upon sex-role stereotyping indicates that the media encourage their audiences to engage in such stereotyping. They lead girls, in particular, to believe that their social horizons and alternatives are more limited than is actually the case. The evidence about the impact of television is particularly compelling.

Aimee Dorr Leifer points out (1975) that television provides many of the same socialization processes as the family. Like the family, television provides examples of good and bad behavior. The family socializes children through the patterning and power of those examples, and television programming also provides variation in the frequency, consistency, and power of examples. Leifer notes some indications that variations in these factors may have an impact on the child viewer (1975, p. 5). Finally, like the family, television can provide reinforcers (rewards and punishments) for behaviors. However, although the family can tailor reinforcers to the individual child, television cannot.

Most of the documentation regarding the impact of television upon children considers the effect of televised violence, primarily because of the national push for such research after the political assassinations and riots of the 1960s. That research is particularly interesting, for our purposes, because of the unanimity of the findings and because of the diverse methods used to analyze the topic.

Social science researchers frequently squabble about which methods of research are appropriate to explore a problem. All seem ready to admit that the ideal way to explore television's impact would be to perform a controlled experiment in a natural setting. Ideally, one would isolate a group that did not watch television, matching characteristics of individuals in that group with the characteristics of others whose viewing was designed by the researchers. The groups would be studied over a period of some years to see whether the effects of television are cumulative. Unfortunately, such a research design is impossible. Virtually all American homes have at least one television set; and so, one cannot locate children for the "control group"—those not exposed to television. To get around this problem, the violence researchers used both laboratory and field experiments. In the former, children were exposed to carefully selected (and sometimes specially prepared) videotapes, lasting anywhere from ten minutes to an hour. Behavior was analyzed before viewing the tape, while viewing it, and after viewing it. By carefully controlling which children would see what tape (designing "control groups"), the experimenters could comment upon the effect of televised violence on the children. Unfortunately, laboratory studies are artificial. For one thing, both sets of children are already dosed with violence in normal viewing, and both watch television under conditions different from their homes or classrooms. Thus, researchers cannot state in any definitive way how the research findings are related to activities in the real world.

The second approach, field experiments, also has difficulties. Such studies are invariably "correlational." The studies demonstrate that two kinds of behavior are found together, but cannot state whether one behavior causes the other or whether both are caused by a third characteristic of the children studied. For instance, in the violence studies, teams of researchers

asked youths and children about their viewing habits (and in one case tried to control those habits) and also measured (in a variety of ways) their antisocial behavior. Although viewing aggression and antisocial behavior were invariably found together, it remains possible that some third factor accounts for the variation.

The fact that different research teams interviewed children of different sexes, ages, social classes, and races from different parts of the country makes it fairly certain that a third factor was not responsible for the association of television viewing and antisocial behavior. And this conclusion is strengthened by the evidence provided by the laboratory studies. Furthermore, since the Surgeon General issued his report in 1973, additional field studies have found "that viewing televised or filmed violence in naturalistic settings increases the incidence of naturally-occurring aggression, that long-term exposure to television may increase one's aggressiveness, and that exposure to televised violence may increase one's tolerance for everyday aggression" (Leifer, 1975).

Although there are not as many studies, researchers have also established that television programming influences racial attitudes. Again, both laboratory and field studies were used. They demonstrate that white children may take their image of blacks from television (Greenberg, 1972), that the longer a white child watches "Sesame Street," the less likely that child will have negative attitudes toward blacks, and that positive portrayals of blacks produce more positive attitudes toward blacks, with negative portrayals producing little attitude changes (Graves, 1975). Aimee Leifer writes of these findings: "Apparently black children increase their [positive] image of their own group by seeing them portrayed on television, while white children are influenced by the portrayal, especially when it is uncomplimentary to blacks" (1975, p. 26). The evidence on the impact of the depiction of race is important in assessing television's impact on sex roles because content analyses provide strong documentation that television treats blacks and whites differently. For instance, in this volume Schuetz and Sprafkin's analysis of children's commercials and Lemon's analysis of patterns of domination document differential treatment by race as well as by sex.

