Gender construction in prime-time sitcoms: "Roseanne" and "Murphy Brown"

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Gender construction in prime-time sitcoms: “Roseanne” and “Murphy Brown”

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1993
Gender Construction in Prime-Time
Sitcoms: *Roseanne* and
*Murphy Brown.*

by

Claudia C. Collins

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

Department of Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 1993
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ABSTRACT

*Gender Construction in Prime-Time Sitcoms: Roseanne and Murphy Brown*

analyzes gender portrayal in the highest rated situation comedies on network television in the United States in 1992. The research is constructed to examine whether gender, as presented in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, continues to be based on confining stereotypes or if female characters are being portrayed in an increasingly egalitarian manner. Findings from previous decades of media research on gender portrayal in network television are used as a standard for comparison. Variations in gender portrayal because of social class differences are also examined.

The main research methodology employed is content analysis. The sample consists of five programs from each series selected from the February and November ratings periods, reflecting twenty percent of each series' annual production. Other episodes of the programs are also consulted to examine overall character development and behavior of the characters within the context of the shows' five year histories.

Analysis revealed that, first, at the manifest level, *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* appear to defy prior gender stereotypes and present an image of female empowerment, in contrast to the previous depiction of female characters on television. Second, female gender-role construction varied by social class in two ways, in the suggestion that single life is more acceptable for a woman who enjoys economic stability, and in the suggestion that single motherhood is acceptable only if the mother is financially stable. Third, a discursive reading of the programs placed them within their socio-historical context,
focusing on the growth of women as consumers and as the largest segment of prime-time network television viewers. The programs were found to offer strong examples of feminine discourse, presenting serious social issues such as the changing face of the "typical" American family, the changing economic landscape, and problems of age and gender discrimination. The manifest message of gender equality thus was reinforced at the latent level.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David R. Dickens, who served as chair of my doctoral committee for five years, for his tireless efforts from the time this project was in the conceptual stage through each and every draft. His thoughtful editing suggestions were crucial up to the completed document. My committee members Dr. Donald E. Cams, Dr. Barbara G. Brents, and from the English Department, Dr. Charles C. Whitney, helped, each in their own special way, with suggestions and comments when my focus would drift.

I also appreciate the contributions of Dr. Barbara Cloud and Dr. Gage Chapel from the Greenspun School of Communication for their help in bringing relevant communication publications to my attention. And finally, a special thanks to Veona Hunsinger and Susie Lafrentz for their kind treatment of a frenetic graduate student.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies of gender portrayal on television have produced remarkably consistent findings in four decades of television research. These studies center around six major areas of focus and their findings. First, male characters outnumber female characters on television, ranging from a 4:1 to a 2:1 ratio (Head 1954; DeFleur 1964; Dominick 1979; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan, Jackson-Beeck 1979; Lemon 1977, 1978; Turow 1974; and Vest 1992). Second, women's roles are smaller than men's roles (Dominick 1979; Downs 1980, 1981; Meehan 1983). Third, male images are central, with limited amounts of female-female interaction portrayed (Mackey and Hess 1982; Signorelli 1989). Fourth, the age range of female characters tends to be much more limited than that for male characters (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli 1980; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974). Fifth, women characters are portrayed in a limited range of occupational roles (DeFleur 1964; Dominick 1979; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Miller and Reeves 1976; Tedesco 1974). Sixth, female characters are defined and limited by marital status more than male characters, with marriage and the workplace portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men (Downs 1981; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974; Weigel and Loomis 1981).

In order to determine whether that pattern has continued into the 1990s, this
research will focus on gender messages embodied in the two currently highest-rated network television situation comedies, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*. Prime-time programming and advertising have long been criticized for gender stereotyping. Stereotypes are confining, they limit human potential. "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" (Tuchman 1978, p.5). Several categories of gender-role stereotypes, taken from quantitative personality analyses, will be employed in this research. These studies, representing progressive decades of media research on gender, found that women are portrayed on television as more dependent, weaker, submissive, less intelligent, less task-oriented, more emotional and more peaceful (Tedesco 1974; Busby 1974; Downs 1981; Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992).

The research will be constructed to examine whether gender, as presented in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, continues to be based on confining stereotypes, or if women characters are now being portrayed in a more egalitarian manner, as seems to be the case. This task will require breaking down the structures of meaning relating to the belief that abilities and/or potential differ by gender. The oppositional positive and negative values attached to the female gender will be examined and the oppositional contradictions embodied within gender definitions will be revealed.

The main research methodology will be content analysis, a research technique for the objective, systematic description of the manifest and latent content of communication, which can be quantitative or qualitative. This content analysis will employ semiotic techniques for codifying meanings. Semiology, or semiotics, the science of signs, "is concerned, primarily, with how meaning is generated in ‘texts’...It deals with what signs are and how they function" (Berger 1982, p.14). The most common version of semiotics in communication research is based on the Swiss linguist Saussure’s notion of language as
a system of signs that express ideas. Within the context of this research, television programs will be the texts, the objects of analysis. *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* contain meanings both in the signs and the hidden system holding the signs together.

The research will then focus on characteristics societally defined as feminine, containing its oppositional elements, to determine whether the definitions hold constant or if the sign systems are affected by the variable of social class. Prior mass communication research found differences in ways women's magazines appealed to audiences of different social classes (Lopate 1978) and World War II messages designed to encourage women to work also varied due to the class of women at which they were aimed (Honey 1984). Since *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* focus on female characters of different social classes, working-class and professional respectively, they present the opportunity to examine whether gender is presented as a universally ascribed characteristic or if gender construction varies by class membership. And if these variations do exist, how are they manifested, and to what degree? This raises the important question of whether the sign systems that define gender have different, or oppositional, relations when class is a variable.

Gender-role definitions will then be examined discursively in terms of the socio-historical context within which both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* are produced and viewed by an audience of approximately thirty million viewers each week (total sixty million). Several researchers suggest that utilizing discourse analysis has the potential to reverse findings of non-stereotypical depiction at the manifest level (Byars 1987; Fiske 1987; Imray and Middleton 1983). Areas of potential latent-level stereotypes have previously been found in the depiction of female competitiveness (Byars 1987; McRobbie), whether single characters or women characters are treated as children (Faludi 1992; Loeb 1990), and where limitations such as the heavy personal costs of professional success for women are emphasized (Dow 1990).

The data analysis will be organized in terms of three hypotheses or research
questions:

H1.  The two most popular prime-time television sitcoms (1992), Roseanne and Murphy Brown, present the manifest message to viewers that they are non-stereotypical and thus empower women. Qualitative content analysis will examine Roseanne and Murphy Brown in light of previous communications research findings on gender in television. When examining a situation such as the ratio of male to female characters presented in prime-time television, character portrayal adds a crucial dimension in trying to determine if sex-role stereotyping is maintained or lessened.

H2.  The characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown clearly represent different social classes and this class distinction influences their gender construction. Social class will be examined here as a possible intervening variable in gender definition.

H3 Female characters in prime-time television who are presented as role models of equality at the manifest level are depicted in ways that reproduce the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level. Here the two programs will be examined within the socio-historical context in which they are created and viewed to facilitate a discursive determination of latent messages.

The research will begin with individual character analysis to determine to what extent Roseanne and Murphy Brown are depicted as empowered women vis-a-vis prior representations of women on television (H1), and whether their portrayed gender characteristics are uniquely individual or representative of their respective social class positions (H2). We will then employ discourse analysis to place these findings in their socio-historical context (H3). The programs will then be compared to each other to determine whether the manifest message of empowerment (H1), and the less obvious message of class differences in gender definitions (H2), are undermined because gender is the ultimate definer of the characters' capabilities, limitations, and individual potential (H3).

This research will also include a discussion of the ideological implications of the kinds of pleasure that people derive from watching television. It will examine the
possibility of substitute empowerment that viewers may derive from watching these programs. One cannot assume a hegemonic or unilinear reception when discussing a dominant message since viewers often reject such messages (Dow 1990; Fiske 1987; Grossberg and Treichler 1987; Radway 1986; and Rakow 1986). The unilinear view of interpretation is a theoretical offspring of hegemony theory, incorporating the concept of a dominant message and one "true" meaning in a cultural message. On the other hand, polysemic interpretation incorporates the idea of multiple potential messages which individuals or groups can receive. Thus, this research will explore the possibility of a multiplicity of subcultural interpretations. Demographic data on program audiences, matched with program content, will be analyzed to suggest what some of these multiple interpretations might be.
It has long been argued that television plays an important role in the socio-cultural conditioning process. Media research reveals that while the average high school graduate has spent 11,000 hours in the classroom, he or she has spent nearly twice as much time, an estimated 20,000 hours, viewing television. By age 20, the average American has been exposed to more than 700,000 television commercials. National research indicates that on the average, in the United States at least one television set is turned on for seven hours and seven minutes in every home, each day (Madison Avenue July, 1986, p.16). While people perceive their lives to be busier with less leisure time (Harris Poll 1984-1986), University of Maryland sociologist, John Robinson claims that idle time is actually on the rise and most free time is devoted to television (Las Vegas Review Journal Nov 19, 1989).

Sociologists, psychologists and mass communications researchers argue that television has become the primary unit of socialization, surpassing the family, the educational system, and religion, (Kalba 1975; Leiss, Klein and Jhally 1986), and that television advertising “creates structures of meaning” and is, in fact, “selling us ourselves” (Williamson 1978, p.13). Stuart Ewen (1976) identifies advertisers as “captains of consciousness” and links the growth of television to the growth of consumer society. Arguments that television acts in the role of significant other, drawn from the definition of
G. H. Mead, claim that television acts upon its viewers to "develop, maintain, and revise their self concepts, including perceptions of gender and role identification" (Newton and Buck 1985, p.294).

A number of social scientists contend that television is a powerful societal force. Kellner claims that television's "ideas, images, information, entertainment are ubiquitous forces of socialization" (1981, p.31). Ben Bagdikian appraises television as a powerful force shaping the public mind, "the mass media become the authority at any given moment for what is true and what is false, what is reality and what is fantasy, what is important and what is trivial" (1987, p.xviii). Todd Gitlin views television as a strong ideological system, "the media specialize in orchestrating everyday consciousness and by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralized symbolic capacity...they certify reality as reality...the mass media have become core systems for the distribution of ideology" (1980, p.2). "Television is the most thoroughly attended to, most pervasive, and probably most influential means of propagating ideas in this country today. It can be instantaneous in its reach, intimate in its reception. It can exercise the most extraordinary sensory and emotional appeal. You can find authorities who believe that it molds minds, fixes modes of perception, and determines what is thought of as desirable and even real for hundreds of millions of people" (Littlejohn 1975, p.65).

Althusser (1971) identifies television as part of the ideological state apparatus which controls the means of ideological production. Mander (1978) argues that television keeps people passively in their homes rather than actively participating in the world. Television replaces actual experience with vicarious experience. Brenkman (1979) claims that home consumption of mass media replaces other more active and participatory forms of association with vicarious consumption of media images. Collective experience has become a "culture of privatization." Television is even blamed by health studies for the higher body weight of today's children, and the percentage of overweight has been correlated to higher viewing times.
The concept of vicarious fulfillment is a factor spotlighted by McQuail to explicate the economic basis of the culture of mass society: "the social structure of most modern societies is so ordered that large majorities are deprived of high material rewards, and are unable to attain the goals which motivate economic activity. In such a situation, a vicarious fulfillment can be achieved by identification with stars and personalities of the entertainment world, and by vicarious involvement in their successful way of life" (1969, p.77).

The concept of vicarious fulfillment raises the issue of ideological implications about the source of viewers' pleasure. In both the spring and fall seasons of 1992 *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* drew the largest audiences of any sitcoms on television. This raises the question, what do these top-rated programs provide for the combined total of sixty million viewers who watch their weekly episodes?

Gans' (1968) analysis of New York television news and current affairs viewers challenged the widespread view that television audiences prefer fantasy content. However, McQuail contends that "people do seek to participate vicariously in a more exciting and glamorous way of life... they do seek escape from an drab and limiting reality, and do also find in mass media attendance a familiar ritual which provides reassurance, companionship and meaningfulness" (1969, p.78). McRobbie (1991) found a main attraction of teen girls magazines to be their "function of reassuring sameness." Gans (1968) contention about the news and information needs of viewers might be affected in 1993 by what viewers now classify as news and information programs, including; *Oprah, Donahue, Current Affair, Geraldo, Entertainment Tonight* and *Hard Copy*. Sleazy tabloid programs and talk shows pandering to the basest interests are considered, by viewers, to be informative programming that many classify as news. Again the question must be asked, what factors create this "drab and limiting reality", and how has an inanimate object (television) come to provide "reassurance, companionship, and meaningfulness?"

Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan and Jackson-Beeck support the theory that television has become a prime source of socially constructed reality for many people which
provides "a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, how things are related and what is right" (1979, p.179). As people become more dependent on vicarious sources of experience through television, they are exposed to a view of the world with repetitive and pervasive patterns that are internally consistent. Viewers tend to assimilate the meanings within these patterns because they watch television "largely non-selectively and by the clock rather than by the program" (Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan and Jackson-Beeck 1979, p.180). They also contend that "violence plays a key role in TV's portrayal of the social order." Results from a series of surveys concluded that heavy television viewers tended to give the "television answer" to questions about social violence. One of the major problems with this thesis according to critics is the assumption of causation. Does a view of the world as violent predispose heavy television viewing? What are the situational life experiences of the heavy viewers? Are they more likely to have been exposed to actual violent situations? Unanswered questions such as these lead to charges that this research reverts to hegemonic, mass society ideas or the belief in a passive audience receiving a singular message, "the Gerbner position tends to regard the mass media as capable of imposing categories through which reality is perceived, by-passing potential neutralizing factors and engulfing the audience in a new symbolic environment. By their critics, however, media influence is regarded as essentially differentiated, filtered through and refracted by the diverse backgrounds, cultures, group affiliations and life-styles of individual audience members" (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982, p.260).

Mass media dominance relates to the area of news as well as entertainment programming. Television has become the primary source of news for the majority of Americans, structuring the way we view our world, what aspects of that world we are exposed to, how they are defined, and ultimately how we interpret them. In 1992, candidate Bill Clinton won the presidency from incumbent George Bush in a campaign where talk show appearances became the primary battleground. As national television critic Tom Shales summarized: "Bill Clinton didn't just appear on talk shows; he bantered with
radio disc jockeys, and he tooted his sax with Arsenio Hall's house band...George Bush raced belatedly to imitate this new accessibility, but he couldn't match Clinton's folksy, aw-shucksiness and guy-next-door charm" (Associated Press, Dec. 28, 1992).

Critical media sociologists like Ben Bagdikian (1987) contend that a “media monopoly” selects and conveys what it defines as the most important stories of the day. Todd Gitlin states that this is structured through “news frames,” journalistically accepted ways of viewing the world where the media orchestrate everyday consciousness by selecting certain versions of reality over others, “media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (1980, p.7).

Network television executives respond to the charges that a media monopoly controls viewers' minds through news and entertainment programming, by saying that they provide only what viewers want. If the public doesn't like a program, they don't watch it, and it is taken off the air because of low ratings and thus low profitability. Several social researchers (Cantor 1980; Ball-Rokeach 1988) support this view of a multiplicity of viewer choices and see program production influenced by audience response. Clearly, it cannot be argued that networks ignore ratings. But there is an entire structure of standards of audience acceptability related to the process of programming to the lowest common denominator to achieve the highest ratings. Within the liberal pluralist tradition, we are regularly exposed to studies which blame viewers for the types of programs they chose to watch rather than acknowledging the ideologically limited range of available programs.

Similar claims have been made about other mass media forms. Angela McRobbie (1982) responded critically to claims that the popular teen magazine Jackie is "merely giving the girls what they want": "Each magazine, newspaper or comic" (read sitcom, drama or soap) "has its own conventions and its own style. But within these conventions and through them a concerted effort is nevertheless made to win and shape the consent of the readers to a particular set of values" (McRobbie 1982, p.264). This she calls "framing
the world for its readers, and through a variety of techniques endowing with importance those topics chosen for inclusion."

A 1992 Report from an American Psychological Association Task Force produced a five year review of research on the impact of television on society. The report gave some recognition to the limited range of television programs, “The major flaw in American broadcasting is that commercial television must generate revenue through programming that attracts large, heterogeneous, affluent audiences which do not represent the majority of viewers.” This has been described by communications specialists as the “lowest common denominator” factor. The report also noted that collectively, every year, Americans spend “20 million years of human life” with the television sets in their homes turned on and some American Psychological Association members claimed that television affects viewers' thinking and “induces a generally passive, intellectually lazy approach to dealing with the world” (Associated Press Feb 26, 1992). This supports the theory that television replaces active interaction with vicarious experiences discussed above.

Despite their theoretical orientation or area of study, all of these researchers find the mass media to be a powerful force in shaping our reality: “network television, one of the most powerful social forces in America, is assuming increasingly important and complex social functions in contemporary societies. Television networks determine the structure and content of news and information as well as the dominant forms, values, and ideologies in television entertainment” (Kellner 1981, p.31). According to television critic Tom Shales this influence reached new heights in 1992: "television sets the agenda. Television is the agenda. Shocking and heartbreaking television pictures of starving children in Somalia helped motivate the American mission of mercy to that country" (Associated Press Dec. 28, 1992). This, however, was not uniformly true in 1992, as pictures of human suffering and the atrocities of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia-Herzegovina did not bring a U.S. or United Nations rescue mission.

Three theoretical orientations dominate mass communication research: Mass Society
theory; Liberal Pluralist theory; and Marxist theory (classical/ political economic, cultural/ hermeneutic and structuralist.)

Mass society theory arose within the context of the political, economic and social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. Fear of technology created the belief that mass media posed great evils for the mindless masses. Sociologists focused on the threat of moral disorder which they predicted would be part of a society which seemed to be creating rootless individuals disassociated from their primary groups by urbanization and the growth of factories. Ferdinand Tönnies (1897) defined this social process as the move from gemeinschaft, or the traditional community with strong social solidarity based on tradition and binding personal relationships; to gesellschaft, or modern society with weak social solidarity and impersonal relationships based on self-interest and competition.

Durkheim denounced the disintegration of traditional forms of social relationships from the sacred to the profane. He claimed this loss of social cohesion led to anomie and, in some cases, suicide. Marx condemned the alienation which resulted from the removal of workers from the product of their labor. And Weber expressed fear of the "iron cage of bureaucracy". This mass society concept is based on a romanticized and idealized view of the past and a total repudiation of the serious problems and inequities of pre-industrial society.

The new technology of the Industrial Revolution also made possible the creation of mass media which, by association, was similarly feared. When the sea of drifting, anomic, alienated individuals were transplanted from their rural gemeinschaft, separated from their families to move to the factories and urban gesellschaft, it was thought that the resultant mindless mass audience would be susceptible to the evils of media control, made possible by the evils of advancing technology. Thus mass society theory created, among other things, a fear of the media as a powerful control device over an anomic public unable to escape its influence. This mass society would involve several levels: cultural, political and social. High culture was seen to be trivialized by the mass culture spread by the new
media. A politically vulnerable mass audience would fall subject to influential media propaganda. And the social shift brought by urbanization and industrialization would expose the new rootless, anomic masses to the commercialized influences of the elites, "a very specific historical image came to dominate this scenario: the breakdown of European societies under the double assault of economic depression and fascism: the latter seen in terms of the unleashing of irrational political forces, in which the propaganda media had played a key role" (Hall 1982, p.58).

Mass society theory had a tremendous impact on twentieth century media studies, especially those of American sociologists steeped in the positivist tradition. Daniel Bell claimed that, besides Marxism, mass society theory was "probably the most influential theory in the western world today" (1960, p.21). Taken simplistically, the negative threatening consensus predicated by mass society theory, combined with the growth of mass media in the twentieth century, led to the development of "a relatively uncomplicated view of the media as all-powerful propaganda agencies brainwashing a susceptible and defenceless public. The media propelled 'word bullets' that penetrated deep into its inert and passive victims. All that needed to be done was to measure the depth and size of penetration through modern scientific techniques" (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott 1982, pp.11-12).

While the negative doomsaying of mass society theory is perceived as a weakness, it also created a recognition of massive societal upheaval and its potential impact. Much of that upheaval has negatively affected traditional social support structures without offering adequate alternatives. When placed in the appropriate historical context, its prediction of the growth in strength of todays' mass media was amazingly accurate. Television has replaced the family and educational system as a primary socialization force as evidenced in the statistic that the average high school graduate has spent 11,000 hours in a classroom and 20,000 hours in front of a television set. The greatest limitation of mass society theory is the assumption of a similar minded mass audience which will, in unison, receive a
message in the same manner.

The task of measuring the impact of stimulous-response mass society theory was taken up by liberal-pluralist American sociology, dominated by the positivist paradigm from the 1930s into the 1960s, when mass society theories were apparently disavowed by empirical research. While the mass society theorists had employed little empirical methodology, Durkheim's statistically based *Suicide* (1897) was a notable exception, the methods employed by the liberal-pluralists were largely quantitative in an effort to produce value-neutral and scientific results. However, despite these claims, it will be argued that liberal pluralist media studies were "predicated on a very specific set of political and ideological presuppositions. These presuppositions, however, were not put to the test, within the theory, but framed and underpinned it as a set of unexamined postulates."... creating "a heady theoretical concoction which, for a long time, passed itself off as 'pure science" (Hall 1982, p.59). Liberal pluralism was not atheoretical as some have charged, there are always ideological underpinnings to even the most 'scientific', empirical research. "Empirical communications research is based upon theoretical models of society even if these are often unexamined and unstated" (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott 1982, p.15).

Liberal-pluralist research also reflected a strong behavioralist perspective. Media effects were ostensibly measured in terms of behavioral changes, mainly voting decisions. These media studies primarily focused on the power of the media to influence opinions, values and ultimately, behavior. The cumulative body of liberal-pluralist research which was seen to disprove mass society theory was summarized in Joseph Klapper's *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960). The comprehensive review of published early liberal-pluralist research on the effects of mass media on opinions, values and behavior was designed to sound the death knell on mass society theory and signal what Daniel Bell called the "end of ideology", comfortably replaced by value-neutral positivism. Klapper concluded that Frankfurt school critical theorists such as Horkheimer & Adorno (1944) and mass society theorists such as C. Wright Mills (1951, 1956) had incorrectly attributed
major socio-political power to the mass media. "Mass communications ordinarily do not
serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects" (Klapper 1960, p.8).

While direct audience effects were not found in this research, the discovery of
opinion leaders, the two-step flow of communication, and the function of gatekeepers were
important contributions to the understanding of communication. Perhaps the greatest
strength of liberal pluralist research was the discovery of mediating factors in audience
influence. Studies of audiences reveal that media organizations adjust their programming to
satisfy at least a perceived audience, although it will later be argued that the changes are
merely small adjustments within the same ideological paradigm. Additionally, when
placing the early effects research within the historical context of the 1930s to the 1960s,
mass media was not as pervasive and invasive as it is today. Rapid growth in television
programming came in the 1960s along with widespread distribution of television sets in
homes.

A weakness in most early liberal-pluralist research was its lack of attention to the
wider social context of the influences and behaviors it claimed to scientifically measure.
"Almost all of the research carried out during their heyday of mass media studies in the
United States (the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s) focused on the effects of content
without recognition that content was created within a social system" (Ball-Rokeach &
Cantor 1986, p.13). As a result of Klapper's work many sociologists adopted his "weak
media - powerful audience" position.

Ideologically this served to transform the perception of the evil, controlling media
envisioned by mass society theory into a positive societal force. Now the "fourth estate",
operating independently of governmental or any other evil control, was redefined as a
benevolent information source rather than a negative controlling force. Pluralism
empirically transformed the concept of the undifferentiated, passive and inert mass
audiences into active participants happily selecting from a neutral and varied plethora of
information and entertainment choices. Lazarsfeld's opinion leader hypothesis was taken
as concrete evidence that what was previously believed to be homogeneous masses were, in actual fact, heterogeneous, with information safeguard filters provided by their primary groups; family, church and business community.

The masses were now safely heterogeneous and informed, the media functioned as the benevolent fourth estate, and media organizations were viewed as operating in an open and competitive fashion. Liberal-pluralism and its underlying ideology had taken the negatives of mass society theory and, in the face of rising multi-billion dollar media organizations, redefined the audience and media itself as fulfilling positive functions in a pluralist democratic society. Bell proclaimed the end of ideology in this classless society. Stuart Hall saw something else: "the installation of pluralism as the model of modern industrial social order represented a moment of profound theoretical and political closure. It was not, however, destined to survive the testing times of the ghetto rebellions, campus revolts, counter-cultural upheavals and anti-war movements of the late 1960s" (1982, p. 61).

The media in this theoretical utopia reinforced values and norms which were seen to be consensually founded. The media was benevolently functional in this ideologically pluralist society.

However, just as American sociology experienced a paradigmatic conflict in the 1960s, the effect was also felt in the areas of sociological media research and mass communications studies. While positivism was being challenged by interactionist and critical theorists, American sociological media inquiry was challenged by the seeming failure of positivist, or liberal-pluralist, research to empirically find the media effects predicated by mass society theory. The apparent consensus achieved by the liberal-pluralist approach was attacked simultaneously from within the paradigm for its inconsistencies, and externally, from other paradigms, for the flaws in its unrecognized but strong theoretical and ideological underpinnings. The first difficulties arose from within deviance studies of the 1960s. Defining "deviant" in relation to a popular "consensus" of normality proclaimed
by liberal-pluralism brought questions of a socially defined and historically variable normative structure. The ideologically based silences relating to questions like "who has the power to construct these definitions?" and "what type of social order do these definitions support?" were exposed as problematic. That challenged the notion of a "naturally" achieved consensus and called into question the social role of the media: "for if the media were not simply reflective or 'expressive' of an already achieved consensus, but instead tended to reproduce those very definitions of the situation which favoured and legitimated the existing structure of things, then what had seemed at first as merely a reinforcing role had now to be reconceptualized in terms of the media's role in the process of consensus formation" (Hall 1982, pp.63-64).

This concern raised a second issue relating to the question of whether the media merely provided a window on the world "reflecting" reality. Or if reality itself was constructed, then the process of construction, or signification, had to be examined. "Representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean" (Hall 1982, p.64).

The concept of representation affected the methodology of content analysis which required replacing the notion of quantitative frequency counts to ascertain manifest messages, with a focus on message content to be examined in terms of its ideological structuration. "From the viewpoint of the media, what was at issue was no longer specific message-injunctions, by A to B, to do this or that, but a shaping of the whole ideological environment: a way of representing the order of things which endowed its limiting perspectives with that natural or divine inevitability which makes them appear universal, natural and coterminous with 'reality' itself" (Hall, 1982, p.65).

The difficulties concerning the creation of meaning which arose from deviance studies paved the way for an ideological shift both within pluralist studies and outside in
the critical approach leading to a strength of later liberal pluralist research: the concentration on situational meaning and context. Gitlin (1978), among others, has re-evaluated some of the "conclusive" empirical data from the classic effects studies and found that they do not support the widely touted contentions of a weak media. The weak media theory was a profound challenge to economic based Marxist studies and hegemony theories. Upon reexamination, the pluralist media studies "revealed the central role of the media in consolidating and fortifying the values and attitudes of audience members" (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott 1982, p.14). However, within the liberal-pluralist ideology this was redefined as a positive factor framed within consensus theory and the end of ideology. It is the very exposition of the ideology underlying liberal-pluralism that produces conclusions about media power similar to those of critical and Marxist theorists.

The third theoretical orientation in communications study is Marxist theory. Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott (1982) separate marxist media studies into three areas: political economic; cultural; and structuralist. Grossberg (1984) calls these roughly equivalent areas: classical, hermeneutic and discursive. Grossberg defines the task of marxist interpretation as the duality of dealing with the politics of textuality and the problematic of cultural studies..."to describe (and intervene in) the way messages are produced by, inserted into, and function within the everyday lives of concrete human beings so as to reproduce or transform structures of power and domination" (1984, p.393). The politics of textuality is examined by focusing on the process of encoding, or textual production; and decoding, or textual reception. The problematic of cultural studies focuses on the relationship between culture and society or how particular structures of meaning determine, or are determined by, social processes. All marxian analyses focus on, in varying degrees, textuality and/or the process of signification in order to examine and characterize the power of the media.

The classical or political economy view of the media takes as its reference early Marxian theory. Political economists, using some empirical and ahistorical methods, tend
to view the media as a window on reality which distorts because of false consciousness. Murdock and Golding claim the political economists first analyze the form and content of cultural artifacts and then work backwards to describe their economic base: "the characteristic outcome is a top-heavy analysis in which an elaborate autonomy of cultural forms balances insecurely on a schematic account of economic forces shaping their production" (1977, p.17). The power of the media is located in the economic processes and structures of media production.

The political economy or classical paradigm of marxian media analysis sets up an argument between economy and ideology. To the political economists ideology is, simultaneously, less important than and determined by the economic base. Ideology is seen as false consciousness. "Also, since the fundamental nature of class struggle is grounded in economic antagonisms, the role of the media is that of concealing and misrepresenting these fundamental antagonisms. Ideology becomes the route through which struggle is obliterated rather than the site of struggle" (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott 1982, p.26). Political economists "conceive the economic level as not only a 'necessary' but a 'sufficient' explanation of cultural and ideological effects" (Hall 1980, p.15). Later we will see this position shifted to a stress on ideology over economy by the structuralists.

Grossberg (1984, pp.394-399) breaks down the classical or political economy advocates into three groups: false consciousness; critical theory; and economism. All view culture as reflecting society and being determined by its economic base. By directly relating the text to the social/economic structure, they perceive the decoding process to be simple because the text is transparent in its protection of the economic structure. Textuality is never questioned. The audience is seen as passive, unaware of the way messages act upon them.

In the false consciousness position, texts are collections of images which function to protect class interests. While false consciousness advocates perceived the text as
distorting but representational, critical theorists viewed the text as a form of alienated consumption. Economism treats the cultural text as commodity, negating the practice of interpretation altogether. It also refuses to address the issue of the relationship between culture and society replacing it instead with questions of economic determinism. Thus the political economy or classical paradigm of media study emphasizes the economic aspect of the base/superstructure model, negating the influence of culture which is only a reflection or mechanical reproduction of the social. A major limitation of this approach is the simplistic belief that the text is transparent, i.e. easily decodable because it is directly related to the economic structure.

The second marxist paradigm characterizing the power of the media is the cultural or hermeneutic approach rejects the economic determinism of the base/superstructure model, instead viewing the media as a powerful force in shaping public consciousness. When culture represents, rather than reflects, society the process of decoding texts becomes more difficult. “Such positions assume that the relationship between cultural texts and social reality is always mediated by processes and structures of signification. Thus, texts reveal their social significance, not on the surface of images and representations, but rather, in the complex ways that they produce, transform and shape meaning-structures” (Grossberg 1984, p.399). Texts must be carefully interpreted, social experience is a mediating structure. While the classical paradigm assumed a passive audience, the cultural/hermeneutic paradigm assumes a much more active ideological role of the audience related to the construction of power relations.

Grossberg (1984, 399-409) breaks the hermeneutic approach down into four categories, separated by their differing views on the sources of the process of mediation between cultural texts and social reality: structural mediation; mediation through appropriation; mediation through signifying practices; and mediation through narrative. The mediation through structure position finds the text and social experience to be linked by a common structure or organization of meaning in which encoded interests and decoded
interpretation are joined. The mediation through appropriation position focuses on the cultural struggles between social groups reflecting a contradiction between meaningfully organized formations. The British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies has taken a leadership role in the focus on subcultures and subcultural styles in which texts must be viewed in relationship to producers (encoding) and consumers (decoding). Stuart Hall (1980) utilized semiotic techniques to argue that texts are not univocal but have a variety of meanings. And he denounced the belief that language, or the surface of the text, determined signification. Cultural producers do, however, encode "preferred meanings" into the structure of texts which support the economic and political power structure. This encoding does not, however, ensure uniform decoding. Thus recognition is given to the multiplicity of subcultural interpretations.

Mediation through signifying practices locates meaning within the specific cultural mode of production. With influence from Brecht, Benjamin and Bakhtin, advocates of this position view culture and society, encoding and decoding, as competing forms of signifying practices. For example, Hebdige (1979) found style to be an alternative mode of production (encoding) rather than merely an alternative construction of meaning (decoding). The fourth approach in the hermeneutic or cultural paradigm locates narrative structure as the basis for the cultural interpretation of texts. Mediation through narration focuses on the actual narrative structure as a way to represent, not reflect, the contradictions of social experience. Narrative theory comes to this point via Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Greimas and Bakhtin as well as the tradition of historical narrative. Here the processes of encoding and decoding are constructed within the textual narrative through processes of identification.

The third marxist paradigm characterizing the power of the media is the discursive or structural model in which culture produces not only structures of experience but also experience itself. In the work of Althusser we find a revival of the base/superstructure model along with the notion of economic determinism whereby the media operate primarily
through ideology. This paradigm stresses a more active role of ideology, viewing the media as "ideological state apparatuses" rather than the classically defined repressive state apparatuses. The structural/discursive tradition also incorporates Saussure's linguistics, Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology, Barthes semiotics, and Lacan's psychoanalysis with a focus on the internal relations or processes of signification and representation utilizing a qualitative theoretical method of textual analysis.

Althusser perceived ideology to be an unconscious system of representation of the imaginary relationship between individuals and the real conditions of their existence. This shifted the marxian notion of ideology away from ideas that constitute a distorted reflection of reality as seen in the classical/political economic paradigm. The idealism versus economism battle resurfaces, however, here economics is seen as the necessary, but not sufficient, explanation of the nature and existence of ideological superstructures. Ideology concerns the transmission of systems of signification across class lines.

Grossberg (1984, pp.410-417) outlines three positions which represent the structural or discursive paradigm. All three oppose both the economism of the classical/political economic paradigm and the cultural/hermeneutic split of text and experience by collapsing the social into the cultural. These include: positioning the subject; articulating the subject; and the power and materiality of culture.

Structural psychoanalyst Lacan believed that ideology functions by positioning the subject. Althusser adapted this view by specifying ideological practice occurs at the point where the subject is inserted into signification. Because media consumption is part of a larger intertextual process of encoding and decoding, one can find alternative or resistant interpretations coded into the text. Grossberg (1984, p.411) calls these "structured absences" within the narrative text or particular moments which it is unable to code according to the underlying ideology of the producers encoding process.

The concept of articulating the subject finds social reality to be the product of multiple signifying practices. It is the social context of the text which gives it recognizable
ideological impact. This position is evidenced in some of Stuart Hall's work (1983) where he finds gender and racial contradictions to be as fundamental as economic contradictions. Hall goes back to Gramsci's hegemony theory when he rejects Lacan and Althusser's belief in the psychoanalytic positioning of the subject. He finds hegemony theory to be a more flexible and less economistic way to conceptualize the relationship among the ideological, social, political and economic processes. Hegemony is taken as cultural leadership rather than totalitarian control. "It involves the colonization of popular consciousness or common sense through the articulation of specific social practices and positions within ideological codes or chains of connotational significance" (Grossberg 1984, 412).

The third position within the structuralist/discursive paradigm refuses to assume any absolute distinction between the signifying culture and society. It is a form of postmodern determinism. The power and materiality of culture is seen in an expansion of the concept of textual effects (decoding) to produce multiple planes of effects beyond the ideological. The materiality of a text, i.e. its existence at a social site, or in a social context, fractures and disperses a multiplicity of effects. Going beyond the idea of "silent meanings", Foucault (1981) finds power located in a network in which events make possible other events, not in the apparatus itself.

As a whole the structuralist/discursive paradigm places the audience into the very structures of cultural textuality. And it emphasizes the function of ideology in contrast to the classical/political economic emphasis on economic determinism.

All three marxist paradigms; political economic/classical, cultural/ hermeneutic, and structural/discursive, share a common belief that the power of the media is ideological but they differ sharply in the ways in which that ideology is conceptualized. The political economic/ classical paradigm focuses on the economic determination of ideology; the cultural/hermeneutic paradigm views the media as a powerful force in shaping public consciousness and popular consent; and the structural/discursive paradigm concentrates on the internal signification systems of the media. A major strength of these marxist
theoretical approaches is the emphasis of each, in varying degrees, on the encoding process with its political, economic and social components and the decoding process with preferred meanings often being undermined by subcultural interpretation. An associated limitation of these approaches comes with their focus on either the encoding or decoding process with varying degrees of lack of concern with, or even acknowledgement of, the other.

Major differences divide the liberal-pluralist perspective and the marxist approaches that will inform this research project. Each proclaims differing views on every aspect of media study. Their views conflict about society itself, media organizations, control of the media, media professionals and media audiences. It is important to recognize that there are a wide range of views internally within the various segments of each theoretical approach.

The basic difference between liberal pluralist and marxist theory concerning mass communications can be found in the contrast between the belief that media merely reflects the reality of a societal consensus or whether it re-presents a view of the situation which legitimates the existing political and economic structure. Representation "implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean" (Hall 1982, p.64). In research, the contrast between a natural consensus and a manufactured consensus is a basic difference that ideologically defines what is looked at, how it is viewed, what questions are asked, and what methodology is utilized.

These two theoretical positions have differing views about society, media organizations, and media audiences. Liberal pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interests. Media organizations are bounded organizational systems with autonomy from the state, political parties and pressure groups. The media is seen to be controlled by an autonomous managerial elite and its professionals have a wide degree of flexibility. To the liberal pluralists, media audiences have a wide variety of choices and are capable of influencing and manipulating the media to meet their needs.

On the other hand, marxists see capitalist society as basically one of class
domination. They view the media and its organizations as part of the ideological arena where class views are imposed hegemonically. Marxists locate media control in an increasingly concentrated group of monopoly capital, and claim its professionals have the illusion of autonomy while being socialized into and internalizing the norms of the dominant culture. Marxists range from believing that audiences lack access to alternative meaning systems, to the belief that different subcultural interpretations can conflict with the intended dominant messages. Distinctions between liberal pluralist and marxist approaches to media studies are crucial: “this contrast has been important to the history and development of mass media studies because it remains a source of distinctive differences in the conceptualization of the media and of society generally” (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran and Woollacott 1982, p.2).

Liberal pluralist studies address class as a mediating factor in life experience, in media effects, even treatment of categories of people by the media. However, unlike marxists, liberal pluralists do not see a class based society. Tuchman is an example of movement from liberal pluralist effects studies concentrating on social class as a mediating factor in media effects to the community of discourse concept related to consumer society and “the twentieth century’s identification of the woman as consumer for the family and the use of that role to maintain women’s subjugation” (Tuchman 1979, p.539). She moves the focus of study from an examination of media effects to a broader view of the economic structure within which the media functions and serves.

The pluralist position views the mass media as providing grounds for ideas competing for ascendancy and dominance. This creates a concentration on the measurement of such influence and the variables which intervene and filter the persuasion process. On the other hand, the marxist perspective views mass media in terms of its ideological role in the production and reproduction of consensus, examining how that role is performed and how consensus is achieved. Blumler and Gurevitch (1982) suggest a convergence of these diverse ways of conceptualizing media impact on audiences in
empirical effects research on media agenda-setting functions; constructions of social reality; and erosion of public confidence in government. While both marxists and pluralists seem to agree, to varying degrees, on the agenda setting function of the media, they disagree as to whether the constructions are ideologically consistent or if they are essentially differentiated and represent competing viewpoints.

Media effects are seen as shaping categories and frameworks of audience perception to construct an agenda for society which may not effectively tell the audience what to think but rather what to think about. This is accomplished by emphasizing certain issues and certain aspects of those issues. "Such a conceptualization reflects a shift from preoccupation with attitude and opinion change in the earlier stages of media effects research towards a concentration on the contributions of the media to the formation of frameworks through which people regard political events and debates" (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982, p.262).

Recent marxist work has approached this task with an emphasis on the processes of encoding and decoding and how they are related to the manufacture of consent. The social contexts of production and reception are examined. The new approach focuses on: audience interpretations over effects; the agenda setting process which creates preferred meanings; the diversity of subcultural response that is possible within these ideological limits; and an examination of the acceptance, modification or rejection of these dominant (preferred) meanings. Marxists "discuss the media and their contents as myths - ways of seeing the world that resonate with the conscious mind and the unconscious passions and that are embedded in, expressive of, and reproductive of social organization" (Tuchman 1979, p.541).

Yet Marxist economic analysis does not succeed in answering, let alone posing, the question of gender differences and why women's activities (whatever the act) are devalued and men's activities are valued. The dichotomy between liberal pluralism and marxism carries over to feminist media studies. While liberal feminists tend to focus on media
effects on individual attitudes and behaviors, socialist feminists examine the central role of media in actually constructing ideology. "While Althusser assumed that economic classes are the major social formations under capitalism and that ideology is important in perpetuating classes, socialist feminists assume that class and gender roles and their representations in popular culture...are crucial in perpetuating ideologies of oppression. However, few move beyond this assumption to theorize just how this process works" (Barrett 1980, p.4). Byars (1983) claims Marxists have ignored the private sphere, the feminine sphere, which she calls the heart of darkness" within Marxist theory.

Three main theoretical perspectives attempt to explain the pervasiveness of gender inequality. First, bio-psychological perspectives espouse the idea that anatomy is destiny, that women's child bearing functions make work in and around the home "natural" functions. This is a variant of the positivist tradition which seeks universal, natural laws. Gender definitions are fixed, unchallengeable. This approach ignores the growing presence of women in the workforce and the growth of single parent homes in contemporary society. Psychologically, the theory claims that women are "naturally" submissive and passive, and that raging hormones make them unfit for important management or decision making positions, leading to rhetorical questions like: "Would you want a woman president making decisions about global war while suffering from PMS?"

Socio-cultural theories contend that society dictates, according to its needs, the gender roles of male and female. In *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, Margaret Mead (1962) argued that sex roles are not based on fundamental biological differences but rather reflect the cultural conditioning and needs of a society. This approach parallels the sociological paradigm of the interactionism in their concern with socially constructed meanings. A plethora of socio-cultural studies have examined everything from the different reactions to newborns based on gender, to the ways in which school systems, games, television programs, textbooks, and language train boys and girls in the "proper" stereotypical attributes of their gender. (Morgan 1982; Miller and Reeves

Thirdly, politico-economic theories argue that an underlying economic reason, tied to the dominant historical/political order, explains male dominance which "molds our views of ourselves, and others, dictates our tastes and buying habits, shapes our attitudes and to a large degree, determines our social and work patterns and controls the sex and nature of our labor force" (Kaufer and Christofel 1972, p.2). This perspective, aligned with the critical theoretical paradigm in sociology, argues that beliefs that women only work to provide supplemental family income and are not primary providers, are myths that help justify the fact that women earn .68 cents on the dollar when compared to a male worker in an equivalent job and that a female college graduate has an earning potential roughly equivalent to a male high school graduate. These myths also ignore the growing number of female heads of household and other aspects of the feminization of poverty.

Government Census Bureau statistics, released on November 13, 1991, outline the economic impact of gender discrimination. The average college-educated woman, age 18-24 earns 92 cents for every dollar earned by the average man of the same age and education. The economic gap grows as they age. At ages 25 to 34, women earn 75 cents on the dollar, at ages 45 to 54 it becomes 59 cents and drops to 54 cents at age 55 to 64. In the 45 to 54 age span, the average woman who has completed four years of college is earning $29,609., while a male in the same age group with a high-school diploma earns an average $32,137. Twenty-five years after college, the average woman college graduate has lower income earning potential than an average male high-school graduate.

Steeves and Smith found the explanation for this gender based economic inequality in early Marxist writings: "Engels identified the cause of women's oppression as their exclusion from production and their exclusive responsibility for reproduction, defined both biologically and in terms of providing for workers' needs. He saw this as unproblematic until the rise of capitalist class societies" (1987, p.44).
Steeves and Smith also identify three feminist approaches that roughly parallel the bio-psychological, socio-cultural and politico-economic theoretical perspectives to explain gender inequity. Radical feminists (Firestone 1970; Millet 1970 and Daly 1979, 1984) would parallel the bio-psychological approach only in the agreement that women's oppression is universal and that men and women could be born with innate differences. More recent writings have added class and race to the primary differences of gender (Cirksena 1987). Some forms include the category of cultural feminism. Liberal feminists believe that greater numbers of women in non-traditional and prestigious professions along with the creation of opportunities for women to move out of the domestic private arena into the more active and prestigious public arena will lead to equality (Tuchman, Daniels and Benet 1978; Barrett 1980; Butler and Paisley 1980; Jaggar 1983). Running roughly parallel to the socio-cultural perspective many liberal feminists contend that a change in media role models will lead to change in female self-perceptions and behaviors. Like the marxian politico-economic approach, socialist feminists blame the capitalist class system for sexism and locate in the class and gender divisions of labor the source of many of these problems (Eisenstein 1979; Glazer 1980; McRobbie 1982, 1991; Jaggar 1983; Steeves and Smith 1987). Socialist feminists focus on media construction of class and gender biased ideology.

This research will concentrate on the social construction of gender in prime-time television sitcoms, an area where research has found that women fare better, and its mediation by class in an advanced capitalist society. The research design will be theoretically informed by politico-economic perspectives combined with the socio-cultural emphasis on how gender and class roles are socially constructed. In terms of feminist studies, this project will combine theoretical influences from liberal feminism and socialist feminism. Stuart Hall argues "that contradictions of race and gender are at least as fundamental as, and certainly irreducible to, the economic contradictions" (Grossberg 1984, p.413). However, there is a major caveat, the fact that patriarchy preceded
capitalism. Imray and Middleton cite the work of Michelle Rosaldo (1974), in claiming that "everywhere, from societies that appear most egalitarian to those that demonstrate a marked degree of sexual stratification, men are the locus of cultural value. Some area of activity is always seen as exclusively or predominantly male and, more importantly, this activity or group of activities has a meaning within the society which is associated with prestige. This observation has its corollary in the fact that everywhere men have some authority over women, that they have a culturally legitimated right to their subordination and compliance. At the same time, women themselves are far from helpless. They can and do exert pressures on the social life of the group, whether or not their influence is acknowledged" (1983, p.12).

Imray and Middleton criticize "Marxist analyses of women's position as equally inadequate because they take as their central tenet the relationship of women to the economic system. . . the categories of Marxist analysis do not explain why particular people fill particular places" (1983, p.14). They trace systematic and cross-cultural gender oppression, citing works on non-capitalist societies, the Yoruba of Nigeria, Jewish ghetto communities of Eastern Europe and the women of Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands of New Guinea where women, while primarily responsible for production, have less value than men who pursue the more valued activity of conducting business transactions.

A major problem with liberal pluralist effects research is raised by the concept of intertextuality. The concept was introduced by Julia Kristeva who contends that most literary works emit messages that refer not only to themselves, but also to other works of literature. Thus, no text can ever be completely free of other texts. She calls this the intertextuality of all writing, that all things are contextual i.e., constituted by relationships. Barthes (1988, p.4) credited Kristeva with "profoundly transforming the semiological landscape" with this new concept. Without using the term, Raymond Williams (1975) discussed the flow of television programs interrupted by commercials sequencing into other programs. Williams criticizes this "habit of interruption" for its production of "surrealist
effects." "Since there is usually no conventional sign for a break to commercial or trailer, a sequence can run from the dinosaur loose in Los Angeles to the deep-voiced woman worrying about keeping her husband with her coffee, to the Indians coming over the skyline, and a girl in a restaurant in Paris suddenly running from her table to cry" (Williams 1989, p.25). Thus Lovell (1986, p.150) summarizes Williams' "continuous flow of discontinuous and unconnected items. The effects of television are mediated by this experience of flow, which overrides the effects an individual programme might have if it were watched as a discrete item."

A large body of research, conducted primarily by psychologists and communications specialists, has demonstrated that mass media also has a significant impact on sex-role socialization. While the average child spends many more hours watching television than in the classroom, important messages are being conveyed about definitions of gender and restrictions relating to the boundaries of male and female. It could be argued that one of USA Today's infamous polls in 1991 reported that "mystery writer" ranked as one of the top five professions preferred by women because of the long-term popularity of Murder She Wrote. Murder is an unusual program in that it features not only a woman, but an older woman, Angela Lansbury, as the leading character in a detective series. The character, Jessica Fletcher, is depicted doing everything but the solitary task of mystery writing: traveling, solving crimes, teaching and socializing with a plethora of international friends. However, Steeves and Smith's analysis found the popular Jessica Fletcher to be a less than perfect gender role model. The woman volunteers her labor, is not paid for her detecting and will use "feminine wiles i.e. 'playing the helpless woman' role to entrap a suspected murderer" (1987, p.54). While working as an amateur sleuth, J.B. Fletcher "appears self-directed as a semi-autonomous writer, but has control over little beyond her own labor" (Steeves and Smith 1987, p.56).