Since the documentation on violence is extensive and the documentation on race is strong, it seems more than reasonable to expect that the content of television programs leads children to hold stereotyped images of sex roles. The power of the evidence on race and violence is important, because researchers have just started to ask about the impact of television on societal sex roles. What, then, do we know now?

Suppose, we asked earlier, that television primarily presents adult women as housewives. Also suppose that girls in the television audience "model" their behavior and expectations on that of television women. Such a supposition is quite plausible for psychologists note that "opportunities for modeling have been vastly increased by television" (Lesser, quoted in Cantor, 1975, p. 5). It is then equally plausible that girls exposed to television women may hope to be homemakers when they are adults, but not workers outside the home.

Do girls actually model their attitudes and behavior on the symbolically annihilated and dominated television woman?

This general question may be broken down into several component questions:

1. Do girls pay closer attention to female television characters than to male characters?
2. Do girls value the attributes of female characters or those of male characters?
3. Does television viewing have an impact on the attitudes of young children toward sex roles?
4. Do these attitudes continue as children mature?

As in the studies on violence and race, the available evidence includes laboratory and field studies.

1. *Do girls pay closer attention to female characters than to male characters?* In this volume, Joyce Sprafkin and Robert Liebert report the results of three laboratory experiments designed to see whether (a) boys and girls each prefer television programs featuring actors of their own sex; (b) whether the children pay closer attention when someone of the same sex is on the television screen; and (c) whether the children prefer to watch members of their own sex engaging in sex-typed (playing with a doll or a football) or nonsex-typed (as in reading with one's parents) behavior. To gather information, they enabled the tested children to switch a dial, choosing between an episode of "Nanny

and the Professor" and one of the "Brady Bunch." (Children like to watch situation comedies [Lyle and Hoffman, 1972].) For each program, episodes featuring male or female characters were selected with different episodes showing a boy or a girl engaging in sex-typed or nonsex-typed behavior. The findings are clear: In their viewing habits, children prefer sex-typing. They prefer programs featuring actors of their own sex; they watch members of their own sex more closely; and they also pay more attention when a member of their own sex engages in sex-typed behavior. According to Sprafkin and Liebert (1976), such behavior probably involves learning, for according to psychological theories children prefer to expose themselves to same-sex models as an information-seeking strategy; children are presumed to attend to same-sex peers because they already know that much social reinforcement is sex-typed and must discover the contingencies that apply to their own gender (see also Grusec and Brinker, 1972).

2. *Do girls value the attributes of female characters or of male characters?* The evidence on evaluation is not as clear. A variety of communications researchers, particularly a group working at Michigan State University, have performed a series of laboratory experiments to determine which specific characters boys and girls prefer, and why they do so. They found that invariably boys identify with male characters. Sometimes though (about thirty percent of the time) girls also identify with or prefer male characters (Miller and Reeves, 1976). When girls choose a television character as a model, they are guided by the character's physical attractiveness; boys are guided by strength (Greenberg, Held, Wakshlag, and Reeves, 1976; Miller and Reeves, 1976). Indeed, even when girls select a male character they appear to be guided by his physical attractiveness (Greenberg *et al.*, 1976). Girls who select male characters do *not* state they are basing their choices on the wider opportunities and fun available to men, although the girls who select female characters state that the characters do the same kind of things as they themselves do (Reeves, 1976).

3. *Does television viewing have an impact on the attitudes of young children toward sex roles?* Here the evidence is clearer. Frueh and McGhee (1975) interviewed children in kindergarten through sixth grade, asking them about the amount of time they spent watching television and testing the extent and direction of their sex-typing. The children who viewed the most television (twenty-five hours or more each week) were significantly more traditional in their sex-typing than those who viewed the least (ten hours or less per week). Because this study is correlational, one cannot know whether viewing determines sex-typing or *vice versa*. But television does seem to be the culprit, according to laboratory studies on television viewing and occupational preferences.