Several research projects have demonstrated that the development of gender stereotypes which can limit life options and social mobility can be attributed, at least
partially, to childhood television viewing. In a survey of 200 elementary school children 
Miller and Reeves found that children select “television characters as people they want to be 
like when they grow up” (1978, p.85). Reeves and Greenberg (1977) discovered that boys 
and girls identify with television characters based on physical attractiveness for girls as 
opposed to boys' identification based on activity level and physical strength. Frueh and 
McGhee studied eighty, K through sixth grade students, finding that “high amounts of 
television watching are clearly associated with stronger traditional sex-role development” 
(1975, p.109). O'Bryant and Corder-Bolz (1978) found that grade school children 
exposed to women portrayed in typically male occupations, in commercials shown within 
cartoon programs, were more likely to find the occupations appropriate for women than 
children not exposed to the commercials. This seems to hold true into the teen years, as 
Morgan (1982) found that adolescent girls who watch more television express more sex-
role stereotyped beliefs than do their peers who watch less TV. “What all the research 
suggests is that many factors lead to sex-role stereotyping, which is multifaceted. To 
understand it and to develop strategies for eliminating sex-role stereotyping that may limit 
life options and social mobility for both children and adults will require more research and 
analysis” (Busby 1985, p.272). Tuchman reports that laboratory experiments and surveys 
in social science research have established "that (1) boys and girls pay particular attention to 
children of their own gender performing gender-typed tasks; (2) they can reproduce these 
tasks; (3) sex-stereotyped content elicits traditional responses about women’s roles from 
children; (4) content contradicting dominant stereotypes prompts less traditional views; and 
(5) the more television girls watch, the more traditional are their attitudes and aspirations” 
(Tuchman 1979, p.539).

In the 1970s, due largely to the women's movement, research was initiated on the 
presence or absence of women in media and the way women were being portrayed in 
advertisements, sitcoms, dramas, soaps and in news programming. Much of this work 
claimed that media portrayals defined women in their relationships to men, as sex objects,
or within the family context, as wives and mothers. In Window Dressing on the Set, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) found little change in the way women were presented in the media between 1954 and 1977, despite the women's movement. According to Tuchman, "men are shown as aggressors, women as victims. Symbolically subservient, policewomen who have been knocked to the floor by a bad guy are pulled from the floor by a good guy; in both cases, women are on the floor in relationship to men. Twenty-five years ago, as today, women on television were concentrated in the ghetto of situation comedy" (1979, p.531). Lemon (1978) found women to be overwhelmingly dominated in action/police dramas and Turow (1974) found that in the seemingly more egalitarian area of soap operas, male characters gave more personal advice than women characters. Greenberg, Richards and Henderson concluded that "if one wants to see women in other than a dominated or nurturance-receiving role, the best bet is to watch women on situation comedies. They'll still be there in those roles, but there will be female counterparts exhibiting complementary behaviors...Apparently, for script writers and producers, women may have equity with men in comic situations; indeed, they may even acquire dominance in comic situations." There is however a caveat to the finding of diminished gender boundaries in sitcoms: "women will, however, still find themselves in emotional trouble more often, seeking help and getting help, and they'll not find themselves any more successful in their order-giving postures" (Greenberg, Richards and Henderson 1980, p.86).

Much of the 1970s research concluded that media did not adequately represent numbers of women and did not accurately reflect women's presence as fifty percent of the population. However this representation may have been more accurate than some realized: "the very underrepresentation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal, may symbolically capture the position of women in American society - their real lack of power. It bespeaks their 'symbolic annihilation' by the media. For, according to Gerbner (1978), just as representation in the media signifies social existence, so too underrepresentation and
trivialization and condemnation indicate symbolic annihilation” (Tuchman 1979, p.533).

The main explanation offered for the existence of media sexism in these studies is the lack of women in dominant media positions, accompanied by an assumption that the presence of more women would indicate less gender stereotyping. However, several studies of journalists revealed that women's decisions about media content did not differ from men's, in part due to perceptions of professional constraints. A more recent example of how women in the media also contribute to stereotypical gender descriptions was found in USA Today (April 22, 1992), in a column by Jeannie Williams. Her column is one of the most popular aspects of the newspapers' Life section because it contains Hollywood gossip. Passing off a few juicy excerpts as a book review, Williams lifted descriptions of six selected insiders from the “back-of-the-book roster” which “tells what power people think about each other” in The Club Rules: Power, Money, Sex and Fear - How It Works in Hollywood by Paul Rosenfield. Williams selects four men and two women to exemplify the information and tone of the book: “Warren Beatty: ‘If the club ran elections, he’d be the best candidate for president.’ Kevin Costner: ‘The club actor with the best timing - he appeared at a moment when a hero was desperately needed.’ Barry Diller: (ex-chairman of 20th Century Fox and Paramount): ‘The one true visionary in the club and (along with David Geffen) the smartest member.’ Michael Douglas: ‘Privately conflicted, internationally bankable, he’ll go the distance.’ Madonna: ‘Privately, some club members call her a pig.’ Penny Marshall: ‘The club is proud of her success, and wishes that she would find a husband - as does Penny herself.” (USA Today April 22, 1992, p.2D). Thus in both media industry insider books and entertainment columns written in 1992, men were being described as: having good timing, hero, visionary, smart, he’ll go the distance. The few women are described as porcine and successful, but needing a husband.

Williams, LaRose and Frost found that children’s gender stereotyping could be reduced when non-stereotypical sex-roles were reflected in television programming: “the
quantities of males and females shown on television are considerably less important than the qualities portrayed. Behavior will be most apt to be emulated from dramatic and realistic contents...where sufficient content is presented to convey evidence of personal and social reinforcement for the behavior” (1981, p. 146 - italics added).

In the area of media effects research, Tuchman (1979) claims that the idea of total media control or absolute media hegemony, which she calls stimulus-response theories, have been rejected based on the lack of concrete findings of immediate effects research in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Gans points out the existence of audience volatility and contentiousness: "the most interesting phenomenon, in America, however, is the political struggle between taste cultures over whose culture will provide society with its symbols, values and world view" (1972, p. 378). Marxists would attack Gans' seemingly naive ignorance of a single minded ruling class ideology. However, the fact remains that while many individuals view the same news event, presented by a ruling class representative news agency, or media monopoly, that same event, depicted in only one way, can have many meanings to different people: "control of the parameters involved in the possible interpretations of events may lead to the reproduction of ruling class ideology in mass culture, but it is not guaranteed to produce false consciousness" (Gottdiener 1985, p. 989). Even total ideological control of mass culture industries does not have guaranteed controls or effects on audience behavior. The process is far more dialectical in nature and while an ideologically controlled society may lead to the creation of Marcuse's "one dimensional man" who lacks alternative views which enable him/her to challenge the system, at the same time, individual behavior and thought cannot be predicted. Gottdiener finds a sort of solution to this problem by breaking the users of mass culture into subcultures, or "heterogeneous aggregations" where there might be some predictability of interpretation.

Tuchman finds more research support for “the theory of limited effects (which) argues that the influence of specific messages is inevitably mediated by such social variables as age, social class, religion, ethnicity, and education” (1979, p. 538). She sees
the belief in mediating variables also reflected in modeling theory and states that more theoretically informed research on gender stereotyping could lead to the idea of a “community of discourse that presupposes consumerism and takes it for granted” (Tuchman 1979, p.539). She bases this statement on findings that young children do not differentiate conceptually between a program and a commercial.

Recent research, especially by Marxist feminists, picks up on some important liberal pluralist research findings, and examines long-ignored issues of representation (absences) which go beyond quantification. Angela McRobbie explored the ideology of adolescent femininity as represented in the popular British magazine Jackie. She saw the magazine performing an ideological function by representing one particular construction of adolescent femininity as real, while leaving no room for alternative identity constructions of female adolescence. Individual components of articles and advertisements are part of the larger social and cultural context of the magazine Jackie, and women’s magazines in general, within feminine teenage culture thus working to construct a “false totality”: “the way Jackie addresses ‘girls’ as a monolithic grouping, as do all other women’s magazines, serves to obscure differences, of class for example, between women. Instead it asserts a sameness, a kind of false sisterhood, which assumes a common definition of womanhood or girlhood” (McRobbie 1982, p.265).

This raises the issues of what Pierre Machery calls "silences" or what is left out of the text, and of Foucault's concept of the "other". In this view, programs, or cultural objects, should be examined for silences and/or unexplored alternatives. Thus, while observing and interpreting what is being said, critical note will also be taken of what is not being said. Foucault claimed that when a theory seeks to explain everything monicausally, it leaves out what cannot be explained, thus excluding the "other." We will look for producers' efforts to trivialize subcultural meanings and homogenize potentially rebellious interpretations. Important questions can be asked about what social problems are being trivialized, in what light are they presented, what is presented as the cause of the problem
and how it is superficially resolved.

A decade after her initial study, McRobbie found that magazines like *Just Seventeen* were no longer concentrating on the "suffocating embrace" of lives dedicated to finding and keeping romance, but had evolved to the "ascendancy of pop and fashion and gradual eclipsing of romance" (1991, p.136). Theoretically and methodologically, McRobbie had moved away from pure textual analysis to "a more contextualised approach which recognises the multiplicity of meanings and readings which any one text or image is capable of generating...to find a broader framework for understanding the reception, or absorption or negotiating of meaning" (1991, pp.137-138).

One of the attractions of the teen magazine McRobbie identified was its creation of security as a weekly ritual and "function of reassuring sameness." There is a strong possibility that *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* fill the same ritualistic security function, but this raises the question of WHY they are consistently the most popular selections by millions of viewers from a weekly choice of hundreds of programs?

Citing the historical context of postmodernism "where the media in its various forms invade all our private and public moments," McRobbie calls for an intertextual analysis located "within a multi-media universe" (1991, p.143). Part of the new trend McRobbie finds in British teen oriented magazines is "that problems and advice about how to solve these problems, plays an increasingly important role in all the magazines, displacing romance altogether" (1991, p.144) reflecting Beaudrillard's focus on the growth of an information-based society. This can be seen, in television, when critic Tom Shales summarized the 1992 television year: "although sitcoms remain the most popular prime-time genre, the runner-up is the nonfiction infotainment show produced by a network news department" (Associated Press, Dec 28, 1992). One example, *60 Minutes*, regularly shares the top three ratings spots with *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*.

Imray and Middleton criticize sociology for taking the public/private dichotomy for granted, as a given, as natural and unquestioned, and for thus re-producing it within
sociological theoretical frameworks. A sociological example of the assumption of a "natural" public-private split between men and women can be found in Parsons and Bales (1955) widely cited definitions of the relationship between family, socialization and the interaction process. They found males to exhibit instrumental oriented behavior and females to function with expressive oriented behavior. Imray and Middleton contend that the association of the private sphere with activities inside the household and the public with those outside, in much sociological analysis, including that done by Marxists, takes away the ability to explain women's subordination because it "perpetuates the assumption that it is the activity which characterises the sphere rather than the actor" (1983, p.16).

Television is a major area where public and private intersect, television brings the public world into the private world of the home. Williamson (1987) states that the intersection of public and private life is politics and contends that if women are defined by the private and men are defined by the public, then the separation is political. Thus, if Murphy's work/baby conflict and Roseanne's lack of time to be a mom, wife and worker are depicted as personal, individual problems of the private sphere, this is a politically ideological re-presentation, removing it from the public sphere of a societal problem, i.e., women with children in the majority cases have to work while available child care is woefully inadequate.

The claim that men's work is valued and women's is not, despite the activity, is clearly reflected in prime-time television sitcom portrayal of men doing housework or domestic chores (private sphere) as entertaining and amusing. Child rearing appears to be more successfully interesting and entertaining in the media when done by single men, as exemplified in the highly rated television program Full House and the movie hit Three Men and a Baby. These television/movie facts of life are summarized by Imray and Middleton: "an activity when performed by men is always more highly valued than when performed by women. When men act it is defined by them as acting within the public sphere; when women act men define it as acting within the private sphere" (1983, pp.25-26). It is
apparently the perception of network executives and program producers that marriage and child rearing activities when performed by women, are less interesting to viewers: "mom and motherhood activities are basically boring - except, of course, when these activities are performed by men" (Posner 1989, p.6).

In the 1991-1992 season, last minute changes were made in several programs to avert this deadly trap:

In *Cheers*, Sam and Rebecca were going to have a child, but not marry. However, the producers decided that that domestic situation would ruin the program. Two other characters, Lilith and Frasier, however, had a child, which did not keep either of them out of the bar; the child was even dragged into Cheers on occasion.

*Who's the Boss?* was a top-ten rated sitcom due largely to the sexual tension between Tony, the hired housekeeper, and Angela, the advertising executive. When the duo seemed to be headed towards the altar, ratings dropped. Viewers wanted the continued sexual tension. The program had a latent message that conflicted with its manifest message: "while on the surface WTB? might seem to support the notion of the independent working woman, in reality it supports male dominance and effectively eliminates what little power mom once had" (Posner 1989, p.6).

The Fox hit, *Married With Children*, abruptly abandoned Peg's pregnancy when the actress miscarried. Since the program emphasizes verbal sarcasm, it was felt that a baby might soften its caustic edge, or expose its cruelty.

*Murphy Brown*'s producers were questioned about the potential negative impact of Murphy as a parent. A partial solution came with the decision that her house painter Eldin would care for baby, leaving her free to be in the "more interesting" public sphere of the FYI newsroom. At the same time this places the child in the more interesting situation of having a male caregiver. Eldin requested that another term besides "nanny" be used to described this function. He suggested, "juvenile mentor... physical, spiritual and aesthetic advisor... or maybe just 'the big guy'." In a classic case of intertextuality,
when Murphy announced she planned to continue her pregnancy, character Jim Dial declared, "Oh good Lord, this could be the worst decision anyone's made in television since Rhoda's wedding." This statement was, at least partially, the producers sarcastic reiteration of critics' declarations that motherhood would destroy the program *Murphy Brown*.

Taking into consideration the pre-capitalist existence of patriarchy, we must still consider the present historical context. Within the critical perspective we must examine what roles television serves in the specific historical period of advanced capitalist or postmodern society. Television is viewed as a way of controlling the needs and wants of society, creating and training consumers, while also generating support for the economic status quo by making it seem natural and therefore unquestionable. Within this framework, network television either reproduces the system or resists the status quo. But the process is far more complicated than a simple either/or situation. Kellner (1981) demonstrates how TV, in order to appeal to mass audiences, often sows seeds of discontent, but frames these in a way that renders them powerless. Brenkman claims that Marcuse's classic essay, *The Affirmative Character of Culture* (1936), explains this apparent contradiction: “Marcuse could thus show that the bourgeois cultural experience was at once the authentic expression of the desires, fantasies, and hopes that capitalism could not fulfill or accommodate and the hegemonic imposition of the very distortions by which cultural experience allowed anything to be expressed so long as nothing could be changed” (Brenkman 1979, p.95). An example of this can be found in the top rated program for the 1991-1992 season, *60 Minutes*. While appearing to challenge actively the existing political and economic order, or status quo, potential unrest is averted by singling out one individual, or group of individuals, as the cause of the problem. This leaves silent or unexplored the possibility that the problem lies with the system, i.e., it is structural.

Prime-time programming and advertising have been criticized for gender stereotyping. The insidious nature of sex-role stereotypes in countries like the United
States that have been part of the (capitalist) ideology for many generations, when looked at positivistically, seem to be natural. Thus the media's role in the construction and reproduction process of sex-role stereotyping was not examined in American communications, psychological, or sociological literature until the women's movement in the 1960s. Stereotypes are confining, they limit human potential: "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" (Tuchman 1978, p.5). The process of stereotyping is described as one that redefines material reality: "part of the stereotype of women concerns their inability to concentrate on one issue at a time... This is part of the 'irrational, illogical, inconsistent' (female logic) stereotype. Now what this seems to me to relate to is a mode of thinking which is essential to the housewife's job. Most other jobs demand concentration on a single issue and the application of one skill at a time; the capacity to keep shifting attention back and forth, and changing skills, is characteristic of a housewife's job. What the stereotype does is to identify the situation, place a negative valuation on it, and then establish it as an innate female characteristic, thus inverting its status so that it becomes a cause rather than an effect" (Perkins 1979, p.154).

Studies of gender portrayal on television, conducted over a period of four decades, have produced a remarkably similar set of findings. Most are related to form, rather than content and are largely based on nominal categories counting the number and characteristics of men and women portrayed. The six major areas of focus and their findings in 1950s through 1990s media gender research are:

1. A large gap in the ratio of men to women characters on television, ranging from 4:1 to 3:2. (Head 1954; DeFleur, 1964; Dominick, 1979; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan, Jackson-Beeck, 1979; Lemon, 1977, 1978; Turow 1974; and Vest 1992). Head (1954) found the ratio of male characters to female characters to be 3:1; Meehan (1983)
found the ratio in top 20 programs in 1980 to be 7:3 and more recently Vande Berg and Streckfuss, (1992) found the ratio to be 2:1. While the number of women-centered series increased in the 1980s, the outnumbering of women by male characters remained an undeniable fact. But far beyond quantity is the issue of quality of portrayal.

2. A more limited range for women's roles than for men's roles. (Dominick 1979; Downs 1980, 1981; Meehan 1983). The range and size of women's roles was found to be limited across the spectrum of prime-time, daytime television and weekend television in all forms of programming. The one area approaching equality came in situation comedies where females performed significantly more actions and had larger and more important roles.

3. The centrality of male images with limited amounts of female-female interaction. Utilizing Parsons' and Bales' (1955) division of action into male, instrumental or "task-oriented" behavior and female, expressive-oriented or "socio-emotional" behavior, Mackey and Hess found: "the patterns emerging from the PTTV (commercial prime-time television) screen and impacting upon the viewer are (a) men and women interacting or men interacting with men, and (b) men assuming more task-oriented roles and women tending more to assume the socioemotional roles. The viewer rarely has the opportunity to see women interacting with other women, especially without a man also being present. Less than 4% of all the scenes on PTTV included women who were interacting with other women in a mode of task-orienting behavior" (1982, p.207).

Citing Chance's (1967) biocultural model of primate societies, Mackey and Hess call the television ratings system "the video version of survival of the fittest" and blame the viewer for the lack of female-female interaction: "The PTTV data show that men, compared to women, are the disproportionate foci of the viewer's attention. Framed another way, an attention-structure argument suggests that woman-woman dyads are not often found in centers of political, social, or economic dominance; and viewers prefer the shows which focus on such nuclei of activity. The viewer's attention-structure is, therefore, ill-suited to
triangulate with a large number of woman-woman interactions" (1982, p.208).

4. A tendency for the age range of women characters to be much more limited than that for male characters. (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli 1980; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974). Examples of the predominance of younger women characters abound in television, and males have been represented in wider age groups from the days of Ben Cartwright to Matlock. The most notable recent exception to this situation was the popular Golden Girls. Parenthetically, both Matlock and Golden Girls were dropped by NBC prior to the fall '92 season because of the network's stated purpose to appeal to younger demographics. Their replacements shows failed within the first few weeks of the season while both Matlock and a spinoff from Golden Girls were picked up by other networks. In a decade long study of prime-time and weekend daytime television Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli found: "the more people, and especially young people, watch television, the more they tend to perceive old people in generally negative and unfavorable terms...At the same time, television seems to be telling younger people that old age, especially for women, begins relatively early in life" (1980, pp. 46-47).

5. A limited occupational range of women characters (DeFleur 1964; Dominick 1979; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Miller and Reeves 1976; Tedesco 1974). While this research finds women locked into a limited occupational range, these occupations are not always gender stereotypical; they include police officer and private investigator.

Vande Berg and Streckfuss found that even when characters are depicted in organizational roles, women are more likely to be portrayed performing interpersonal functions and men are more likely to be portrayed performing operational, decisional, informational, and political functions. "Television continues to present working women as lacking the competitively achieved occupational hierarchical power and status of male workers" (1992, p.205). McNeil found similar results in her analysis of prime-time programming in the 1972-1973 season: "in the few instances in which women held high
positions, there were almost always mitigating factors to dilute their power: they tended to occupy less important roles; they were frequently employed in traditionally female occupations within their respective professions; their work activities, like those of most females, tended to be peripheral to the plot; and, no matter what their position, they were almost always outranked by their male colleagues. Females also worked under significantly closer supervision and had far less authority...In no instance did a female exercise direct legitimate authority over an adult male, and in only one instance did a female exercise such authority over another female" (1975, pp.264-265).

Atkin found a major change in the depiction of women characters' occupational roles in the late 1970s: "beginning with the 1978 season, white-collar roles were in the plurality and grew to be twice as common as pink-collar roles after the 1982 season" (1991, p.521). In 1964 DeFleur found the world of work on TV to be, overall, a man's world. In 1988 television programs, Vande Berg and Streckfuss found the same, "although nearly 57% of the U.S. civilian work force in 1988 were women (Sapiro, 1990, p.23, quoting the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development), only 35% of this composite six-week sample of 1986 and 1987 prime-time's organizational members were females" (1992, p.204).

6. Women are defined and limited by marital status more than men. Marriage and the workplace are portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men. (Downs 1981; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974; Weigel and Loomis 1981). Atkin found that "single working women were 'broken-in' through situation comedies" (1991, p.520), with 62.9% represented in the 1966-1990 time frame of his study: "although Lucy stands as an early example of a widowed single woman, only a small portion of female principals were allowed to appear as divorced or otherwise unconcerned about relationships" (1991, p.522).

All of the above are nominal categories basically related to form - they merely count numbers and types of women portrayed. Personality analysis, also done quantitatively,
similarly found women to be portrayed on television as more dependent, weaker, submissive, less intelligent, less task-oriented, more emotional and more peaceable (Tedesco 1974; Busby 1974). Mackey and Hess (1982) found TV males behavior to be instrumentally oriented, females to be expressively oriented. Turow (1974) found that men give 70% of the orders, and Sternglanz and Serbin (1974) found male behavioral outcomes more often positive and female outcomes to be more often neutral or negative. Signorelli found prime time televisions' sex role portrayals changed very little in the past two decades, with these portrayals maintaining traditional and stereotypical gender roles:

"women are seen less often than the men and in many respects may be considered as less important. When women do appear, they usually are younger than the men, more attractive and nurturing, portrayed in the context of romantic interests, home, and family, and are more likely to be victimized. Women are somewhat more likely than men to be married (although both men and women are much more likely to be single), and if they are married, they usually are not employed outside the home" (1989, p.352). "Men, on the other hand, are older. They tend to be more powerful and potent than the women, and proportionately few are presented as married. Significantly more men are employed outside the home, and they usually work in high prestige and traditionally masculine occupations such as doctors, lawyers, police, and other higher status jobs" (Signorelli 1989, p.352). However, throughout four decades from the 1950s into the 90s, women have been more likely to appear in comedies than any other format.

Media research was heavily focused for some time on quantifying the absence of women in television, but there are more important absences or unconsidered alternatives to be explored than a mere lack of female presence on television. Even if women were reflected on 50% of televised air time, a more important question concerns how they are represented. How are women depicted? What roles do they play? If the answer, as much previous research has found, is that the majority of women on television are portrayed as accessories, victims, people who react instead of initiating action, concerned only with the
"private sphere" but absent or underrepresented in the "public sphere", the mere quantification of female presence does not get to the heart of the issue of representation. Vande Berg and Streckfuss raise an important research point for utilizing qualitative research to enhance quantitative analysis. They claim the duality of their study produced an added benefit: "several significant differences appeared in the scene-by-scene analysis of the actions of organizational characters that did not appear in the single overall character analysis. This suggests that future content analysis might gain additional insight by utilizing similar two-pronged approaches in the analysis of prime-time portrayals" (Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992, p.204).

Qualitative content analysis as well as quantitative research could add tremendously to the information we already have on gender in television. When stating the ratio of male to female characters presented in prime-time television, HOW the characters are portrayed adds a crucial dimension in trying to determine if sex-role stereotyping is decreasing. For instance, if women were portrayed at 1:3 ratio with men, but were portrayed in a wider range of roles and reflecting less sex-role stereotyping THOSE manifest figures could reflect a more positive portrayal than a 2:1 or 1:1 ratio with a narrower range of roles and more traditional stereotyping. The latent message lies qualitatively far beyond the quantification of numbers.

In order to examine the content of the programs Roseanne and Murphy Brown for gender stereotypes, whether they reinforce or challenge the status quo of patriarchy, we must also examine the form of the sitcom within which this activity takes place. Lovell distinguishes between two types of sitcoms. Roseanne and Murphy Brown seem to fit the description of "comedies of social realism [which] share the goal of 'showing things as they really are', adapted for purposes of comedy to 'showing the funny side of life'." This contrasts with "non-realist comedy [which] is still set in recognizable social situations, and the realism stays within the bonds of the possible, but within these broad limits it provides pleasurable escape from social reality" (Lovell 1986, p.164).
Lovell contends that the comedies of social realism have the potential to challenge the status quo or to reinforce it: "comedies which expose the inconsistencies and contradictions of the social world to laughter may extend 'recognition' beyond its usual boundaries; or, they may strengthen the sense that that order, flawed as it is, is normal and inevitable" (1986, p.165). Roseanne's family's economic situation and the Murphy Brown episode about the Clarence Thomas Senate hearings are on the cutting edge, potentially exposing economic and social situations as unnatural. On the other hand, they can merely "produce a wry smile and at best the wish that things might be different, rather than any urgent sense that they can and should be" (Lovell 1986, p.164). Lovell concludes tentatively: "the closer the referencing of social reality, the less 'subversive' the sitcom tends to be" (1986, p.165).

This view parallels Feuer's contrast of Norman Lear sitcoms representing social reality vis a vis the Mary Tyler Moore comedies representing lifestyle issues and character. Feuer contends that Roseanne is more progressive because, in the tradition of the Norman Lear comedies, it relates to social issues: "Roseanne deals more with the social and familial problems of a 'realistic' family whose struggles are primarily, if not totally, economic in nature" (1992, p.155). Following Brecht's concept of epic theater, Feuer finds the characters in Roseanne to be flat cartoon characters, which she sees as an advantage. "Flat characters are more politically progressive because they take us away from our identification with the characters and force us to think about how the play is constructed" (Feuer 1992, p.154). The program Roseanne also adopts certain Brechtian theater techniques such as running outtakes at the end of the program under the credits, clearly stating that the program is, in fact, a performance.

On the other hand, Feuer views Murphy Brown like the Mary Tyler Moore sitcoms in emphasizing character with a concentration on "lifestyle issues." "In the realm of the work-family sitcom, Murphy Brown reconstructs The Mary Tyler Moore Show for the 1990s. . . Mary represented the traditional woman caught in a network of social change;
Murphy represents the fruition of the middle-class women's movement: tough, successful, and alone as she approaches middle age. In spite of its brilliance, Murphy Brown is arguably a program based almost entirely on intertextuality" (1992, p.156). Feuer concludes that Murphy is more conservative and more enforcing of the status quo, i.e. regressive, than Mary Tyler Moore because the program presents itself as post-feminist: "the two shows really represent a continuation of the same cultural theme - the earlier show riding the crest of the feminist movement, the later one detailing its ebbing in the 'postfeminist' era" (1992, p.156).

The Mary Tyler Moore Show has been heavily criticized as repressive: "any 'independence' on her part is punished by the end of the episode, much like the 'independent' acts of Lucy Ricardo on I Love Lucy" (Byars 1987, p.294). Similarly, Dow claims that Murphy Brown "focuses on the life of a woman who is a successful television journalist and avowed feminist, depicts the title character as embodying traditionally male characteristics; she is aggressive, competitive, and often insensitive. Moreover, her public success is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness" (1990, p.271).

While The Mary Tyler Moore Show has been suggested as a forerunner to Murphy Brown, especially because both programs feature single women who work in a television news operation, perhaps Cagney and Lacey provides more of a model in the areas of characterization and issues covered. I contend that the forerunners for both Roseanne and Murphy Brown can be found in this policewoman drama, with Roseanne modeled physically, and in relationship to marital status and social class after Mary Beth Lacey; and Murphy strongly modeled in the same three ways after the Christine Cagney character ultimately created in the series.

De Laurentis (1984, p.5) distinguished between women, the real historical beings, and the fictional construct 'woman'. Julie D'Acci analyzed Cagney and Lacey specifically looking for the multi-faceted relationships between women and 'woman', as reflected in
television: "the relationship between 'woman', produced by discursive practices such as television, and women as historical/empirical subjects, is neither direct nor natural, but always primarily cultural" (1987, p.203). She traces the development of *Cagney and Lacey* the series, which premiered as a TV movie in 1981. The series featuring Tyne Daly and Meg Foster as policewomen partners premiered in March 1982. Despite good ratings CBS officials felt the characters were not feminine and were perceived as "dykes": "the evidence points to an extreme discomfort on the part of the network with 'woman' represented as non-glamorous, feminist, sexually active and working-class and single. 'Woman' in the case of the original Chris Cagney manifested too many markers of 'non-feminine', according to the network's definition of the term. She also had no acceptable class, family or marriage context to contain, domesticate or 'make safe' those differences. Lacey, on the other hand, was 'less threatening' because married" (D'Acci 1987, p.214).

CBS decided to replace Meg Foster and make two changes in the Cagney character, making her more 'feminine' and changing her socio-economic background, both of which included a radical fashion change: "the revised concept for character calls for Cagney to wear less middle-class, classier clothes so that her upward mobility is evidenced" (unpublished production memo). "The overt feminism of the scripts was, after the original series, for the most part removed. The new Chris Cagney is more of a rugged individualist than a feminist and is actually conservative on many social issues. Mary Beth Lacey carries on most of the feminism and the liberal politics" (D'Acci 1987, p.215). Murphy is liberal politically and a feminist. Roseanne, while not claiming to be a feminist, exhibits many equality seeking characteristics, but her politics are difficult to intuit.

Fiske's intertextual analysis of the character change in *Cagney and Lacey* included publicity about the changes. Sharon Gless was the actress who played the new Chris Cagney: "Gless says the press didn't make her job any easier, badgering her about whether she would bring more 'sexiness' to the show. That bothered me a lot because it suggested there was no femininity on the show before her. I made sure to make her a real strong
lady.' (Washington Post April 23, 1984). The lexical shift from 'sexiness' through
'femininity' to a real strong lady is a discursive shift and therefore has a socio-political
dimension. 'Sexiness' is from an explicitly patriarchal discourse, 'femininity' is from a
discourse that attempts to naturalize gender construction and difference in terms of the
status quo and is therefore implicitly patriarchal, whereas 'real strong lady' is from a
discourse that consciously opposes and exposes both the explicit and implicit patriarchy of
'sexiness' and 'femininity'."(Fiske 1987, p.419).

The changes were successful with the viewing public and the Emmy Award
winning series ran for several years. D'Acci concluded however that Cagney and Lacey
became more conservative, portraying "Mary Beth's and Harvey's situation - the traditional
family, and the role of mother and wife - not simply as one of many possibilities but as the
satisfying, healthy norm for 'woman'. Chris Cagney in several narratives has in fact been
represented as alone and on the outside of this normal, healthy and moral unit" (1987,
p.222). She also notes, however, that Cagney and Lacey provided women with writing,
acting and producing jobs. More importantly, the series' representation of female
friendship and presentation of women's culture and women's communities is seen as a
strong positive aspect. Discussing the importance of presentation of women's culture and
communities, Byars identifies prime-time network television as the bastion of dominant
ideologies. She does, however, find "evidence of strong feminine discourses at work and
evidence that television does not present a monolithic and invulnerable discursive system"
(Byars 1987, p.296).

Loeb found a similar conservatism operating in thirtysomething. While television is
"continually updating shifts in the socioeconomic structure... at the core, fictional
programming remains fairly stable and conservative. Ultimately, support and affirmation
are given to traditional views of family, patriarchy, gender roles, and other values and
definitions held by the dominant ideology" (Loeb 1990, p.249). She found two major sets
of relationships operating to preserve traditional values in thirtysomething: "married
characters function as parental figures to the unmarried (child) characters, thus reaffirming the traditional lifestyle of marriage and parenthood as the only route to adulthood and self-actualization. Second, Michael and Hope Steadman and Elliot and Nancy Weston are alternatively positioned as ideal versus troubled marriages, with one couple occupying the ideal state while the other occupies the troubled state, to reaffirm conservative gender roles and values" (Loeb 1990, p.250).

Very little similar work is being done to research changing male definitions. Hanke traces the changes in manifest images of male television characters, following Fiske's (1987) suggestion that Miami Vice "redefines masculinity as appearance, as a body to be looked at" (Hanke 1990, p.233). Hanke's analysis of thirtysomething is concerned with "how masculinity is defined and redefined in order to remain hegemonic" (1990, p.233). He concludes that "hegemonic masculinity changes in order to remain hegemonic" and warns against "falling prey to the progressive fallacy in which any changes in images of male and female characters are taken as the displacement of dominant gender ideologies" (Hanke 1990, p.245).

Grossberg and Treichler illuminate the connections between criticism, television and gender. Their views summarize the goal of this research project to create a situation or format where "gender is examined not as an unproblematic given but as a socially and historically constructed category, produced in televisual texts through specific representations" (Grossberg and Treichler 1987, p.273). These gendered texts do not necessarily "succeed" however, as viewers from their own social/ cultural/ political and economic perspectives find multiple ways to interpret and use them - and often resist and challenge them - in their everyday lives: "the assumption that television images have direct, simple, and easily predictable effects on viewers further threatens to make any form of political resistance to those images not only invisible but theoretically impossible as well...The feminist critique of gender representation as fixed and determined, however, does not necessarily account for the diverse ways in which gender is reinscribed again and
again in cultural products nor describe the many ways people use - and often resist and challenge - these representations in their everyday lives." (Grossberg and Treichler 1987, p.283). Questions about the production and use of these television representations, "clearly move us beyond an account which identifies and assumes gender as already and necessarily constituted" (Grossberg and Treichler 1987) justifying the need for this research project, with its focus on class differences in gender construction and interpretation of television gender representations.

A central concern of this research is to determine if the status quo is reinforced or reproduced by the ideological creation of structures of gender. A related issue concerns why inconsistencies in gender construction have been left unchallenged in this and other societies.

This summary of prior research provides standards against which *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* may be compared in order to determine whether these seemingly empowered women fit, or do NOT fit, four decades of prior findings about women's depiction on television. The question becomes, at the manifest level, do *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* appear to defy prior gender stereotypes and present the image of female empowerment? Do the "real strong ladies" Roseanne and Murphy Brown, oppose and expose the patriarchal status quo OR do they reinforce that status quo?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The review of literature indicates that media studies have made great progress from the direct effects research and the audience demographic research of the 1930-1950 time period, the formative era of communications study. This early trend in mass communications research produced many benefits: the discovery of mediating factors in communications effects and the identification of conditions under which these effects are likely to occur; a focus on the flow of communication and its relationship to audience structure; a foundation for uses and gratifications research; the beginnings of research on media content, communicators, audience research and the diffusion process; the creation of new methodologies and techniques to study communication content; and the measurement of intervening variables between exposure and effect in audience research.

Methodologically and theoretically we have moved beyond the more simplistic versions of mass society and hegemony theories to focus on the many layers of content analysis and the multi-faceted arena of subjective audience interpretations. The media studies referenced in the literature review show progression from a mere quantitative enumeration of male and female characters to a more qualitative content analysis of gender portrayal and a recognition of its' potential impact within the wider social context. Together these studies suggest a triangulation of research methodologies involving the combination of quantitative and qualitative research to examine both form and content in media texts.
This research will begin by confronting the issues addressed in the six major findings on gender in prior television research, from enumerating the ratio of male to female characters, looking at their age distribution and occupational range, to the measurement of gender-based interaction. The programs *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* first will be examined to see if they contain, at the manifest level, the gender stereotyping consistently found in other television programming and to determine whether they match or challenge the psychological profile of women constructed via prior research.

The second phase will involve an examination of the role played by class as an intervening variable in gender definition, with a focus on characteristics conventionally defined as feminine, to determine whether the definitions hold constant or if their meanings vary by social class. We know that life choices and decision making are often affected by an individual's social class. The question here is, does this also impact gender construction?

The third research phase involves a discursive analysis of latent messages about gender conveyed at a hidden or less obvious level, within the social context, to determine whether these messages support or challenge conventional gender stereotypes. Since Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found their overall character analysis was enhanced by a scene-by-scene analysis, which revealed several significant differences in their interpretation of characters' organizational actions, the programs to be analyzed here have been recorded on videotape for repeated viewing. Along with this, a word-for-word transcript of each of the programs in the sample will be produced.

The primary research method will be content analysis, a research technique for the objective, systematic description of the manifest and latent content of communication, which can be quantitative or qualitative. This method of contextual analysis has long been a leading methodology in communications research and is increasingly being used in sociological research on mass media. Goffman's (1979) study *Gender Advertisements* is a prominent early sociological example. He found several gender based differences in
print advertisements, including the fact that men always instruct women; that people depicted lying on floors or beds were nearly always women or children; and that women's hands touch or caress instead of the more powerful actions of grasping or manipulating.

Content analysis of both form and substance, informed by semiotics and hermeneutics, will be used to examine the agenda setting process that outlines preferred gender meanings in the television programs *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*. According to Stuart Hall: "the domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices, and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits, and sanctions... which seek actively to enforce or prefer one semantic domain over another and rule items into and of their appropriate meaning-sets" (1980, p.134).

Recognition of the wide range of possible subcultural interpretations precludes a deterministic contention that the findings of this research project are the only acceptable interpretations. However, a social, political, and economically informed analysis, acknowledging the general situational character of the historical context of television viewers of the prime-time sitcoms *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* in 1992, should provide valuable information on media-generated gender construction.

This research project will examine televised gender depiction while departing from conventional forms of content analysis in two ways. First, it will focus on both form and content, at both the manifest or surface level and the more difficult to interpret latent level. Holsti points out the decision whether to look only for manifest content or to impute latent meanings is an inherent problem in content analysis: "a second major source of disagreement among those defining content analysis is whether it must be limited to manifest content, that is, the surface meaning of the content. Or may content analysis be used to analyze the deeper layers of meaning embedded in the content?" (1968, p.600). This also relates to the quantitative/qualitative debate. Although both uncover manifest
meanings qualitative research is assumed to be better at decoding latent meanings.

Second, messages about gender conveyed in these sitcoms will be linked to the political, economic and structural processes in society, placing the results within a historical context (Goldman and Dickens 1983, p.593). It is difficult to decode meanings without an understanding of the cultural process in which these meanings are produced.

In order to enhance the scope of generalizability beyond the selected episodes for each program, two formal types of research will be conducted. First, a chart listing program descriptions for an entire year, minus repeats, for the programs *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* will be compiled from *TV Guide* blurbs (Appendix I). Topics and categories of topics will be divided by whether they fit into the public or private sector, and then compared. This analysis will cover the entire 1992 season (spring and fall). Problems or issues dealt with by each individual program will be listed and clustered into public categories such as work, the economic or political sector; and private categories such as family problems, love relationship or personal inadequacy issues. The topics will also be compared as to whether they are treated as individual or social issues.

Second, a Nielsen ratings demographic breakdown of the actual viewing audiences for *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* in March, 1992, will be examined to determine the gender/income level/ education level/ age, and family size breakdowns of each program's audience. These audience demographics will be compared for similarities and differences to provide a basis from which to suggest possible subcultural interpretations.

The analysis of content will employ semiotic techniques for codifying meanings. Semiology, or semiotics, the science of signs, "is concerned, primarily, with how meaning is generated in 'texts'...It deals with what signs are and how they function" (Berger 1982, p.14). The most common version of semiotics in communication research is based on the Swiss linguist Saussure's notion of language as a system of signs that express ideas. Within the context of this research, television programs will be the texts, or sign systems, for analysis. Culler identifies two benefits of utilizing semiotics to study
cultural phenomena: "social and cultural phenomena are not simply natural objects or events but objects or events with meaning, and hence signs; and second that they will not have essences but are defined by a network of relations" (1976, p.4). Thus, Murphy Brown and Roseanne are texts, or systems of signs, with meanings found both in the signs and the system holding the signs together.

In the mass media, the feminine is defined by its opposition, the masculine, i.e., to be feminine is to be not masculine. However, within the context of the feminine definition itself contradictions are presented; oppositions such as single vs. married; career oriented vs. family oriented. A problem is created when career orientation and family orientation are presented as oppositions, as mutually exclusive instead of coexisting. The reality for most viewers is the duality of work and home lives. Thus these woman are seen as embodying two oppositional definitions of female gender in their everyday lives. In emphasizing Murphy's career over family and Roseanne's family orientation over work, the two characters are presented not only as different, but as oppositional definitions of feminine gender. This study will be based upon the dichotomy between the two main characters who arguably represent what seems to be two main oppositional categories for women: married, family-oriented women, and single, career-oriented women. The significance of the dichotomy will be discussed later as it relates to the social, historical and economic conditions of 1990s America.

For Saussure, signs consist of two parts: the signifier or sound image, and the concept which is signified. The relationship between these two components "is arbitrary, unmotivated, and unnatural. There is no logical connection between a word and a concept or a signifier and signified, a point that makes finding meaning in texts interesting and problematical" (Berger 1982, p.19). On the other hand, Saussure maintains that a "characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary" (1966, p.68).

We look at the programs Roseanne and Murphy Brown in terms of signifiers and what is signified. Both are generally signified as situation comedies with female lead
characters. One signifier which supports that signification is the laugh track. Each episode has a plot with some situation that has to be resolved and a related subplot that also often requires some sort of resolution. Continuing characters in both programs are presented with quirks and foibles that are alternately displayed for humorous purposes or presented as a problem needing a solution. The outspoken demeanor of the two leading characters, Roseanne and Murphy, creates difficult situations that are also presented as amusing. When we watch these programs, and the majority of television viewing Americans on Monday and Tuesday evenings do watch these top-rated programs, they are presented as a sign system that we mutually understand. Viewers know the signs and what they signify. They know the codes, for example, that the laugh track is utilized to indicate what the writers/producers want to be interpreted as an amusing moment. This does not negate the possibility and probability of subcultural interpretations yet viewers have to appreciate the importance of Roseanne’s family to her, and Murphy Brown’s career to her, in order to decode the program in the dominant manner.

A key concept in semiotic analysis is that of codes, “highly complex patterns of associations we all learn in a given society and culture” (Berger 1982, p.34). Codes are unperceived structures that determine how we interpret signs and symbols. Codes are not universal, and problems of different interpretations or unpredictable reactions to media messages result from the interpretive gap between cultural creators and those who read, watch, or listen to the cultural product: “codes and subcodes are applied to the message in the light of a general framework of cultural references, that constitutes the receiver’s patrimony of knowledge: his ideological, ethical, religious standpoints, his psychological attitudes, his tastes, his value systems, etc.” (Eco 1972, p.115 italics added to emphasize the absence of female cultural interpreters). When drawing conclusions about media messages and possible effects, it is important to recognize the multiplicity of possible subcultural interpretations based on the social class, political ideology, world view and gender of media consumers.
Situation comedies follow certain codes or formulas. Signs are found in the narrative, in characters' speech, dress, actions and reactions. On a more formal level camera shots, angles, editing techniques, lighting, and sound effects also convey signs. This research will examine this system of signs to determine which are gender based, which are class based and how the two are related.

Saussure distinguishes between synchronic and diachronic analysis. A synchronic or analytical study focuses on relationships among the elements of a text and looks for the pattern of paired oppositions forming the paradigmatic structure of a text that generate meaning in a text. Saussure saw opposition as the basis of the production of meaning in language. In this research, each episode presents a basic opposition for the plot along with characters' actions and situations that exemplify each opposition. For example, Murphy's journalistic First Amendment rights will be seen as oppositional to the government's right to know the source of leaks or "security violators." It is assumed to be "natural" that the government must know all, even if leaks have the positive effect of informing the general public that their government is handling something improperly or unfairly.

A diachronic, historical study focuses on the way narrative evolves and looks at the chain of events or syntagmatic structure of the narrative. Syntagmatic textual analysis is exemplified in Vladimir Propp's (1973) work which identifies a chronological list of thirty-one character actions, or functions, that characterize fairy tales. Syntagmatic analysis reveals that narratives of all genres contain certain functions or elements basic to the creation of a story, and that the order of events in a narrative is important. This research will look at the basic elements of a sitcom: a crisis or problem presented in the main plot; a related subplot; and the resolution of both at the end of the episode. Episodes are presented as moral tales where a problem is solved and a lesson is learned before the credits roll.

According to Levi-Strauss (1967), syntagmatic textual analysis, focusing on the
historical evolution of a narrative, reveals the manifest meaning of a text and paradigmatic
textual analysis, with a focus on the relationships of elements in a text based on
oppositions, reveals the latent meaning. These oppositions must be more than mere
negations and must be tied to the characters and events in the text. When dealing with
oppositions, some things are presented as natural, as not having a valid or recognizable
opposition. An example of these unchallenged and "natural" assumptions would be the
separation of public and private spheres discussed above. The lack of alternatives
suggested by this dichotomy was identified by Marcuse as one dimensional thought.
Other theorists have explored the issue of lack of alternative thought. Foucault called the
absence of things that cannot be explained the "other." And Pierre Machery identified as
"silences" that which is not said in a text. These types of omissions represent a very
important element that relates this research to the social construction of meaning by
examining what is left out, what is not considered. Williamson discusses structured
absences in commercials that only allow one answer - the advertisers product. The
question, "what do I need to be happy?" is not designed to stimulate thought about life
aspirations and goals, instead it is designed to channel thoughts of "happiness" in
association with X beer, Y car or Z household cleaning product: "the significance of
absences and puzzles in ads is that they give us the opportunity for a 'conscious' activity
that masks these unconscious processes. They present their 'manifest' meaning to us as
latent, thereby concealing the real 'latent' meaning" (Williamson 1975, p.73). So also in
situation comedies. These mini-morality plays present a crisis or problem and viewers are
led along the thought path to one true solution or moral. The issue of a "real" meaning
highlights the difference between unilinear and polysemic interpretation. Unilinear
interpretation is a theoretical offspring of hegemony theory, incorporating the concept of a
dominant message and one "true" meaning in a cultural message. On the other hand,
polysemic interpretation incorporates the ideal of multiple potential messages which
individuals or groups can receive.
Mark Miller (1987) adopts hegemony theory, carrying the concept of negation of alternatives to extreme. He finds the pluralist argument for choice of everything from a wide variety of television programs to a vast array of advertised products to be negated in a Pepsi commercial: "like most ads, this one contradicts its own celebration of ‘choice’ by making choice itself seem inconceivable" (Miller 1987, p.86). Advertised products are presented as the only appropriate choice. Unfortunately, Miller goes so far into pessimistic self-referentiality, he conceives of only one possible interpretation of the ad. Best and Kellner criticize this hegemonic assumption; "Miller's postmodern argument takes us into a deep fatalism which disallows any contradictory textual moments or readings. He assumes paralyzed subjects who must respond to the texts in the same way and who cannot resist the seduction" (1987, p.104).

This one-dimensional tendency in some media analysis is a strong argument for the joining of content analysis with audience response research. Hegemonic assumptions of a single-minded, passive audience must take into account the wide variety of audience interpretations, even though the range of these interpretations may fall within an ideological framework.

Fiske (1987) makes an important distinction between what he calls "psychologistic" or individualistic interpretation that focuses on the impact the character has on the viewer, and the discursive interpretation that focuses on the creative work the viewer brings to the reading of character. He contends that the **individualistic interpretive strategy** represents a belief in the uniqueness and persistence of the self where "character is seen as an analogue of a real person, and identification becomes a process of self projection of the viewer into the character represented in the text. This projection is creative" (Fiske 1987, pp.401-402). When applied to textual analysis, it "produces the theory that character is the unifying element in narrative, and that the sense that the narrative makes is the sense that the actions and events make to the character-people involved in them" (Fiske 1987, p.412).
Feuer traces the development of "character comedy" from the Mary Tyler Moore (MTM) sitcoms of the 1970s, until it became the dominant sitcom form in the 1980s: "character development is also a quality prized by the upscale audience that tends to have a more literary standard of value... the idea of character depth and development does not make for 'better' or even for more sophisticated programming. To value 'character comedy' over other comic techniques is to take up an ideological position, to construct the genre in a particular way and to value it for a kind of depth that some would construe as ideologically conservative" (Feuer 1992, p.154). Fiske contends that individual analysis represents the ideology of individualism: "when character representation is seen as that of a psychologically real personality, then the reading practice of merging character with the player becomes not only easy, but ideologically rewarding" (1987, p.414).

When we look at character within the context of the program, and then broaden the image to look at the program intertextually, we must also examine the program publicity and journalistic criticism that is written by what Bennett (1983) calls "cultural operators". Fiske contends this reveals that the individual approach is the dominant reading strategy.

The discursive (structuralist or semiotic) model broadens the range of individualistic character analysis out to a wider social and historical context within which a program is created and viewed. The social and political dimension "points to the political construction of both gender and self. The body is political, not natural, despite the powerful attempts by our ideology to naturalize and depoliticize it" (Fiske 1987, p.419). The socio-political construction of character and gender will be the primary focus of this research project.

In discursive analysis, the unifying power of character is found in the structural relationship between or among characters: "the characters unify disparate actions not through their personal experience of them, but through their textual function of embodying an abstract value system, which is the means by which sense is made of the incidents" (Fiske 1987, p.413). A discursive approach examines character as historically specific
and socially constructed.

Discursive analysis adds an important layer of information about latent television messages to the individual analysis of character: "character in TV drama may not be the representation of psychologically layered and motivated individuals but rather a metonymic representation of social positions and the values embodied in them. These values are deeply encoded in the 'symbolic codes' (Barthes 1974) of the culture, the codes that organize our understandings around such fundamental oppositions as male: female, married: single, or family: career" (Fiske 1987, p.408). The characters Murphy Brown and Roseanne embody these basic oppositions within the construction of feminine gender.