Miller and Reeves (1976; see also Pingree, 1976) asked children to watch television characters in nontraditional roles and then asked them what kind of jobs boys and girls could do when they grew up. Children exposed to programs about female police officers, for instance, were significantly more likely to state that a woman could be a police officer than were children who watched more traditional fare.

Beuf (1974) reports similar results from sixty-three interviews with boys and girls between the ages of three and six. Some girls had even abandoned their ambitions:

> One of the most interesting aspects of the children's responses lay in their reactions to the question: "What would you want to be when you grew up, if you were a girl (boy?)" Several girls mentioned that this other-sex ambition was their true ambition, but one that could not be realized because of their sex. Doctor and milkman were both cited in this regard. . . . One blond moppet confided that what she really wanted to do when she grew up was fly like a bird. "But, I'll never do it," she sighed, "because I'm not a boy." Further questioning revealed that a TV cartoon character was the cause of this misconception. (p. 143)

A boy said, "Oh, if I were a girl, I'd have to grow up to be nothing." Beuf reports, "Children who were moderate viewers appeared to exert a wider range of choice in career selection than heavy viewers. Seventy-six percent of the heavy viewers (compared with fifty percent of the moderate viewers) selected stereotyped careers for themselves" (p. 147).

4. *Do these attitudes continue as children mature?* It is known that sex-typing increases as children mature.

Second graders are more insistent in their sex-typing than first graders are. Adolescent boys and girls insist upon discriminating between behavior by sex. But little is known about the impact of television on this process. A longitudinal study presently underway at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication is the first attempt to answer this question systematically. Chapter 14 [in *Hearth and Home*], which contains a summary of that research, indicates that definitive answers are not yet available. However, analyses based on data from the second year of the study do tentatively indicate an association between television viewing and sexist attitudes. The association is weak, but it does suggest that the more a youngster watches television, the more likely the child will be to hold sexist attitudes.

What can we make of all this? The answer is: The mass media perform two tasks at once. First, with some culture lag, they reflect dominant values and attitudes in the society. Second, they act as agents of socialization, teaching youngsters in particular how to behave. Watching lots of television leads children and adolescents to believe in traditional sex roles: Boys should work; girls should not. The same sex-role stereotypes are found in the media designed especially for women. They teach that women should direct their hearts toward hearth and home.

At a time when over forty percent of the American labor force is female and when women with preschool children are entering the labor force in increasing numbers, the mass media's message has severe national consequences. As demographers (for example, Oppenheimer, 1970) and economists (for example, Bowen and Finegan, 1969) have shown, the maintenance and expansion of the American economy depends upon increasing the rate of female employment. Discouraging women from working presents a national dilemma. Furthermore, it is quite probable that the media's message discourages women from working up to their full capacity in the labor force. And by limiting the *kinds* of jobs held by fictional women, it may encourage the underemployment of women, a severe problem for those working-class families who can barely scrape by with two incomes (Rubin, 1976). And rigid sex-role stereotypes make the burden heavier for all working women who must still shoulder the responsibilities of home and family with limited assistance from their husbands. This problem is particularly acute in blue-collar families (Rubin, 1976). For the nation and for individuals, the message "women belong in the home" is an anachronism we can ill afford.

Throughout this book, in original essays reporting new research, social scientists delve further into the media's symbolic annihilation and trivialization of women. In introductions to each section of this volume, we relate the individual chapters to the themes we have considered here. Finally, in our last chapter we explore the policy implications of all these materials. How can the media be changed? we ask. How can we free women from the tyranny of media messages limiting their lives to hearth and home?

Notes

1. Government data indicate that at age twenty, American women are more likely to be members of the labor force than to be married. U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1976.
2. Sponsors do play a role in public broadcasting. As underwriters of programs, they may refuse to fund controversial materials. Some critics claim the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has avoided controversial topics to maintain corporate grants, and has designed dramatic series to appeal to corporations and foundations. According to informants at WNET, corporate underwriters object when the station delays airing their programs to squeeze in public appeals for contributions to the station.
3. Matilda Butler and William Paisley. Personal communication, Fall 1976.
4. 1976, personal communication.

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