Just as Fiske presented Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey from the program Cagney and Lacey as 1980s representations of this dichotomy, so Murphy Brown and Roseanne may be seen as 1990s models. The individual form of analysis, that Fiske claimed is the dominant reading strategy utilized by journalistic critics, transforms the values of social positions into contemporary political and social values and then individualizes them into character. It takes a discursive analysis to see "character as an embodiment of abstract social and political values, and conflict between characters as an enactment of social conflict" (Fiske 1987, p.408).

To understand "television as a bearer of meaning, as an agent of culture" in our multi-culturally diverse society, Fiske suggests that analysis should "shift our interest away from the ideology of the text and toward the ideologies of the text's potential readers" (1987, p.414). This would involve an examination of the source of viewers' subcultural interpretations and the ideological implications of the kinds of pleasure that people derive from watching. There is a possibility that many are drawn to these shows to enjoy seeing strong women challenge the status quo, but then are given a bogus substitute sort of pleasure that actually accommodates the status quo. If it is that simple, why do sophisticated, liberated types keep watching? Is it the need to find, as prior research has found about mystery novel readers, a problem with a neat solution in a short period of
time, unlike most everyday lives in the 1990s? We must also leave open possible residual or "subcultural" viewer interpretation, i.e., the possible fact that if viewers think Roseanne and Murphy are empowered, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy positively impacting their attitudes and lives.

The focus of this research is the current status of media generated sex-role stereotypes. Sitcoms have been considered an area of seeming equality for more than two decades. After completing a three year study of gender differentials for "ordergiving" and the "support needs" dimensions of stereotypes, Greenberg, Richards and Henderson concluded, "apparently, for script writers and producers, women may have equity with men in comic situations; indeed, they may even acquire dominance in comic situations...If one wants to see women in other than a dominated or nurturance-receiving role, the best bet is to watch women on situation comedies" (1980, p.86).

Partial justification for the decision to focus on two characters, utilizing social class as a variable for analysis can be found in the following statement: "A typical week in TV Guide shows that more than 90 percent of display ads for programs foreground character over plot, action or setting" (Fiske 1987, p.399). Other research (Feuer 1992) suggests that "character comedy" became the dominant sitcom form in the 1980s.

Regarding viewer reaction and fulfillment, Fiske asks, "How do we, the viewers, 'read' character?" and stresses "the amount of creative work a reader has to do in order to make or fill out a character" (1987, p.399). This is where programs, as texts, leave room for diverse subcultural interpretation. Several researchers (Fiske 1987; Grossberg & Treichler 1987) contend that the dominant TV message is not received uniformly by all, because in many situations it is rejected.

The programs Murphy Brown and Roseanne were selected for analysis for a variety of reasons. They feature women lead characters in ratings dominant sitcoms. Roseanne and Murphy Brown appear to be strong women who seem to defy traditional television sex-role stereotypes. They are two seemingly empowered women who speak
their minds. For the purposes of this analysis, empowerment will be equated with challenging traditional sex-role stereotypes, specifically those found in prior gender research on television characters. Several justifications for the selection of these two top-rated programs can be found in current literature. The first is the opportunity to build upon Fiske's (1987) analysis of *Cagney & Lacey*, where two women of different social class and character were depicted within one program. Although *Cagney & Lacey* never enjoyed the long-run nor reached the ratings pinnacle enjoyed by *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, it does offer the opportunity for comparison. *Cagney & Lacey*, was praised by feminists because "it honors women's friendships and represents a radical departure from the myth that women can't get along" (Gloria Steinem, *TV Guide* Jan 16, 1988). Byars praises *Cagney & Lacey* for presenting "a very real picture of female friendship" which is "unusual on network television" (1987, p.302).

The newer programs have higher ratings appeal and may reflect even sharper class contrasts. While the characters Cagney and Lacey were featured in the same program, and the characters Murphy Brown and Roseanne are featured on different programs, the concept of intertextuality justifies their comparison because "distinctions among texts are as invalid as the distinctions between texts and life. Popular culture can be studied only intertextually" (Fiske 1989, p.126).

The second justification for the selection of these programs for analysis comes from Bonnie Dow's (1990) analysis of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (*TMTMS*) calls for a hegemonic analysis of *Murphy Brown* looking for the tension between the oppositional concepts of feminism and patriarchy. The series *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has been heavily criticized: "the series consistently and systematically repressed women, in the form of Mary Richards, that any 'independence' on her part is punished by the end of the episode, much like the 'independent' acts of Lucy Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*" (Byars 1987, p.294). "The problems of *TMTMS* and its portrayal of women are neither minor nor obvious... Mary Richards is a successful single women, but only at the expense of
conforming to traditional expectations in the roles she plays for others. In addition, although Mary's friendships with women enhance her private life, the contrast between her success and their lack of it implies that the route to happiness is found in compliance with patriarchal norms; the resistance that Rhoda, Phyllis, and Sue Ann represent leads to dissatisfaction" (Dow 1990, p.271). Similarly, according to Dow, *Murphy Brown* "focuses on the life of a woman who is a successful television journalist and avowed feminist, depicts the title character as embodying traditionally male characteristics; she is aggressive, competitive, and often insensitive. Moreover, her public success is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness" (1990, p.271).

And, third, Jackie Byars offers a convincing argument to examine *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*. Identifying prime-time network television as the bastion of dominant ideologies, she finds "evidence of strong feminine discourses at work and evidence that television does not present a monolithic and invulnerable discursive system" (Byars 1987, p.296).

The two sitcoms to be analyzed have several similarities. Both air at 9 pm; *Murphy Brown* on Monday (CBS) and *Roseanne* on Tuesday (ABC). Both are the centerpieces of their network's leading comedy night programming. And both programs were created by women producers: Roseanne Barr Arnold and Diane English although English and her co-producer, husband Joel Shukovsky, left *Murphy Brown* after it won several Emmy Awards in spring 1992, replaced by Steven Peterman and Gary Dontzig.

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The main differences between the popular leading characters relate to their marital status and class. Roseanne is a blue collar, married, working class woman with three children and a husband. Murphy Brown is a professional, unmarried, career woman expecting an illegitimate child. By fall 1992, Roseanne's oldest daughter, Becky, had eloped when her family did not have the money to send her to college, and Murphy Brown had given birth to a boy whom she named Avery, after her mother.
Situations outside the actual programs relating to the lead characters personal and career lives, and publicity surrounding the programs, highlight these differences. The lead characters in both programs are played by two actresses with strong off-screen personalities. Their personal lives appear to be closely aligned with the characters they portray. Roseanne Barr Arnold owns part or all of the program's production company and has control over the program staff and content. She comes from a highly publicized, troubled family background and covered the talk show circuit in September 1991, claiming to be an abused child. Roseanne came from a working class family who committed her to an insane asylum in her early teens. She married young to get away from her family. During the course of the hit program, Roseanne experienced a highly publicized divorce and second marriage to Tom Arnold, a comedy writer with self-admitted drug and alcohol problems. Both are overweight. The couple pledged their eternal love with matching tattoos. In 1990, her highly publicized, off-key rendition of the national anthem became a national scandal. Despite her millions, Roseanne is still perceived as, and seems to identify closely with, her blue collar background. She is a Hollywood outsider. However, with ratings dominance comes power and in fall, 1992, Roseanne Arnold used her considerable clout to place her husband's program, The Jackie Thomas Show, in the coveted time slot following her own show. She offered no apologies for the power play: "Hey, I didn't have to hold a gun to anybody's head. I'm too powerful" (Associated Press, Nov 22, 1992). She also faxed vicious personal attacks to several national television critics who panned the program.

For years Roseanne Barr Arnold presented an image of a woman totally unconcerned with physical attributes. She seemed content to use her non-traditional female Hollywood star image to thumb her nose at the television establishment. She spent little time having her hair coiffed and seemed to care little about her wardrobe, except to dress outrageously at important events. However, in 1992 she entered the Hollywood plastic surgery scene with breast reduction and nose reconstruction surgery. Roseanne
and her husband Tom hit the talk-show circuit praising the wonders of plastic surgery. In December 1992 as soon as the show began its Christmas break she underwent further breast surgery, had a tummy tuck, navel reconstruction and several other forms of vanity-based, elective surgery in an apparent attempt to make her image conform to an artificial, and constantly changing, Hollywood standard.

In stark contrast, Candice Bergen was raised in a wealthy Hollywood family, the only child of of Edgar Bergen, and seemingly experienced a storybook childhood. During that time Hollywood stars were equivalent to American royalty. While she had no brothers or sisters, much was written about a "sibling rivalry" with her father's dummy, Charlie McCarthy. After years as a photojournalist and actress, she married noted French film director Louis Malle. They have one daughter and an intercontinental marriage, he in France, she in New York and Los Angeles. The tall, slender, attractive Bergen is also a highly visible TV advertising spokesperson for the Sprint telephone network.

These programs must be placed within the proper historical context. Both programs premiered in the Fall 1988 season, at the height of the consumerism of the late 1980s. The working class sitcom Roseanne was an instant hit, ranking first for all programs for the 1988-1989 season: "The blue-collar comedy started out in advantageous position, Tuesdays at 8:30, but soon proved it didn’t need a protected time period to pull large audiences. In the spring, having lost Tuesday night to NBC, ABC did the unthinkable with ‘Roseanne,’ moving it back a half-hour, and it responded by beating ‘The Cosby Show’ for the No. 1 weekly spot as often as not...legitimate smash hit" (Variety May 3-9, 1989 p.69). The more upscale Murphy Brown was the only new hit for CBS. "The only other successful September starter was CBS' ‘Murphy Brown,’ which ranked 36th for the season. CBS had trouble all season getting viewers on Monday night so ‘Brown’ seldom had much of a lead-in, but it did well enough to justify its return - and served as CBS' token 1988-89 new hit" (Variety May 3-9, 1989, p.69).

In the second season, 1989-1990, Roseanne again claimed the number one spot
and *Murphy Brown* had moved up to 29th according to A.C. Nielsen. By the 1991-1992 television season, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* were the top rated sitcoms in the nation. By this time, the impact of the recession was becoming increasingly obvious nationally, especially to the California-based culture industry. Fortune 500 companies suffered tremendous financial losses with net income down $38 billion in 1991. Orion pictures produced its second consecutive Academy Award winning movie while suffering tremendous economic setbacks and ultimately filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. In 1991 the company produced *Silence of the Lambs* which earned more than $180 million (as of April, 1992), and in 1990, the smash hit *Dances with Wolves*.

The industry began to look at stars' salaries in television series and movie productions. For the first time, cable subscriptions declined. Economists estimated that it was an easy first cut in tight family budgets. It also reversed a decade long trend of declining viewership of network television. By the end of 1992 "corporate downsizing and restructuring" along with early retirement programs and worker buyouts became euphemisms for severe curtailment of middle management positions, jobs that would not be replaced even in an improved corporate climate. In December 1992, IBM, a generational symbol of economic stability, announced its first layoffs ever.

The **population sample** was selected from two ratings months (February 1992; and November 1992), when networks compete in what they consider to be a life or death battle for ratings points. Each ratings point translates roughly to one million viewing households, and millions of dollars in potential advertising revenue. November and February are considered the primary ratings periods and competition for viewers is fierce. If one were to adopt the view that audience determines program content, then the programs shown during these crucial ratings periods would be the most representative or strongest program product.

In the 1992 February ratings period *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* directly competed in only two of the four ratings weeks because the 1992 Winter Olympics took
over the CBS prime time schedule during the first two ratings weeks. The two programs from each series that aired during the latter two week period were selected for this research: the *Murphy Brown* episodes that aired on Monday February 24 and March 2; and the *Roseanne* programs that aired on Tuesday February 25 and March 3.

Three weeks of the November 1992 ratings period were also included in the sample. Since *Roseanne* was pre-empted by Presidential election coverage the first week in November, only the last three rating weeks were incorporated into the study.

The ten programs to be analyzed have been recorded on videotape for repeated viewing. The primary research tool will be a word-for-word transcript of each of the ten programs in the sample.

There are several relevant statistics about the Sample. During the week of February 24-25, the A. C. Nielsen Company found that *Roseanne* was the third most watched program in the nation with 30.1 million viewers and a rating of 19.2 (x 921,000 TV households). 28% of all the television sets turned on between 9 and 9:30 pm, that Tuesday evening were watching *Roseanne*. The *Murphy Brown* episode that aired on February 24, 1992 was the fourth rated program in the country. It boasted 27.2 million viewers; a rating of 19 (x 921,000 TV households), reflecting a similar 28% of all television sets turned on between 9 and 9:30 pm that Monday evening.

During the week of March 2 to 8, *Roseanne* was the second most watched program in the country with a 22.2 rating representing 20.4 million homes. *Murphy Brown* was the third highest rated program with a 19.8 rating reflecting 18.2 million homes. The cumulative total for the 1991-1992 season placed *Roseanne* as the second most watched program nationally and *Murphy Brown* in third place. The top rated program for the season was *60 Minutes*. Thus, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* were the season's top rated sitcoms with each episode of each program attracting approximately thirty million viewers in twenty million households. In November 1992, *Roseanne* was once again the nations' most watched program and *Murphy Brown* was third. *60 Minutes*
took the second place slot.

The five episodes of each program represent approximately 20% (5 of 26) of the series' annual production. There is a potential problem in that the selection of a sample is not representative of the whole, however, research will draw extensively upon other episodes in order to background characters and trace plot development over the life of each series. This should help obtain a more substantial sampling of character development/behavior and help place these selected episodes within the context of each sitcom's five year history.

As discussed in the review of literature, intertextuality is an important element in this research, referring to the way in which texts, in this case television programs, are constituted by their relationships with other texts. This extends to the publicity about the programs, articles, critiques, reviews and increasingly the lives of the actors portraying the characters. Fiske provides one form of justification for the intertextual comparison of the lead character in one program to that in another: "popular culture is built on repetition, for no one text is sufficient, no text is a completed object. The culture consists only of meanings and pleasures in constant process" (1989, p. 126).

The task of examining the first five years of each sitcom was made easier since both programs went into strip syndication in fall '92, making available the earliest episodes of the programs to provide perspective on character-plot-lifestyle changes (five episode reruns plus one new episode for each program equals ten reruns and two new programs per week).

Additionally, this in-depth look should give life to statistical findings and provide an opportunity to see if the projected gender message is consistent with prior findings. It also provides the opportunity to look at subtle nuances and messages related to previous statistical research findings and could possibly suggest new forms of research to broaden the area of gender study on prime-time television.

This research will investigate three primary questions or hypotheses:
H1 The two most popular prime time television sitcoms (1992), Roseanne and Murphy Brown present the manifest message to viewers that they are non-stereotypical and thus empower women.

H2 The characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown manifestly represent different social classes and these class distinctions influence the construction of their gender identities.

H3 Women characters in prime-time television who are presented as role models of equality, at the manifest level, are depicted in ways that reproduce the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level.

To begin the analysis of Hypothesis One, Tuchman (1978) defines gender stereotypes as confining portrayals of sex-appropriate appearance, interests, skills, behaviors, and self-perceptions. Gender stereotypes present accepted standards of what is valued about male and female gender roles, the qualities which are positively or negatively associated with each gender, and how are they applied. This phase of analysis (H1) will involve comparison of the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown to prior findings of gender research outlined in the review of literature to see if they fit traditional sex-role stereotypes depicted on television.

Several factors will be examined in relationship to the two leading characters. This will be done with the realization that it is difficult to draw exact parallels in every case, based on five episodes of each program. Instead of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories, the following general factors will provide a basis of comparison between Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown, the lead characters of the two programs. These are not fill in the blank categories since the primary focus, at least in the first phase of the research, is to look for similarities and differences between the two characters and to compare each to prior research findings on gender stereotyping on television. These categories are relative to each other and take their value in comparison with their opposition.
Fiske points out that several problems are inherent in any categorizing system ranging from the choice of categories, which is never self-evident, to assigning defined units to the appropriate category: "for instance I am not sure whether 'attitude to work' is a psychological trait, or a social one. But even when a categorization has been completed, however arbitrarily, we are still no further towards understanding the relationship between the categories, for meaning derives from relationship, not from essences. For instance, do we read Cagney's marital status as an effect of her career ambitions, or a cause of them? And how do both relate to her physical characteristic?" (1987, p.409).

Fiske's observations about *Cagney & Lacey* parallel the comparison of *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*: "What is striking about this list is the preponderance of traits that are not derived from the nature of the individual, but are social, political, or economic in origin" (1987, p.408). This raises the question of whether these television characters are merely social, political, or economic caricatures. Later, a discursive analysis will consider that issue.

Just as Fiske found Cagney's feminine appearance to contrast with her masculine name and interpersonal style, so also Murphy Brown is the feminine looking television journalist, with a not so feminine name and abrasive interpersonal style: "such contradictions take her beyond characterization by stereotype, because the practice of stereotyping necessarily implies the sort of close fit between representation and dominant ideology that is refuted or denied by internally contradictory values of this sort" (1987, p.408).

The six major findings of 1950s through 1990s media gender research are:

1. A large gap exists in the ratio of men to women characters on television.
2. Women's roles are smaller and less important than men's roles.
3. Limited amounts of female-female interaction were depicted and male images were more central.
4. The tendency for women characters to have a significantly more limited age
distribution than male characters.

5. Women characters exhibited a more limited occupational range than male characters.

6. The depiction of women in television is defined and limited by marital status more than men. Marriage and the workplace are portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men.

At the manifest level *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* appear to defy prior gender stereotypes and present an image of female empowerment. Systematic content analysis will be employed to see whether these seemingly empowered women fit, or do not fit, four decades of prior findings about women's depiction on television.

After the issue of gender stereotypes is analyzed, greater depth will be given to the nominal categories. This aspect of data analysis will also be conducted at the individual level, focusing on characters, comparing and contrasting them to the psychological profile of women on television that has been constructed over the past several decades. The two characters will be compared to each other for similarities and differences, to determine if one or the other is more or less gender stereotyped. For the purposes of this project the term "empowerment" will be equated with not matching the sex-role stereotypes listed above in the six categories and below in the psychological profile of women portrayed on television. This is based on the ideological linkage that equates masculine characteristics with power.

Prior research has suggested several categories for sex-role stereotypes that will be used to evaluate Hypothesis One. These categories are taken from three studies representing progressive decades of gender research in media (Tedesco 1974; Downs 1981; Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). The categories will be analyzed for similarities and differences, stereotypical or non-stereotypical, in the selected sample.

Tedesco (1974) in a four-year sample of major characters in prime-time network programs, discovered a number of gender specific stereotypes. Female stereotypes
included: attractive, fair, sociable, warm, happy, peaceful, youthful, rich and clean. Male stereotypical definitions included: powerful, tall, masculine, smart and stable.

Fiske (1987) suggests that physical appearance, mannerisms and style of caring are appropriate categories for character analysis. Long & Simon (1974) found that physically, women portrayed on television are usually tall, thin, attractive, well-dressed and less physically active. At the individual level the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown will be compared on external characteristics such as their physical attributes and general appearance.

Attractiveness and the creation of an "appropriate" feminine appearance has long been the focus of women's and teens' popular culture where attractive physical appearance is associated with getting a man, the desired outcome. Angela McRobbie found the overwhelming message from Jackie magazine to be that women were preoccupied with personal appearance as part of their active competition with other women for men: "Romance problems, fashion, beauty and pop mark out the limits of the girl's concern - other possibilities are ignored or dismissed" (1982, pp.281-2).

The second study, Downs' analysis of fourteen top-rated, prime-time programs suggested that the following areas typify female gender stereotypes: home orientation, high sociability, empathy, emotionality and fearfulness. Male characteristics were: work orientation, other activity, low sociability and confidence. Downs found statistically significant sex differences for only three of the eleven above listed categories: Work orientation (m), home orientation (f) and emotionality (f) where "women were more likely than men to cry or express emotional upset" (1981, p.256).

Two of the three categories where significant gender differences were found: home and work orientation, relate to the Public (m) vs. Private (f) arena or sphere. Most research has found women television characters predominantly functioning in the private sphere. Even those functioning in the public sphere were largely concerned with private sphere issues: "the television series female is far more personally and less professionally
oriented" (McNeil 1975, p.266).

For the purposes of analysis of Hypothesis One, the TV Guide descriptions for a full year will be categorized as public or private in focus. This will determine the predominant sphere of activity for each program's entire season and the primary arena in which each lead character's sitcom life takes place. This analysis will remain at the individual level, specifically highlighting the arena or sphere within which the program takes place, categorizing the program focus and the arena in which the problems of the main plot and sub-plot take place. Later, discursive analysis of Hypothesis Three will explore the ideological implications of the focus on the separation of public and private spheres. When the analysis moves to the discursive level to test Hypothesis Three, some situations seen as individual problems in this initial analysis may be viewed as larger societal problems relating to larger social issues.

Another research focus in the analysis of Hypothesis One will be the area of actual problem solving. This will be analyzed at the individual level by examining at the content of the ten individual programs for: specific problem; source of that problem (public vs private issue or individual vs. social issue); type of problem; character to whom the problem is related, i.e., who needs help (M-F); and type of support or help needed. Prior research indicates that the type of support needed will fall into two areas: physical or emotional. Deaux (1976) found women to be considered more emotional, while men were depicted as more active & physical. Busby (1974) found women to be portrayed as more emotional & fragile while men were characterized as more adventurous & sturdy. Henderson, Greenberg and Atkin's (1980) study of programs from 1975 to 1977 concluded that males need significantly more physical support and females need emotional support.

Next, we will examine who complicates the issue (m-f); did the character request support; was help given; who helps or who solves the problem; and the gender of support givers. Henderson, Greenberg, and Atkin (1980, p.78) found that women were more
likely to request support than men and more likely to receive it. In sitcoms only, Henderson, Greenberg, Atkin (1980, pp.80-85) found disproportionate support for females who request help and that females support other females more than they do men.

Downs' research produced similar results: "men (characters) were most often likely to solve their own problems without assistance from others (41.67%)...women most frequently dealt with someone else's problem (32.25%) or required help to solve their own problems (25%)" (1981, pp.256-257).

Downs identified two categories which have potential significance when analyzing two outspoken lead characters. While "verbal aggression", characterized as a female characteristic, is a powerless form of grumbling, the "assertiveness" category, described as a male characteristic, is a more powerful confrontational form. Verbal aggression (f) is defined as "insulting, sarcastic, or derogatory remarks"; while assertiveness (m) is defined as "disagreement with another's point of view or announcement of an alternative method for dealing with a problem" (Downs 1981, p.254). It would be easy to confuse verbal aggression (powerless) with the more powerful assertiveness. Although Downs did not find significant gender differences, I contend this would be an important area to examine since part of the perception of empowerment of both Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown is their outspoken demeanor.

Another set of categories were identified by Vande Berg and Streckfuss who found that: "women are more likely to be depicted as positive characters than men" (1992, pp.202-203). What they define as positive characteristics are all female sex-role stereotypes; charitable, helpful and friendly. The only negative characteristics attributed to female characters were: foolish and selfish. It might be argued that if these latter characteristics are found in Roseanne or Murphy Brown they would have the potential to undermine their perceived empowerment.

Two other areas offer possible insight into the non-stereotypical empowerment of Roseanne and Murphy. The first is an examination of whether these female characters
either act or react to other characters or situations. Much previous research has found, the majority of women on television are portrayed as accessories, victims, and people who react instead of initiating action. The second is an examination of whose physical space is the locus of program, i.e., who comes to whom. Organizational literature reveals that there is a power dimension in personal space, especially in organizational settings; who gets a private office, who has the largest office, where it is located, who is summoned by whom, who goes to whom.

**H2** The characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown clearly represent different social classes and this class distinction influences their gender construction.

Here we look at social class as an intervening variable in gender definition. This analysis takes place initially at the individual level. However, the characters are now analyzed as members of a social class, actually different social classes, so they are broadening out past the individual to represent social, economic and political values.

The specific social class of each of the two main characters, Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown, will be categorized both by what is apparent or implied, including factors such as the character's occupational status; income level; educational background; personal power in the public (work) arena and private (personal) life; the degree of decision making and scope of options; and economic constraints, i.e., what they have to do, but don't want to do, to keep their job and what they want but cannot afford. Their range of options for other jobs will also figure prominently in the analysis since Murphy is an aging woman on TV and Roseanne has few skills and little formal education.

Class is not defined solely in economic terms, i.e. merely the amount of salary. Also relevant is the character's source of finances (wage/salary or investment income), which relates to being supported by one's own work or the work of others. In this case, both characters, Roseanne and Murphy Brown, work for a salary, when Roseanne is employed. In fall 1992, Roseanne became a small business owner when her mother gave
her and her sister Jackie an early inheritance. The mother, and a friend, Nancy, also invested in the loosemeat business.

The years 1991-92 were marked by a national recession following the consumer spending frenzy of the 1980s. Department of Labor statistics reveal the average unemployment rate for January to December 1992, over the course of this study, was 7.4%, the highest rate since the recession of 1984. This research will look for differences in response to economic problems, based on class, between the characters Murphy Brown and Roseanne. Economic problems play a much more obvious role in *Roseanne*. Regular viewers have seen Roseanne repeatedly lose work, in one case her entire factory section was shut down, throwing friends and relatives into unemployment and economic instability. Her husband Dan constantly struggled for contracting work in the first years of the series, and then opened a small motorcycle shop that he subsequently lost. Money, or more specifically the lack of money, is a constant topic of dialogue in *Roseanne*. Such issues are seldom mentioned in *Murphy Brown*.

Differences between the two characters are highlighted by incorporating Eric Olin Wright's (1979) division of classes into popular *gradational definitions* based on the amount of income/education/status an individual seems to possess, recognizing that status is a subjective category, and *relational definitions* defined as the individual's position within relations of the market or exchange relations in the actual production of goods and services.

Class differences in gender construction can be found in World War II media messages about Rosie the Riveter. "formulas developed for middle-class and working-class audiences emphasized different aspects of OWI's program and fashioned rather different portraits of war workers" (Honey 1984, p.213). The blue-collar "confessional formula" emphasized the helpless female who needed a man for survival, and gained identity through motherhood and domestic happiness. The middle class "romance formula" emphasized wit, pluck and determinism, with the fantasy of self-actualization
and the ability to get the job done: "this wartime contrast suggests that images of female experience as filtered through the media are greatly influenced by the socioeconomic level of the group at which they are aimed ... the fantasies, aspirations, and self-images of women depend on more than their gender" (Honey 1984, p.214). Although *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* seem to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, there is a possibility that this apparent challenge is merely a minor societal adjustment to include working women who have increasingly been driven to the workplace, out of necessity, since 1973. Media redefinitions of gender to meet economic societal needs were also found in the World War II case of Rosie the Riveter: "certainly the propaganda campaign of World War II was the most comprehensive, well-organized effort this society has made toward ending prejudice against women in male occupations and toward legitimizing the notion that women belong in the paid labor force" (Honey 1984, p.211).

In the mid-1970s another example of class differentiation in media presentations was revealed in women's magazines. Lopate found that the social class of magazine readers produced differing images of Jackie Kennedy Onasis: "those magazines aimed at middle- or upper-middle-class readers play down the role of mothering and stress the importance of consuming: shopping, decorating, and attending cultural events, for example. Those magazines intending to reach working- and lower-class women, on the other hand, minimize these costly activities and focus instead on the activity that all women are biologically capable of - being a mother" (1978, p.131).

*McCall's* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, targeted for middle class women detailed Onasis' society life "in such a way as to indicate her vulnerability and so draw out the tragedies that can occur to the rich" (Lopate 1978, p.131). The programs *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are television examples of this ilk. A dramatic shift in Onasis' image is found in working class magazines; *Woman's Day, Family Circle,* and *Lady's Circle:* "No longer is she a society lady involved in spending money; now she is a wife and mother, caring (or not caring) for her husband and children" (Lopate 1978, p.134). A pertinent question
concerns whether Roseanne's focus on the private issues of family and Murphy Brown's focus on public issues with depictions of her personal vulnerability are actually a continuation and updating of, class based gender definitions found in media representations since World War II.

Lemon found in her research on dominance in situation comedies and crime shows that social class was a major determining factor when the aspect of power is being displayed: "whatever the story line, television maintains societal stereotypes in its portrayal of power. Social class, as indicated by the relevant occupations of characters, has more of an impact upon dominance patterns than does sex" (1978, p.52). She defines dominance as the power “to influence or control others, to persuade, prohibit, dictate, to lead or direct, to restrain and to organize the behavior of [others]” (Lemon 1975, p. 51). Does this mean that traditional or non-traditional gender definitions are of no importance, that social class is the ultimate determinant of life options and other attributes which gender stereotyping is said to limit?

H3 Women characters in prime-time television who are presented as role models of equality at the manifest level, are depicted in ways that reproduce the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level.

The analysis of this hypothesis will involve a discursive reading strategy where the self is seen as historically specific and socially constructed (Fiske 1987). It adds depth to, and places in context, the preceding individual character analysis. A more political or discursive analysis of gender based stereotypes has the potential to reverse any findings about non-stereotypical behavior found in Hypothesis One: "based in material reality, the stereotype is a discursive inversion whose effect is the suppression of the power of its object" (Byars 1987, p.295).

Discursively, these programs will be placed within their socio-historical context. In the late 1980s, changes in economic structure contributed to a determination that women are a very desirable consumer demographic, especially those upscale single professionals
with discretionary income as well as women who make the majority of purchase decisions in the family.

Imray and Middleton (1983) suggest that even if Murphy Brown seems to be an empowered woman functioning successfully in the public sphere, her ultimate definition is found in gender, rather than the public sphere. They contend that it is the actor, rather than the activity itself, that defines it as public or private: "activities in themselves have no absolute and unchanging value, be they economic, political, cultural. Rather, value accrues to activities by virtue of who performs them and more importantly who controls their social meaning and importance. We seek to demonstrate that it is not work *per se* which is valued and which is part of the public sphere but rather that it is work done by *men*" (Imray and Middleton 1983, p.16).

Thus, Murphy would be ultimately defined by her female gender rather than by her function in the public sphere. Who she is (female) as an actor would be more important than the activities she performs in the public (male) sphere. The ultimate definition and limitation of life options would be located in gender. For example, despite Murphy Brown's stature as important network reporter, her pregnancy was depicted in many episodes as a physically humiliating and mentally incapacitating "disease." The FYI staff made bets on how many doughnuts she'd consume or how much weight she'd gained.

Physical characteristics and appearance were analyzed at the individual level in Hypothesis One. At the discursive level we will examine the ideological basis for cultural interpretations of these appearance characteristics such as the belief that fat is undesirable and equals sloppy and lazy: "the body is as much a political metaphor for womanhood in patriarchy as it is for the individual in capitalism and in both cases it works as a naturalizing agent for the dominant ideology... the naturalness of the body masks the socio-political construction of character, of womanhood... The body is political, not natural, despite powerful attempts by our ideology to naturalize and depoliticize it" (Fiske 1987, p.418). This is an area where class and gender intersect and relate to power. We
live in a society where much is judged and evaluated on appearance and if this approach was not created by television, it is strongly reinforced by it.

The interpretation or "reading" of the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown would be viewed by structuralists and semioticians as a culturally determined activity placed within the viewers' social and historical context. Hunter (1983, p.320 cited in Fiske 1987, p.400) contrasts the 18th century rhetorical interpretation or "reading" of the character Hamlet with the 19th century interpretation of Hamlet as a moral object. Bennett's concept of "parallel texts" points out how publicity about television programs and their stars (actors) in TV Guide, USA Today, People Magazine, Variety, and Entertainment Tonight suggest "an appropriate framework of ideological and cultural reference" (1983, p.213). In other words, they tell us how to interpret the program or text. However, viewers make their own decisions and the text leaves gaps for interpretation, intended or not.

Discursive analysis must also include a consideration of the variety of possible subcultural interpretations. The issue of vicarious fulfillment relates to the issue of ideological implications of the source of viewer's pleasure. Roseanne and Murphy Brown have the largest audiences of any sitcom on television. What do these programs provide for the thirty million viewers who tune in to each weekly episode? What makes these characters likeable and to which demographic groups do they appeal? Nielsen demographic data will be utilized to determine what similarities and differences exist between the Roseanne audience and the Murphy Brown audience.

Several other issues will be analyzed in relation to Hypothesis Three to determine whether the programs support or challenge the status quo of gender discrimination. These issues are derived from recent research on prime-time programs such as The Mary Tyler Moore Show, I Love Lucy, thirtysomething, as well as some preliminary speculations about Roseanne and Murphy Brown.

Female characters are competitive rather than cooperative and friendly. The fierce
competition between women, ultimately for men, is well-documented in media studies (McRobbie 1982; Byars 1987). Women competing with other women is as much a part of television and film history as the portrayal of women as victims. On television the apex, or nadir, of this activity came with the highly rated, vicious, physical battle between Crystal and Alexis on *Dynasty*. In recent movies, audiences have seen women's competition for men reach the murderous stage in the hit movies *Fatal Attraction* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*. *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* will be analyzed for similar signs of female competition or cooperation. There is a strong possibility that the militantly feminist *Murphy Brown* offers little in the way of expressing cooperation. On the other hand, the majority of the relationships demonstrated in *Roseanne* are female-female.

Female character's acts of independence are punished. In the early days of television, programs like *I Love Lucy* were built around Lucy's comical striving for some form of independence, usually portrayed as directly disobeying an order from her husband, Desi. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has been accused of replicating that situation: "the series consistently and systematically repressed women, in the form of Mary Richards, that any 'independence' on her part is punished by the end of the episode, much like the 'independent' acts of Lucy Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*" (Byars 1987, p.294).

This research will look at the treatment of, and definition of, acts of independence on the part of Murphy and Roseanne as well as other female characters.

Single characters are treated as children. In her best selling book, *Backlash*, Susan Faludi traces the dismal treatment of single women television characters who, she contends, reflect two stock types: "the coldly calculating careerist or the deeply depressed spinster" (1992, p.159). She cites *thirtysomething* as a series of cautionary tales "aimed exclusively at women" (Faludi 1992, p.160). In her analysis of *thirtysomething* Loeb contends that marriage is depicted as the right alternative or "natural" state. While television is "continually updating shifts in the socioeconomic structure ... at the core, fictional programming remains fairly stable and conservative. Ultimately, support and
affirmation are given to traditional views of family, patriarchy, gender roles, and other values and definitions held by the dominant ideology" (Loeb 1990, p.249). She found two major sets of relationships operating to preserve traditional values in *thirtysomething*: "married characters function as parental figures to the unmarried (child) characters, thus reaffirming the traditional lifestyle of marriage and parenthood as the only route to adulthood and self-actualization" (Loeb 1990, p.250). This research will examine the treatment of single characters in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*: Roseanne's sister Jackie, Murphy, Miles, Frank and Eldin to see if they are treated as childlike in comparison with the married characters.

A related area is whether female characters are represented as children, reinforcing the second-class status of childlike and emotional women in comparison with more rational and goal oriented men. An example of this would be the treatment of Murphy's pregnancy as a disease both physically and emotionally unbalancing.

Professional success includes heavy personal costs for women. Bonnie Dow calls for a hegemonic analysis of *Murphy Brown* to expose the tension between the oppositional concepts of feminism and patriarchy. She claims that Murphy's embodiment of the masculine defined qualities of success "is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness" (Dow 1990, p.271). Feuer similarly finds *Murphy Brown* regressive for its presentation as part of the post feminist era: "Murphy represents the fruition of the middle-class women's movement: tough, successful, and alone as she approaches middle age" (1992, p.156). Viewer subcultural interpretations might not find that to be the worst alternative, Murphy has economic independence, a rewarding career and a good life. "Man-less" has long been presented to women as equivalent to life disaster. The female professional with a personally and economically rewarding career may have a different definition of "lonely" or "disaster".

In summary, we began with individualistic categories of analysis of character to see if Murphy Brown and Roseanne are, in fact, non-stereotypical empowered women
(H1), if their gender distinctions are individualistic or representative of their respective social classes (H2), and we then move to discursive analysis of textual function to place these findings within the broader context of the current socio-political historical context (H3) to see if the manifest message of empowerment (H1), and the less obvious message of class barriers in gender definition (H2), are limited or undermined because gender is the ultimate societal base for definitions of capabilities, limitations and an individual's potential (H3).
Data analysis employing the methodology of content analysis and the semiotic approach outlined in the previous chapter will now be conducted on the ten sampled programs (five from each series). Before examining the three hypotheses, it should be noted that these are not hypotheses in strict positivist terms but are instead research statements around which the analysis is structured.

H1. **The two most popular prime time television sitcoms (1992), Roseanne and Murphy Brown, present the manifest message to viewers that they are non-stereotypical and thus empower women.**

The first task will be to compare *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* to prior research findings concerning traditional sex-role stereotypes portrayed on television. The six major generalizations found in media gender research for the period from the 1950s up to the present include:

1. **A large gap was found in the ratio of men to women characters on television** (Head 1954; DeFleur, 1964; Dominick, 1979; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan, Jackson-Beeck, 1979; Lemon, 1977, 1978; Turow 1974; and Vest 1992). Spanning four decades of research, in the 1950s Head found the ratio of male characters to female characters to be 3:1 and more recently Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found the ratio to be 2:1. Thus, while women represent approximately fifty percent of the population, on television their representation ranged from 20% to 40%. Numeric counts of
the characters in these two programs will be conducted, based on gender, to determine the characters' gender-ratio.

In *Murphy Brown*, the gender split for series regular characters is roughly 2:1, with slightly more male characters in small parts. The female continuing characters in main roles are Murphy and her co-worker Corky Sherwood-Forest. The male continuing characters are Murphy's co-workers at FYI: producer Miles Silverberg; co-anchors Jim Dial and Frank Fontana; and Murphy's painter Eldin Biemieke. Other continuing characters in lesser roles are: bar owner Phil; Jim's wife Doris; Miles' girlfriend Audrey; and Corky's husband Will.

The male: female ratio is heavily skewed (13:2), deliberately so, toward the male in one episode (MB#1). Seven male senators and Stan, the corporate lawyer play major roles in this episode which is designed to duplicate the "good old boys club" atmosphere of the Senate which created such a public outcry and was deemed responsible for naming 1992 the "Year of the Woman" in politics. The executive producer duplicated the dominant male atmosphere evidenced in the Clarence Thomas Senate Confirmation Hearings, with Murphy taking the "isolated female under attack" role played in the real hearings by Anita Hill. However, an analysis of the dialogue from that episode shows Murphy with nearly half the dialogue in that program and all the action centers around her. She is allowed to fight back as Anita Hill was not.

In the rural farmhouse episode (MB#2) there is a much more egalitarian gender count with the main characters running 4:3 male to female. Murphy, Corky and Doris Dial are balanced by Jim, Frank, Miles and Eldin with Corky's husband Will, and a neighbor couple (m-f) as incidental characters. The subplot concerns oppositional definitions of marital relationships with newlyweds Corky and Will's obvious physical attraction set against the long married Jim and Doris's bickering.

When Murphy is set to travel to Paris to cover the Economic Summit (MB#3) the main characters are Murphy and Eldin, with complimentary roles played by Miles, Frank,
Corky and Jim, reflecting a 2:1 male to female ratio. Cameo appearances are made by the singing male secretary #54 who Murphy fires, nanny #6 who quits, and Phil. When Frank's parents come to Washington to protest, (MB#4), the male:female ratio is 4:3. Murphy, Corky and Connie Silverberg are the primary female characters with Miles, Nathan Silverberg, Jim and Frank the primary male characters. Other characters are Phil and Secretary #55, sporting a hairstyle packed with pencils. Ostensibly, Miles would be the center of this episode but Miles parents' protest is a story Murphy wants to cover. Murphy is present and vocal when Miles argues with his parents, she seems to have more in common with them. The subplot concerns the issue of what defines a good family, yet another challenge of the "traditional family" this sitcom has become noted for. The final sample episode (MB#5) centers around an awards presentation. The gender ratio is 3:2 with Miles, Jim, Frank, Murphy and Corky playing major roles. Eldin and Phil have smaller roles. The five main characters are all presented as petty, squabbling children.

Eliminating the deliberately and heavily skewed first sample episode (MB#1, 13:2), the highest male:female ratio depicted in the five sampled Murphy Brown episodes is 2:1 (MB#3), the rest are 4:3 (MB#2, MB#4), and 3:2 (MB#5). This reflects and corroborates the earlier findings of more male than female characters; however the impact of this will be mediated in the next area when the size and importance of roles is included in the analysis.

A much more female-dominated gender-role ratio is presented in Roseanne. This program is not gender equal, it is female-dominated, reversing the numbers found in prior research. A gender breakdown of the Conner family reveals four females: Roseanne, her daughters Becky and Darlene, and her sister Jackie; and two males, husband Dan and their son D.J., who either has a cameo appearance or is missing in most episodes. This starts the cast of most episodes out with a 2:4 or 1:4 male: female ratio.

In the program concerning Roseanne's and Jackie's visit to the home of their youth just before it was torn down (R#1), these two females are the main characters. In the subplot, Dan and Roseanne learned that their daughter Darlene had cut school to go to a
comic book convention with David. The major gender role ratio in this episode was 2:3 male to female with Roseanne's husband Dan and Darlene's boyfriend and comic book collaborator David in the male roles, and Roseanne, Jackie and Darlene in the main female roles. The family ratio changed over the course of the 1992-1993 season when Becky left the cast because of her marriage and Darlene left for Chicago because the actress who played her left for college.

The episode which dealt with the filming of a television commercial at the Rodbell's luncheonette where Roseanne worked (R#2), reflected the largest number of male characters found in the five Roseanne episodes in the sample, and largest ratio 1:1. This could reflect the movement of the family into the public sector of television commercials. While the family maintains its 1:2 male-female ratio, the Rodbell's location added two males; Roseanne's boss, Leon, and commercial director, Ken; and one female, Roseanne's co-worker and friend, Bonnie. The subplot involved their next door neighbor's plans to move out of town because the husband/father lost his job. This adds two male characters: Todd and his father Jerry; and one female, Todd's mother Kathy.

The remaining three sample episodes were heavily skewed with female characters. The episode concerning Roseanne and Jackie's mother moving to a senior community (R#/3), with the subplot of their friend Nancy announcing she's a lesbian, had an all-female cast except for a few lines by Dan in the opening. This reflects a 1:7 male: female ratio. The next episode, in which the Lanford Lunch Box, owned and operated by Roseanne, Jackie, Nancy, and mother Bev as a silent partner, opened, has an equal gender ratio of 1:1. Dan, Nancy's ex-husband Arnie, two male customers and a male karate instructor were balanced by Roseanne, Jackie, Nancy, Darlene and a female self-defense instructor. An all-male poker game was balanced by an all-female self-defense class. The episode in which Darlene attended a rock concert with neighbor Molly had a 1:2 male to female ratio. Dan, D.J, and the man who was the neighbor girl's father, represented the men, Roseanne, Darlene, Jackie, the sisters Molly and Charlotte, and Becky on the telephone, were the
female characters.

Thus the gender ratio in *Roseanne* ranges from an equal 1:1 ratio on two programs (R# 2, R# 4), through a 2:3 (R# 1) and 1:2 (R# 4) ratio all the way up to a 1:7 (R# 3) heavily female ratio. This directly challenges the findings of decades of television research that there are more male than female characters.

2. **Women's roles are smaller than men's roles** (Dominick 1979; Downs 1980, 1981; Meehan 1983). While women were found to be underrepresented in the number of roles, the range and size of women's roles was also found to be limited across the spectrum of prime-time, daytime television and weekend television in all forms of programming. This research will examine the size of character's roles based on their gender to determine whether women's roles are, in fact, smaller than male character's roles.

In contrast to the previous research findings, the two programs *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* feature female lead characters around whom the action and most of the dialogue takes place. While the male characters outnumber the female characters on *Murphy Brown*, script analysis shows nearly half the dialogue to be female-speaking, mainly that of Murphy. The farm visit (MB#2) is a good example: Murphy is the center of action and discussion, it's her farm, she sets the rules, and the rest of the cast is ensemble. While some episodes are centered around other characters, these episodes are less frequent and were not aired during the ratings periods.

Like Murphy Brown, Roseanne Conner is the leading character; however in *Roseanne*, most of the other players are female: Jackie, Becky, Darlene, mother Bev, and Nancy. The two males in the family, Dan and D.J. are, in many cases, incidental. Dan plays a much smaller role, nearly reflecting complaints by many female actors that they have only accessory roles. Dan is not a "Yes, dear...No, honey," character but he is much less central to the dialogue in most episodes. Arnie, played by Roseanne's real-life husband Tom Arnold, is the most pathetic buffoon in either program.
The largest roles in these programs are those of Murphy and Roseanne. Whether they are on screen or off, all characters are defined in relation to them, and most action takes place either directly around them or as a consequence of something they've done, might do, or plan to do. Even when other characters are featured in an episode, they are most often defined in terms of Roseanne or Murphy, and these two characters dominate both the action and the dialogue. Even in the extremely gender unbalanced (13:2) episode on the Senate hearings (MB# 1), Murphy is the center of every scene, except the final scene when the Senators confer. Yet, she is the topic of their conversation and they react to her statement as a journalist in defense of First Amendment rights. Both Roseanne and Murphy Brown are sitcoms with a central, female, leading character and ensemble casts.

In Murphy Brown, the ensemble players include Corky, who is a former beauty queen working to be taken seriously as a journalist. However, she does light feature stories instead of heavy investigative reporting and adds the stereotypical female element in many instances, i.e., the importance of clothes, make-up, hair, and the cosmetic battle against aging; an interest in domestic issues; and a traditional Southern upbringing. Corky has, however, in more recent episodes been revealed at times as a fairly strong individual. The male continuing characters are Murphy's co-workers at FYI: producer Miles Silverberg; co-anchors Jim Dial and Frank Fontana; and Murphy's painter Eldin Biemieke. Technically, the young, Harvard educated Miles is Murphy's boss and Jim Dial is senior anchor. Frank is Murphy's equal and Eldin is her employee. Murphy's mother was becoming a strong series regular until the death of the actress, Colleen Dewhurst, who portrayed her, which, in a prime example of the program's intertextuality, was written into the script as the death of Murphy's mother.

Thus, in these two top-rated sitcoms, the female lead characters have the largest roles. In Murphy Brown the ensemble roles are played predominantly by men, largely reflecting the male dominated world of network television in which the program takes place, and in Roseanne the ensemble roles are played predominantly, in some cases
exclusively, by women. The nation's top-rated sitcom, *Roseanne* does not fit the first two prior research findings that on television male characters outnumber female characters nor that women's roles are smaller than men's roles. While *Murphy Brown* does present a male: female character ratio reflected in prior research, when the factor of size of roles and centrality to the action is examined, it presents a more egalitarian picture, challenging the conclusions of prior research that women's roles are smaller than men's roles.

3. **Limited amounts of female-female interaction were reflected with male images depicted as central.** Mackey and Hess (1982) and Vest (1992) found the most frequent type of gender interactions on prime-time television to be between men and women, followed by men interacting with men. Female-female interaction was the least often found category (6.3% - 1982; 12% - 1992). Mixed gender interaction was the leading type of prime-time television interaction but it declined from 1982 to 1992 (61.6% - 1982; 49.3% - 1992). Increasing interaction between male characters was reflected in the same decade (32.1% - 1982; 38.7% - 1992). A sub-category of male role centrality involves findings that **men are portrayed as being more task-oriented and women are depicted as being more socio-emotional** (Mackey and Hess 1982; Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). These programs will be analyzed to determine which type of interaction by gender is predominant, if male roles are depicted as more central or important and whether male characters seem to be more task-oriented and female characters more socio-emotional.

*Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* seem to provide more female-female interactions and less male-male interactions than found by either Mackey and Hess (1982) or Vest (1992). These two studies analyzed prime-time television in general and not the apparently less gender-stereotypical sub-area of situation comedies.

It may, in fact, be difficult to find very many female-female interaction scenes in *Murphy Brown* since the cast, with Murphy's colleagues largely representing the public sphere, is predominantly male. Roseanne Conner, on the other hand, primarily operates in
the private sphere. The program presents a significant amount of female-female interaction with major roles including that of her sister Jackie, daughters Becky and Darlene, and her friends. *Roseanne’s* five year reign as the top-rated series on commercial television seems to undermine Mackey and Hess’s biocultural argument that women are not interesting as the focus of television programs: “an attention-structure argument suggests that woman-woman dyads are not often found in centers of political, social or economic dominance; and viewers prefer the shows which focus on such nuclei of activity. The viewer's attention structure is, therefore, ill suited to triangulate with a large number of woman-woman interactions … writers and producers do not offer many examples and viewers subsequently do not watch the few available examples. An unintended artifact of this disproportion may be to increase the psychological acceptance of the political and economic dominance of the American male” (Mackey and Hess 1982, pp. 210-211). This argument is not only challenged by the larger proportion of female-female dialogue and interaction in the nation's top-rated television sitcom, *Roseanne*, but has prior challenges in the Lucy-Ethel interaction in *I Love Lucy* and the hilarious exchanges between Mary and Rhoda on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and, after the article was written, the popular prime-time drama featuring female-female interaction between Mary Beth and Christine in *Cagney and Lacy*.

However, *Roseanne* moves far beyond female-female interaction as only an aspect of a program; it is the major aspect in many episodes. Roseanne’s primary relationships are female. Most are in the personal sphere. In the first sampled episode (R# 1), Jackie and Roseanne discuss how they shared a difficult childhood when they visit their old family home before it is torn down:

Roseanne: Let's face it Jackie, our family was like totally screwed up. Which is probably why I got fat and why you can't have any decent relationship with any man.

Jackie: Or maybe I just never found the right guy … And you never found the wrong donut.
Roseanne: Well that's probably how we survived it all, we could always make each other laugh.

Jackie: Oh, I Know. Well ...Well ..., Are you sorry you came?

Roseanne: No... No, cause I think, well, you know, we probably needed to do this. Goodbye house.

Jackie: Yeah.

Roseanne: Let's go pick up a couple a burgers.

Jackie: Yeah, or sailors ...

Jackie also uses the occasion of the visit to defend Darlene's skipping school to attend a comic book convention with her boyfriend, and comic collaborator, David. She reminds Roseanne of the time they sneaked out of the house to attend a fraternity party in Bloomington.

Roseanne: Yeah, that Frat party.

Jackie: We were really too mature for high school guys.

Roseanne: Yeah, so we end up with these future doctors and lawyers playing "Up Up and Away" on their armpits.

Jackie: Yeah, we slept in a car. What were we thinking? We could have gotten really hurt, you know, and mom and dad had no idea where we were ... But I guess that's just the crazy kind a stuff kids do.

Roseanne: Oh gee, Jackie, that sounds just like what Darlene did. I guess I'm just no better than her.

(sarcastic) How could I be so blind?

Jackie: My point exactly.

Roseanne: You know, Jackie, When you remember to water your chia pet, you can criticize the way I raise my kids.


Roseanne: Okay, so, you know, what we did was stupid. But if we would have gotten caught, we would've gotten busted ... and we would've deserved it.

Jackie: Yes, but Darlene says what she did was important.

Roseanne: She said the same thing when she shaved D.J.'s head.
Jackie: Well the comic book thing seems to mean a lot to her, and I believe her.

Roseanne: Why?

Jackie: Because she gave me Hell for not sticking up for her. And usually when she's mad at you, she's really nice to me. And now it's like we're on the same side and that just stinks.

Roseanne: Okay, so all right, this thing is really important to her ... But I never told her she had to quit the comic book thing.

Jackie: Well yeah, you did, kind a, because David does the pictures.

Roseanne: Okay. Okay. I get it. Shut up.

Jackie: All right, You're welcome.

In the prior two examples Roseanne and Jackie discussed their past personal relationship between themselves and their parents, and Roseanne's present relationship with her daughter Darlene.

While *Roseanne* is full of examples of female-female interaction, the sampled episodes of *Murphy Brown* reflected far less. One interchange between Corky and Jim's wife Doris, however, is a good example. The FYI group is spending the weekend at Murphy's farmhouse and Jim and Doris have been fighting since they arrived.

Corky: I've always loved this commercial. It's so sweet the way the husband puts those comfort insoles into his wife's shoes in the morning when she isn't looking. Don't laugh, but it sort of reminds me of you and Jim.

Doris: Why? Is there an air of unspoken resentment and recrimination between them?

Corky: No, It's the kind of thing you do for each other, like how Jim always washes your car on Sunday morning, or driving up here the way you took the pickle off his cheeseburger, and he didn't even have to ask. Those are things people who really know each other and really care about each other do.

Doris: Well, surely you and Will do those things.

Corky: Not really. I don't think it means we love each other any less, but for some reason we just never think to do them. You're lucky, I
hope someday Will and I have what you two have.

Another exchange between Corky and Murphy points out how ignorant the career professional is of childhood things. Corky is holding up flash cards for Murphy to identify.

Corky: We both know your future success depends on it.
Murphy: Is it Big bird?
Corky: No! It isn't Big Bird. It has no feathers, no beak. It's Cookie Monster. How do you ever expect to teach your child to read? Now, try this one.
Murphy: Topo Gigo?

Mackey and Hess found an aspect of male role centrality to be that men were portrayed as more task-oriented while women were portrayed as more socio-emotional. They utilized Parsons' and Bales' (1955) division of action into male instrumental or "task-oriented" behavior and female expressive-oriented or "socio-emotional" behavior. Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found that even when characters were depicted in organizational roles, women were more likely to be portrayed performing interpersonal functions with men more likely to be portrayed performing operational, decisional, informational, and political functions.

While *Roseanne* offers a wide array of female-female interaction, the program *Murphy Brown* presents more of a challenge to Mackey and Hess's second finding, as well as that of Vande Berg and Streckfuss, that men are presented as task-oriented and women are presented as socio-emotional. In the first sample episode (*MB# 1*), Murphy was subpoenaed by a Senate committee to reveal her source of a confidential government document. She could be jailed if found in contempt. In the opening scene, when the network lawyer, Stan, explained the Senate subpoena, Murphy had the task-oriented response, her producer, Miles, the socio-emotional.
Murphy: It's a pain in the neck. Now I have to take time out from my schedule to spend 30 seconds in a hearing reminding them of my First Amendment Rights.

Stan: You think it's gonna be that easy Murphy? The Senate's dead serious about stopping leaks, they want a name and if they don't get one, they could find you in contempt of Congress, which, in turn, means you could go to prison. And as much as that idea secretly thrills me, the network pays me to see that it doesn't happen.

Miles: I knew it. I got too cocky. For a split second I allowed myself to enjoy life. God asked me to sit down and then he yanked the chair away.

Stan: You've got a few days to prepare Murphy. Now there are ways to present your testimony that might appease the committee and won't alienate anyone.

Murphy: Whoa. Whoa. Whoa, hold it. I don't need handlers, or strategy sessions. I'm in the right.

Murphy was relatively unflappable testifying before the committee; however, Frank, Jim and Miles fell apart during their testimony. Frank got so confused he ended up making the obscure statement, "check please," Jim ranted on with a prepared speech the committee wouldn't listen to, and Miles ended up pantomiming juggling as he said, "and she said those clowns in the Senate deserve to be exposed. Not that being a clown is a bad thing. Clowns are good. Emmett Kelly was a clown. I think he was even on a stamp..." After the Senators conducted the hearing like a group of bumbling, sexist idiots, Murphy's response was very task-oriented. She decided not to reveal her source, even if it meant going to prison, despite the fact that she was pregnant.

Senator: Uh thank you Senator. And now Ms. Brown, it's our job to vote whether to recommend to the full Senate that you be charged with contempt and in deliberating that ...

Murphy: Excuse me Senator, I have something to say. Senators, last night I decided that I would come here today and reveal to you the name of my source. I had one very good reason for doing that, it's a reason that's very close to my heart, well actually it's closer to my stomach at the moment. But then a colleague of mine said, the next time he was leaked information he'd have to think before using it and then I realized
that's exactly what you want: to keep us at heel.

Well gentlemen, I don't know if you realize this but we recently marked the 200th birthday of the First Amendment. Some birthday. Federal employees are being pressured to sign secrecy agreements so that they can't speak or write about their job without government approval ... Doctors at federally funded clinics can no longer discuss the option of abortion with their patients.

Well, as far as I'm concerned, the party's not over yet. If I think Senator Sampson is a narrow-minded misogynist, I can say that. If I think Senator Laughlin is a provincial gas bag, well I can say that too. And if I think this whole proceeding does nothing more than give you boys a chance to do some grandstanding and flagrant self promotion : well, I won't say that, I'll just say, "Happy Birthday First Amendment."

Senator: The hearing is now adjourned. Pages please clear the room.

In the episode in which Miles' parents came to Washington for a political protest (MB# 4), Murphy was very task-oriented. She knew the protest was a good story, and Miles did too, until he found out his parents were involved.

Miles: My parents picketed my senior prom dressed as dolphins because tuna was being served as an appetizer. . .

Murphy: Miles, are you saying you won't let me cover one of the most important protests of the decade because you're afraid your parents will show up as flipper?

Might I remind you we have a responsibility to our viewers? No, not just our viewers but to all of humanity for generations to come?

Miles: Forget humanity. I've got bigger problems. Nathan and Connie Silverberg are coming to town.

(Later, at the protest, which Murphy was covering, her interview with Nathan and Connie Silverberg was interrupted by her producer, and their son, Miles.)

Miles: Can we talk about this later? Come on, I want to leave before somebody gets hurt.

Murphy: Miles, we're fine. Now just get out of the shot and let me finish up.

Miles: No, I will not just get out of the shot. No. If you're not gonna come with me then I'll just stand here and ruin your interview. I, I'll just have a little protest of my own.

Miles mother: I hate it when he gets like this.
Because Roseanne is far less career-oriented - when she is employed it is a job, a paycheck - there is far less employment task-orientation. An example of this attitude was depicted in the opening scene of an episode (R# 2) where D.J.'s friend Todd was spending the night at the Conner home and the children were making a lot of noise, keeping Dan and Roseanne awake.

Dan: Oh God, I'm gonna be so tired tomorrow I won't be able to think.
Roseanne: Yeah me too. But luckily I'll be at work.

This lack of career task-orientation changed when Roseanne opened her own business with Jackie and Nancy. Yet, when Roseanne's mother announced she has selected a place to live, in a senior community, Bev was very task-oriented while Roseanne's response was emotional.

Bev: You might have heard of it, it's called Harvest Glen.
Jackie: Isn't that a retirement place?
Bev: Uh, no they call it a senior community.
Roseanne: Well you can't live there. That's just for old people. . . Jackie, they tie old people into chairs in places like that.

However, once the trio arrived at the senior community, Roseanne became very task-oriented in dealing with the saleswoman, though she reverted to the emotional state again with her mother.

Saleswoman: The price of the condo includes long-term medical attention. You, know, when it becomes necessary, your mother will be automatically relocated into a bed in our constant care wing.
Roseanne: What happens to her apartment?
Woman: Oh well, it will go back into a pool to be resold to new residents.
Roseanne: Well, what if she gets better?
Woman: Now, this is a long way off, obviously your mom is in great shape.
Roseanne: No, but I mean, I want, I want to know what happens if she gets better?
Woman: They're not young people, Mrs. Conner.
Mom: Wonderful laundry facility. Oh, though it is a bit of a meat market.
Roseanne: Mom, you better think about this a little bit.
Mom: Nonsense, I think I'm ready to sign right now.
Roseanne: No, you're not mom. You need to think about it a little bit more.
Jackie: Mom knows what she wants, Roseanne.
Roseanne: She does not.
Mom: Yes, I do.
Jackie: I hope you're not calling mom stupid, Roseanne.
Roseanne: Well, what else do you call paying for a condo that they take back? And medical care that you might never use? Mom could get run over by a bus tomorrow and they hit the jackpot.
Jackie: Don't say that, Roseanne. Mom could lapse into a coma, live 40 years as a vegetable and she cleans up.
Mom: I don't think this is up to either of you. It's my money and my life.
Roseanne: Okay, Well, if you want to go throwing 'em both away. I mean, if you're feeble-minded enough to want to take this deal, then maybe you should be in a home.

Perhaps the best example of reversal of Mackey and Hess's findings about male characters being depicted as task oriented and female characters depicted as emotional can be found in the episode in which the Lanford Lunch Box opened and Roseanne was threatened by a customer on the first night (R# 4). The majority of the female-female interaction concerned opening the business, later the need to take a self-defense class in order to protect themselves, since they refused to be victims. The male dialogue was primarily concerned with Dan and Arnie's need to defend their threatened masculinity. Dan felt threatened because he believes it is his role to protect Roseanne and he feels powerless. She refused to take a gun to the restaurant and she wouldn't let him hang around the
restaurant until closing.

Roseanne: How long do you plan to be here on psycho patrol, Dan?
Dan: Till closing.
Roseanne: That is just not possible, Dan, because if you sit here and watch me serving people food and cleaning up then that will take all the romance out of it when I do it at home.
Dan: If you're not gonna do anything about this I'm gonna stay here and make sure you're safe. It's my job.

Roseanne decided, along with her female business partners, to take a self-defense class. Amie felt threatened because his wife Nancy entered a lesbian relationship after he abandoned her when he was allegedly abducted by aliens. He rushed into the self-defense class to confront Nancy.

Amie: I don't mean to bother you women but I need to speak to that chick right over there, real quick.
Roseanne: Oh man. You want me to kick him in the head for ya?
Nancy: Uh, it won't make any difference. I'll be right back. Amie, what the Hell are you doing here?
Amie: Why won't you talk to me Nanc?
Nancy: I'm gonna tell you one more time. I'm gay. It has nothing to do with you or your masculinity.
Amie: Of course it doesn't. I'm still every bit the man I always was. Last night I beat up three guys in a topless bar to prove it.
Nancy: I mean, you just don't get it. It's about love, trust and commitment. What we had was not natural.
Amie: I can accept that. And, and I know that we won't get back together but that doesn't mean you and me can't, you know, do it one more time.
Nancy: Swine!
Amie: All right. If it's about that Marla broad, you can bring her along.
Nancy: Amie!
Another interesting aspect of gender interaction is the quality of the small amount of male-male interaction in Roseanne. Much of this concerns the topic of women (wives) as the "boss". In the episode where the next door neighbors were moving (R# 2), Dan told neighbor Jerry that he heard his screaming conversation with his wife about the move.

Jerry: I guess the whole block heard us, huh?

Dan: Nothin' to be embarrassed about Jer, when you said, 'we ain't movin' back to Chicago and that's final', men all over the neighborhood took a little bit more of the blanket.

Jerry: Really.

Dan: To be honest with ya Jer, I didn't think you had it in ya.

Jerry: Well, to be honest with you Dan, we're moving back to Chicago.

Dan: Jerry, Jerry, Jerry. Why?

Jerry: Well, Wellman's in big trouble and big cutbacks in management, and my job is one of the first to go.

When Arnie returned to Lanford (R# 4), Roseanne was surprised to see him in their home. He walked into the kitchen where she was talking to Dan.

Roseanne: Arnie? What the Hell are you doing here?

Arnie: Dan! Dan, get over here and help me, Dan.

Dan: Oh, boy. Oh, boy. Calm down honey, honey?

Roseanne: Why would you even let him into my house, after the way he dumped Nancy?

Dan: I couldn't help it. He was whimpering and scratching at the back door.

Arnie: Now Rosie, this is the last house I went to. I went everywhere else I knew. The lights were on, cars were in the driveway but nobody was home. It was really weird.

Dan: I was outside.

Roseanne: How could you tell Nancy that you were abducted by space aliens? There's not even a 12-step program for that!
Amie: Call her off, Dan. Call her off.

Dan: Ya gotta appreciate my situation here, Am, she's my wife. I gotta let her hurt ya.

Amie: I hear ya, buddy.

During the all-male interaction at the poker game, in the same episode (R# 4), Amie was very defensive about his masculinity.

neighbor: I've got a straight.

Amie: A straight, huh? Is that a crack about my ex-wife?

Dan: Whoa, whoa there, big guy. He didn't mean anything by it.

Amie: Sorry.

Man: Beats me. I just got a pair of ladies.

Amie: That's it. ...

Man: Sorry, Arn.

Dan: Yeah Arn, we're all really sorry and we all think you're real manly. Don't we guys?

Everyone: Agree.

Dan: Yeah, absolutely, and uh, see you two, I'll bump you two more.

Amie: Nah, that's too rich for my blood, I fold.

Dan: Real man wouldn't fold.

Amie: All right, I call.

Dan: What you got?

Amie: An eight.

In one touching example of male-male interaction, the new next door neighbor, a widowed father of two teenaged girls (R# 5), confided in Dan regarding the difficulties of single parenthood. Jackie was also in the room.

Neighbor: Ah man, daughters. They ought to come with a handbook.
Dan: Yeah, so you can smack 'em with it.

Neighbor: You know, Dan. Look at me. I'm working all the time. These kids don't have a mother. I mean it's getting tough. Charlotte, she's a dream, but Molly, ah, she's a real handful.

It is interesting to observe that in this episode, the female interaction was primarily aimed at problem solving: Nancy explained the situation to Arnie wanting to get on with her life. The women refused to be intimidated and live in fear of becoming victims, so they took self-defense classes together. The only true male-male interaction was a card game. The women were working, the men were playing.

Prior research (Mackey and Hess 1982, Vest 1992, p.35) showed mixed gender interaction was portrayed most frequently (61% 1982, 50% 1990) followed by male-male interaction (32%, 39%) and the least often depicted interaction was female-female (6%, 12%). In the decade between 1982 and 1992, mixed gender interaction, although the primary form, decreased. Mixed gender interaction is the most often used on Murphy Brown, with little either female-female interaction or male-male interaction, largely because of the ensemble format. Roseanne primarily presents female-female interaction, with male-female interaction a distant second, and male-male interaction scarce.

When male and female characters are compared for task-orientation, Murphy Brown presents several examples of Murphy as the task-oriented character and various male characters as emotional, although the seemingly most emotionally stable character in the program is painter, Eldin.

4. The tendency for women characters to have a significantly more limited age distribution than male characters. The age-range of women characters portrayed on television is much more limited than that for male characters (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli 1980; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974). Examples of the predominance of younger women characters abound in television, while male characters are depicted in all age groups. This analysis will examine the age range of male and female
characters on both programs to see if disproportionate representation exists in any age category based on gender.

The characters Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner violate the stereotype that only young, attractive women are depicted on television. Both characters are in their forties. Murphy Brown is a successful professional woman in her mid-40s. A large part of the charm of her character involves tales of her more than twenty years as a television journalist. When she announced her pregnancy, several comments were made about her age, 42. In a sample episode (R#3), Roseanne proclaimed loudly, "I'm 40" in reference to her mother's announced age of 63. She also has an 18 year old daughter.

Older male characters have some representation on Murphy Brown, in bartender, Phil who has ongoing small role status, and Murphy's father who has made a few guest appearances. In her late 20s, Corky would be the youngest female character and Miles at approximately the same age would be the youngest male. At age 16, Darlene and Becky at 18 (1992-1993 season), are the youngest females on Roseanne. Becky moved out when she eloped to marry Mark and relocated to another state. Darlene had one of the largest ongoing roles until she left the program at the end of the 1992-1993 season. Both programs have very young male characters; Roseanne's son D.J. who is missing from many episodes and only has one or two lines in others; and Murphy's son, Avery, who at less than a year old, is yet to utter a line.

Several older women characters are presented in the cast of Roseanne, including her mother and grandmother. Importantly, the older female characters in both programs are portrayed positively; they are not the object of an overwhelming number of derogatory attitudes or remarks. By the time of her mother's "death", Murphy had an excellent relationship with her. They had even double-dated and shared similar complaints about their specific dates, and men in general as dating material, and actually preferred each other company.

While Roseanne and Jackie resented their mother's criticism of them and feared her
moving to Lanford would bring problems, that situation too progressed. In the sample episode where Bev selected a senior community in Lanford (R# 3), they seemed to come to an understanding of each other and aging. Aging is a topic seldom discussed on prime-time television.

Roseanne: How old do you feel?
Jackie: I don't know. Most of the time 30...12, on a good day, eight.
Roseanne: Well I feel like I'm 16. With an 18 year old, married, daughter. Two mortgages and a mother going into a retirement home. I wish I was old enough to drink.
Jackie: It's not that bad, Roseanne.
Roseanne: I'm 40 Jackie. This is all just going way too fast. How long till I'm shuffling towards that medical alert button?

(later with Bev at Harvest Glenn)

Roseanne: Well, I just never want to come in here and find you acting like an old person.
Mom: You don't have to worry about that, I don't feel like an old person.
Roseanne: Well, so how old do you feel?
Mom: 63. I'm 63.
Roseanne: No, I know that. But I mean, like, on the inside, you know. How old do you feel?
Mom: I'm 63. I feel like a 63 year old woman.
Roseanne: Well, nice having this talk with you, mom.
Mom: Well, what do you want me to say, Roseanne?
Roseanne: Well, I, I want you to say that you feel like, you know, 16 or 24, 35, anything but 63.
Mom: What's wrong with 63?
Roseanne: Well, it's so old. I don't want you to get old.
Mom: I know dear.
Roseanne: Because you're just dragging me with ya, and I don't like it.

Mom: You know dear, I don't get older just to inconvenience you.

Roseanne: Yeah, I know. I'm old.

Mom: Oh, you're not old dear.

Roseanne: Well, I feel old. Listen, why can't you just forget about all this and just go get a regular apartment and then later on, if you need to, well then you could just move in with Dan and me... well me?

Mom: I appreciate the offer dear, and I did consider it. Uh, I just think strangers would take better care of me.

Thus, while prior research found women characters to have a significantly more limited age distribution than male characters, that is not evidenced in either *Roseanne* or *Murphy Brown*. Most of the series regulars in both programs are leading edge baby boomers, with older men and women, and younger males and females, equally represented on both programs.

5. **Limited occupational range of women characters.** Four decades of research have documented a variety of limitations and stereotypes imposed on television women depicted in the workforce (DeFleur 1964; Dominick 1979; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Miller and Reeves 1976; Tedesco 1974). In 1964 DeFleur found the world of work on TV to be, overall, a man's world. Twenty-five years later, in 1988 television programs, Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) produced similar findings. Analysis of this category will include observations by Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) of a lack of competitiveness in women workers depicted in organizational settings and the predominantly comedic depiction of women in organizations.

On *Murphy Brown*, most characters are news professionals, except Phil and Eldin who both work in service professions but both have their own businesses; free-lance painting and bar ownership. The majority of the other characters in *Murphy Brown* are her endless succession of secretaries, both male and female, and the television studio crew...
which is all male, as are most television crews. There are no waiter/waitresses at Phil's other than Phil himself.

Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found women workers depicted in organizational settings lacked a competitive spirit, and that they did not achieve the occupational hierarchical power and status of male workers. This is certainly not true of Murphy Brown, it is her overwhelmingly competitive spirit that is the source of much of the program's humor. This competitiveness carries over into the private sphere, as when Eldin integrates Murphy into a play group for her son. However, this is much more gender stereotypically acceptable. The private sphere is an area where women are supposed to be competitive with other women, seen usually as a negative characteristic.

Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992, p.203) found the organizational actions of women are more likely to be presented comedically, less likely seriously. Since these programs are both sitcoms, that representation is to be expected. However, Murphy's depiction comedically is counterposed with a representation of a competent, driven journalist who has made major career gains and accomplishments. As a multidimensional character, Murphy's decisions or acts of childish revenge may be portrayed lightly. However, her news judgment and job capabilities are seldom questioned. This questioning of her mental state and job competence took place when she was pregnant, i.e., in a more womanly state.

An example of the respect paid to Murphy's journalistic competence was seen in the sampled episode in which she was scheduled to cover the European Economic Summit (MB# 3). The trip was delayed when her baby got sick and her nanny quit. Her producer Miles, hesitantly suggested replacing her.

Miles: Well, Murphy, are you sure you want to go? I, I, I mean I could send someone else to cover the Summit. It's, it's pretty short notice, but it could be done.

Frank: Absolutely, don't worry about the story Murph. I can handle it.
Murphy: Oh, really. You think Helmut Kohl's gonna want to talk German nationalism with you after that Colonel Klink impression you did at the Berlin Wall celebration?

Frank: It was Sergeant Schultz. And you'd think with a name like Helmut the guy could take a joke.

Murphy: I'm the only one who can do this. No one else has the access to get the interviews I've set up.

Thus the occupational range of women characters in both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* was found to be no more limited than the occupations available to male characters depicted in the programs. No substantial differences in occupational range was found between men and women characters. Female characters depicted in organizational settings were neither found to be less competitive nor less seriously depicted than their male counterparts.

6. The next two statements relate to the relationship between marital status, gender and work. (a) Marital status is defined more often for women than men. (b) Marriage and the workplace are portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men (Downs 1981; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974; Weigel and Loomis 1981). This research will examine whether female character's marital status is defined more often than that of male characters and will seek to find any areas of opportunities in the work-place that seem to be shut off for women based upon their marital status.

The single characters in the two sitcoms are: Jackie; Nancy and Arnie (as of Fall 1992); Murphy; Frank; Miles; and Eldin. With the exception of Eldin, all have been portrayed in comedic dating situations and disasters. Frank's fear of commitment was highlighted in the sample episode in which Murphy announced she had purchased a farm (MB# 2). Frank said, "I can't believe it, you actually bought a farm, just like that. It takes me three weeks to buy a comb." Roseanne is constantly trying to fix people up. The following dialogue from the sample episode (R# 3) in which Nancy announced she was a
lesbian makes several statements about men and women and the world of dating. The
women were preparing to open the restaurant and Nancy had just brought in a creamer
shaped like a cow that made a "mooing" sound.

Nancy: No one appreciates my pain.
Roseanne: Which is why you should not be alone all the time.
Nancy: No, Roseanne.
Roseanne: What, you don't even know what I'm going to say.
Nancy: You're going to try to fix me up with another one of Dan's friends.
Roseanne: See there, it just goes to show you how wrong you are, cause I was
gonna say something totally different from that.
Nancy: What?
Roseanne: Well, now I forget. One thing I can think about is this one friend of
Dan's that would be really perfect for ya.
Nancy: I'm not looking. Can we just drop it?
Jackie: Come on Nancy. Just cause you haven't met anybody lately,
doesn't mean you should just give up.
Roseanne: Yeah. Besides, this friend of Dan's, I think he is doing really,
really well, okay. Cause he just blew a ton of money on these hair plugs.
Nancy: Sounds like a dream, Roseanne. I think I'll take a pass.
Roseanne: No you won't, I mean cause I told him you were gonna call him this
morning (dialing phone) and I just know you guys are really... 
Nancy: (puts finger on phone). No, I'm already seeing someone.
Roseanne: Oh, well. Thank god, cause this bald guy's a real looser.
Jackie: Come on, tell us about the guy. What's his name?
Roseanne: Yeah, come on, why didn't you tell us.
We're just gonna bug ya until you do.
Everyone: Tell us.
Nancy: All right, her name is Marla. I'm seeing a woman.
...Jackie: Wait a minute. You and I used to go out looking for guys all the
time. We went to all those singles dances together.

Nancy: Singles dances, I thought we were dating. . . Joke, joke. Just kidding.

Marital status seems to be no more defined for female characters than for male characters and neither status is presented as more desirable. To the contrary, both the single and married states have been presented as problematic in these programs. By the spring of 1993, Corky and Will were divorced. Phil described his eight children and then admitted, "truth is, there's days when coming in here to sweat over a deep fryer is like a Bermuda vacation." Viewers have seen Doris and Jim experience marital problems, Murphy's parents divorced with much animosity, Nancy and Arnie were divorcing, Roseanne and Dan experienced constant financial problems and discipline problems with their children. Problematic personal relationships, both married and single, seem to be the cornerstone of both programs.

The single state has been depicted as undesirable for both men and women, as we saw in the dialogue above between Roseanne, Nancy and Jackie. In a non-sampled episode which aired in 1992, Roseanne's boss Leon (Martin Mull) introduced Linda Wagner to his employees; Roseanne and Bonnie. She is a representative of corporate headquarters, there to evaluate the restaurant operation and employees. Leon designated Roseanne as the first employee to be interviewed.

Linda: No. Let me start by asking you about your boss.
Roseanne: Oh, so it is an animal question.
Linda: was wondering. Is he single?
Roseanne: Leon! Of course he's single.
Linda: Well, I find him very attractive. Don't you?
Roseanne: Well Okay. I suppose that in kinda an off beat... Oh what the Hell, put me down for a No.
Linda: There's just something about him. He's got this mysterious charisma.
Roseanne: Uh huh.

Linda: It's strange. The second I looked at him a voice in my head said, "I want that man."

Roseanne: How long you been on the road Linda? (audience laugh)

Linda: Almost six weeks. Why?

Roseanne: Time to go home.

**Marriage and the workplace are portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men.** Marriage and work, or motherhood and work, are difficult for both Murphy Brown and Roseanne. However, this does not imply any kind of sisterhood - mainly because of class differences and their symbolic isolation on separate programs.

The first episode of the first season depicted the problems Roseanne had in trying to prepare her children for school while working all day at the factory. One child needed a book bag exchanged, another needed a parent-teacher conference. Despite the fact that she could not get time off work, Roseanne managed somehow to accomplish the tasks. Early in the 1992 season, Roseanne tried to get time off work at Rodbell's to go watch Darlene play baseball. Leon, her supervisor would not let her off and this caused problems for Darlene who was preparing for her first dance but wanted to be recognized for her athletic skills.

Motherhood seemed to redefine Murphy, as a professional. Despite her stature as important network reporter, her pregnancy was depicted in many episodes as a physically humiliating and mentally incapacitating "disease." The office made bets on how many doughnuts she'd consume or how much weight she'd gained. In this physically and mentally disorienting state of pregnancy, the intelligent, well groomed anchorwoman was suddenly spilling doughnut jelly on her clothes and scooping it off her sweatshirt with her fingers...to eat. At the same time this competent journalist's legendary memory made sporadic and strategic disappearances. On one occasion she turned to introduce her interviewee on live television and forgot his name.
The FYI crew expects Murphy to make decisions in favor of her career over personal life, the masculine defined stereotype. She usually does. However, this was not so in the 1991 episode in which Murphy announced she her decision not to have an abortion, she planned keep the child fathered by her ex-husband. Interestingly, the predominantly male contingent of her co-workers: Frank, Jim, Miles and Corky, all said they would support her decision. Viewers got the distinct impression that they all believed she would decide in favor of her career (m) and have an abortion. They blustered at her decision.

Murphy: This is the hardest decision I've ever had to make but I'm exercising my choice...to have this baby.

Jim: Murphy, are you saying that you're going to attempt to do your job while week after week you puff up in front of a viewing audience that includes a certain number of people still reeling from the concept of women wearing pants!

Murphy: That's right Jim.

Jim: Oh good Lord, this could be the worst decision anyone's made in television since Rhoda's wedding.

(Murphy Brown producers to critics charging that allowing Murphy to have a child will ruin the program.)

Miles: She's trying to kill me, she is. People who have children should be married. They should raise their children under one roof with two parents living there, together, in holy wedded matrimony. There should be a station wagon and a hobby room.

Murphy: Oh come on Miles you didn't grow up with that.

Miles: And look at me, I have a tremendous fear of dogs, is that what you want?

Miles' statement defending the image of the traditional family was made in a time when single parent families had grown from one in ten families, in 1970, to one in four, in 1990, according to the U. S. Census Bureau. This raises the question of whether the
conservative definition of "family values" reflects a culture lag between ideal types and a changing reality. Regardless, the baby created a severe career crisis for Murphy in the sample episode where she was scheduled to fly to Paris (MB#3). Early in the episode, Murphy thought everything was under control.

Murphy: It's the final proof that I've successfully integrated my baby and my career. Everything's all taken care of. Right down to the Parisian nanny, so while I'm working, little Winston can be in EuroDisneyland watching a French Snow White walk around with hairy legs.

Frank: You're not serious, Murph. You're naming your kid Winston, after Winston Churchill?

Murphy: No, Frank, I'm naming him after a bad habit I've given up but 'Ernest and Julio Gallo' wouldn't fit on an ID bracelet.

Frank: Murphy, the baby is four and a half months old. Don't you think it's time you stopped playing musical names and finally commit to one?

Thus, while Murphy thought she had everything covered, she hadn't even named the child yet. Then her young son got sick and really complicated the planned business trip. She told Eldin: "I'm supposed to go to Paris tomorrow and my kid can't go. Which means I've either got to give up one of the biggest international stories of the year or leave him with a nanny for four days." Eldin then informed her that the nanny had just quit.

Murphy responded, "No way I can go to Paris now. You believe it? I've got a story to cover and I can't go. Well that's the first time I ever heard myself say that. I can't go. Huh, sounds weird. (picking up the hand translator Jim gave her as a gift for the trip) Let's see what it looks like in Yiddish. Oiyyy."

Eldin volunteered to be the nanny. The next day Murphy went to Phil's to explain her changed plans to the FYI gang. By leaving the baby with Eldin, she would be free to handle her work assignment.

Miles: Well Murphy, if you're sure.
Murphy: Who said anything about being sure. I was up all night over this. And the baby was no help at all. At three a.m., he smiled, like a sign that I should go. At four thirty, he cried, like he was asking me to stay. Smile, cry, smile, cry. It was like an evening with Liza Minelli.

Corky: Oh, Murphy. Don't you see what's happening here? You're a mother now and you're feeling maternal ties.

Murphy: No I'm not... You know, this wouldn't even be an issue if I were a man. No one thinks twice when fathers leave their kids to go on business trips.

Ultimately, Murphy decided she had to make the trip. She explained to the baby; "here's the deal. I may not know a lot about this mother business but one thing I am sure of is that if I can't be who I am, I won't be much good to you. So I guess what I'm trying to say is, I gotta go do my job."

Thus, marital status was found to be no more defined for women than men. And marriage and the workplace were found to be no more incompatible for women than men. However, reflecting reality for many women, motherhood, is depicted in both programs as being more difficult for women. There are exceptions, in the episode in which Murphy challenged the Senate committee (MB# 1), she refused to let her unborn child compromise her journalistic ethics because of the impact it would have on other reporters. The network lawyer Stan urged her, "wear something maternal. You're pregnant, we should use it."

In addition to the above listed six areas of generalizations, prior communication and media sociological research have suggested categories involving sex-role stereotypes which have been used to psychologically describe and differentiate male and female characters. These categories are taken primarily from three studies representing progressive decades of gender research in media referenced in the methodology section (Tedesco 1974, Downs 1981, Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). Some of the categories have been found to have statistically significant differences by gender while others have developed as general descriptors.

The first study was conducted in the 1970s by Nancy Tedesco. Her four-year
analysis of major characters in prime-time network programs, found several gender stereotypical categories. Female stereotypes included: (a) attractive, (b) fair, (c) sociable, (d) warm, (e) happy, (f) peaceful, and youthful, which has already been discussed. Male stereotypical definitions included: (a) powerful, (b) masculine and (c) smart. The two programs will be analyzed for evidence which supports or challenges these stereotypical definitions.

(a) **Attractive**: Physically, Murphy Brown is tall, slender and very attractive. As a network anchor, her hair is perfectly coiffed and her clothes are professional. During the opening episodes of the 1992 season, however, she did appear, both in the program and in advertising, in a bedraggled state, wearing a bathrobe, hair a mess, and circles under her eyes. The running joke in the fall 1992 premier episode, just after the baby’s birth, was that Murphy could not find time to take a shower. During her pregnancy, jokes were made about her weight gain; Eldin asked if she had a zip code for her expanding posterior. Pregnancy, childbirth and a few personal crises over the course of the series have shown an unkempt Murphy. During the episode in which she testified before the Senate (MB# 1), her pre-natal sweating became the topic of conversation at Phil’s.

**Corky:** Murphy we were so proud of you. You were the perfect example of grace under pressure. But for tomorrow, a tiny suggestion. Just two little words: 'dress shields.' Nuff said.

**Frank:** You know what really bugs me, I mean besides the sweating thing...

On the other hand, Roseanne Conner is short, overweight and apparently spends little time or money on her appearance or grooming. She wears oversized blouses that would be considered casual, bordering on sloppy. Her hair seldom looks as if it has even been combed. In the first sample episode (R# 1), when she and Jackie climbed a tree to break into their old house through a second floor window, her girth became the topic.
Roseanne: Oh the branch is creakin' Jackie, it never creaked back when we were kids.

Jackie: Well the tree's older now and you're . . . older now too.

Roseanne: Hey, we both fall at the same speed, Slim. . . .Oh just get in, nice branch, good branch, strong branch, umph.

Jackie: Wow! I just flashed on Winnie the Pooh and the honey tree.

In the next sampled episode (R#2), the Conner family was being featured in a commercial being shot at Rodbell's. Jackie was sitting at the counter and Roseanne invited her over to sit with the family.

Jackie: Well they told me to sit here.

Roseanne: Hey! Hey! Hey! I'm the star of the commercial here, I think if I want you to sit with us, you can sit with us.

Jackie: Okay, great. Now what am I playing?

Roseanne: Well, the aunt.

Director: Why are there two mothers at this table?

Roseanne: Oh, uh, she's the aunt.

Director: I don't want an aunt.

Roseanne: Okay, we'll lose her.

Jackie: Hey!

Director: Am I wrong, the new mother's better.

Roseanne: You're nuts.

Director: And more likeable. Let's keep the nicer, thinner mom. Stick the other one around the back somewhere.

The issue of appearance as an indicator of status and, in one example, even of sexual proclivity, was offered in the third sampled episode of Roseanne. Jackie and Roseanne were discussing Nancy's revelation that she was a lesbian:

Jackie: I still don't see how we could've missed it, Roseanne.
How could we not have known that Nancy is a lesbian.

Roseanne: Well, she doesn't look like a lesbian, you know? I mean, lesbians are uh big old truck drivers that wear flannel shirts and faded jeans.

Jackie started to agree, then realized that she was a truck driver and that she was wearing a flannel shirt and faded jeans. The scene ended with a shocked look on her face.

In a non-sampled episode concerning Mother's Day in 1992, Roseanne was at The Beauty Box being fixed-up, compliments of Becky and Darlene who were being dutiful daughters in order to get permission to attend a concert. The beautician turned Roseanne to the mirror and asked, "Well Mrs. Conner, what do you think?" Recognizing the status associated in society with beauty, Roseanne responded; "oh, I'm beautiful, I no longer have to think."

It would be difficult to argue that any of the characters on these two programs are depicted as overwhelmingly attractive or atrociously ugly. The character who seems to take the most criticism is Darlene, especially for her "dark" phase of black clothing. McRobbie found the female concentration on appearance to be related to the competition for men. Murphy Brown is never seen working on her appearance or competing for men, as a matter of fact she has rejected them. In one episode after learning she was pregnant, Murphy turned down a marriage proposal from her ex-husband and father of the unborn child, Jake Lowenstein. Another man, Jerry Gold, wanted to continue their relationship despite the fact that he was not the father. Roseanne Arnold also seemed to be a living rejection of artificial standards of the exterior construction of gender before late 1992. It will be interesting to see if the transformation in her private life will be carried over and reflected in her television character.

(b) Another characteristic considered to be stereotypically feminine in television portrayal is being fair. Neither Roseanne nor Murphy is presented as fair. Murphy has stated on occasion that one cannot play fair and become a top-rated journalist. Competition, and a little ingenuity, are integral to the game. In the sampled episode where
Murphy purchased a farm (MB# 2), she was depicted as an absolute dictator. It was her place and she made the rules. The FYI group reacted when they entered the farm.

Murphy: Miles, what are you doing?
Miles: Trying to get an update on that hostage story we were listening to in the car.
Murphy: Sorry but that's technology and this weekend technology's not allowed.
Miles: What are you talking about?
Murphy: It's not country. Now if you'll look around, you'll notice there's no telephone, no television, none of the trappings of modern civilization.
Miles: Oh, God! (gasps).
Murphy: Sorry, but that's the rule. So you can just put this thing back in your car along with your cellular phone and whatever high-tech contraband you were thinking of smuggling in here.

Several situations in Roseanne reveal that being fair is not her major concern. In the first sampled episode (R# 1), Jackie made it clear that Darlene has been punished for doing something not nearly as bad as the adventures they remember from their childhood. During the episode in which Darlene and Molly attended a concert (R# 5), Roseanne learned that Molly's sister Charlotte wanted to go but Molly offered the ticket to Darlene.

Roseanne: I could still tell Darlene that she can't go.
Charlotte: No. That wouldn't be fair.
Roseanne: Well, hey. I'm unreasonable all the time and Darlene would never know the difference.

Women television characters have been depicted as (c) sociable, (d) warm and (e) happy. Not so Roseanne or Murphy. In a non-sampled 1993 episode, Jackie and Roseanne were working at the Lunch Box.

Jackie: Someone you don't like is coming.
Roseanne: That could be lots of people.

When Murphy was preparing for Paris (MB# 3) she made the statement, "Yes, Paris, a city where people are so rude, I'm considered a gracious guest." After Jim gave her a pocket translator as a travel gift, the first phrase she wanted to test was, "Get your damn beret out of my face."

Both Murphy and Roseanne are known for their complaining. In the farm episode (MB# 2), Murphy listed what she believed was wrong with city living.

Murphy: You know what else is wrong with living in this city?
Frank: I'm sure you'll tell us.
Murphy: Dirt, crime, traffic noise. How long have you heard me complaining about it?
Jim: Well Murphy, you do a lot of complaining. I don't think any of us have had the time to break it down by subject headings.

(f) Peaceful is another characteristic identified as feminine. Confrontational would be a more accurate descriptor of these two leading ladies. In Roseanne and Murphy Brown, it is more often the male characters who are placating and who strive for peace. When Miles' parents were protesting (MB# 4), he tried to stop the protest in order to get his parents out safely. When Murphy was preparing to testify before the Senate committee (MB# 1), Stan the lawyer wanted the journalist to soften her approach, but she wanted to confront them. When Darlene was being punished for cutting school to attend a comic convention (R# 1), Dan tried to make peace with Darlene by offering to order pizza.

Murphy completed her trip to Paris with a confrontation with the cab driver who drove her home from the airport (MB# 3): "Hey pal, any cab driver in Paris would be thrilled with a five percent tip (cab screeches off). I'm home!" In a non-sampled episode Murphy verbally attacked a potential FYI guest, a man who was volunteering his time to help the less fortunate. He asked; "has she ever hit a guest before?" "Define hit," the FYIers
responded. And Roseanne adapted quite well to self defense class. After the instructor explained that women must learn to fight an attacker, Roseanne asked: "when are you gonna bring out that guy in the suit, cause I'd like to kick that guy in the suit." And she did.

In the same research, Tedesco (1974) found that male stereotypical definitions included: (a) powerful, (b) masculine, and (c) smart. (a) Looking at Murphy and Roseanne within this context, they are arguably powerful characters, both competent and tough. When Roseanne was threatened at the Lunch Box (R#4) she handled herself well when physically confronted by a less than mentally stable customer. She did not expect Dan to protect her, nor did she run away from night work at her restaurant. She did not exhibit fearfulness, which is another characteristic found by Downs (1981) to be feminine. Instead, Roseanne enrolled in a self defense class and in the episode's final scene when she was showing Dan what she learned, she literally punched his lights out as the screen faded to black. Murphy shows no fear, even when subpoenaed by a Senate committee which could send her to jail. In an early episode she was kidnapped, yet she showed no fear in that situation and the kidnappers became anxious to get rid of her.

Darlene is another female character who is depicted as being very strong. After attending a rock concert with a neighbor, Molly, Darlene wants to return home. Molly wants to stay and party and heavy peer pressure is exerted on Darlene.

Darlene: Come on Molly, let's go. It's getting late.
Molly: So cute. Which one do you want.
Darlene: The one that will kill you and stuff you into a trunk.
Molly: Come on, will you lighten up?
Darlene: I have a boyfriend. I don't need these jerks. Now, can we get out of here?
      It's been like an hour and a half.
Molly: Well, it's my car and I'm not ready to go. I'm still looking for the perfect guy, okay?
Darlene: Well, it's a good thing we're in a parking lot full of drunken losers. Shouldn't be hard to spot that white horse.

Guy #1: So you guys coming or what?

Molly: Well, I'm definitely gonna go but Darlene here's kinda shy.

Guy #1: Well look, we don't have to go anywhere, I've got a couple a joints in the van.

Guy #2: Hey Darlene, you look like a real partyer.

Darlene: Any part of you that touches me, you're not getting back.

Molly: I'm going without you.

Darlene: I'm not sitting in this parking lot alone. Give me the keys and I'll drive home.

Molly: Let Sean drive you home.

Sean: Yeah, I'll drive you home.

Darlene: Oh God.

Molly: Look, just 15 minutes, I promise.

Sean: So Darlene...

Darlene: Would you stop right there pony boy. You and the rest of your outsiders can go rumble someplace else.

Sean: Look, I apologize for my friend. I mean, he's a real jerk. I mean, it's obviously a bad idea to go into somebody's van you hardly even know. So it's lucky for you I happen to have a couple a joints right here.

Darlene: Oh man, I feel like I'm in the middle of a really bad "After School Special".

Darlene maintains her convictions and takes a cab home, a $75 ride. Thus both Roseanne and Darlene have demonstrated power in their personal lives and Murphy, in her professional life has the power to fire secretaries and over the course of the series had gone through more than fifty.

(b) Masculinity is included in Tedesco's list of male stereotyped characteristics. An interesting challenge to this can be found in the Murphy Brown episode in which she traveled to Paris. Eldin offered to replace the female nanny who had just quit.
Murphy: Gee, I never even considered you, Eldin. But it does make sense. You know him as well as anybody. And he's not breast feeding anymore so that wouldn't be a problem. Eldin are you sure you want to do this?

Eldin: Well, the only problem I see is, I think that maybe I have a slightly more developed feminine side than you do, and that might confuse him. But, other than that, no.

(c) Tedesco also found "smart" to be a masculine characteristic. Few male characters in these programs are depicted as being particularly intelligent. Senators are depicted as idiots, Jim doesn't know how to start a fire, and Arnie is depicted as a complete moron. Murphy is depicted as very intelligent, at least in her professional life, Roseanne is nobody's fool, and Darlene is seen as having wisdom beyond her years.

The second study, conducted by Downs (1981), involved analysis of fourteen top-rated, prime-time programs. Downs found statistically significant sex differences for only three categories: (a) Work orientation (m), (b) home orientation (f) and (c) emotionality (f) where "women were more likely than men to cry or express emotional upset" (Downs 1981, p.256).

Two of the three categories where significant gender differences were found, home and work orientation, relate to the Public (m) vs. Private (f) arena or sphere. Most research has found that women television characters predominantly function in the private sphere. Even those female characters who function in the public sphere seem to be largely concerned with private sphere issues: "the television series female is far more personally and less professionally oriented" (McNeil 1975, p.266).

Murphy Brown seems to reflect the traditional male work orientation while Roseanne has the traditional female home and family orientation, although she is not to be confused with June Cleaver or Donna Reed. Both characters appear to be represented as more masculine oriented than feminine oriented, when analyzed according to these stereotypical categories. However, in the three categories which Downs' research found to
be significant, Roseanne has two female and one male defined characteristic and Murphy exhibits all three male defined characteristics. This raises the question of whether Roseanne is a more traditional figure than Murphy.

However, Roseanne's home orientation is not the type which comes to mind with traditional definitions. In one sampled episode (R#4) she left work to prepare dinner for her family.

Roseanne: Don't get used to my being home, Dan, because I got stuck with the night shift again. First, mom calls in sick, then Fisher calls over there to say he's sick, then Jackie starts whining about her little snuffle bear and that made me sick. So I told her to go home.

(Roseanne took four boxes out of the cabinet, stacked them in the microwave without even opening them and pressed the button).

Roseanne: So I get an hour off so I can come over here and make dinner for my family. Now what am I going to do with the other 56 minutes?

When next-door neighbor Charlotte visited, she asked Roseanne if she was interrupting anything. Roseanne answered, "no, I just got this wife and mother thing going on." That "wife and mother thing" was defined as unconventional in the first episode of the series when Roseanne's son, D.J. came to her with a problem.

D.J. I've got a knot in my shoe.
Roseanne: Wear loafers.

In that same opening episode, Roseanne was struggling to get off work early to get to the store to exchange Becky's book bag and meet Darlene's teacher for a conference. Her boss at Wellman Plastics, Booker, would not let her leave work an hour early. She rushed in, late, to meet the teacher and after a fat joke about her inability to fit in the "little student chairs" was told that her daughter Darlene is barking like a dog in class and that a
problem at school usually means problems at home. The teacher inquired about her "quality time" with the children.

Roseanne: I work and have three kids, I don't have free time.
Teacher: Your daughter barks!
Roseanne: The whole family barks.

Roseanne's seemingly overwhelming burden of work and family was demonstrated when she argued with Dan after the teacher conference. Gender roles were defined rigidly.

Dan: Fixing the sink is man's work. I'm the man. I fix the sink.
Roseanne: Yeah, and I'm the wife, so everything else is my job.

Murphy's work orientation carries over into her personal life. When she visited her farm, she took her work colleagues with her and she insisted that they enjoy rural life. She conducts her personal life in the same organizational fashion that is so successful for her at work. Hiring a nanny or making the baby understand her career are seen as items on a check list. However, Murphy does care very much for her career and put herself on the line to defend the journalistic profession in the Senate hearings, at a potentially great personal cost.

For the purposes of analysis of work orientation versus home orientation, the TV Guide descriptions for a full year for Roseanne and Murphy Brown will now be categorized as public or private in focus. This will determine the predominant sphere of activity for each program's entire season and the primary arena in which each lead character's sitcom life takes place.

The issue of home orientation vis a vis work orientation introduces the related dichotomy between the public sphere and the private sphere. Earlier research found women concentrated in the home and their problems to be emotional, family, and relationship-oriented even when working outside home; thus we look for similarities and
contrasts. For the purposes of analysis of Hypothesis One, this examination of program focus will remain at the manifest level, specifically highlighting the arena or sphere within which each program takes place. Since the predominant sitcom formula includes a main problem and sub-problem which are usually neatly solved in a happy ending, the individual programs will be analyzed to determine in which sphere (public or private) the lead characters most often function. For the purposes of individual character analysis, this will consist solely of categorizing the focus of programs.

In 1992, twenty-four new episodes of *Murphy Brown* and twenty-five new episodes of *Roseanne* were listed and described in one year's sample of *TV Guide* issues. The actual program descriptions are found in Appendix I. These brief descriptions were analyzed to determine the sphere in which the programs most often took place. While Murphy represents a non-traditional concentration in the public sphere (16 public: 8 private), Roseanne has a more traditional concentration in the private sphere (18 private: 7 public).

However, there are several issues here which must be addressed. The first is the large amount of overlap between spheres making it very difficult to categorize the programs. For example, the private sphere concern of Murphy struggling to take care of her newborn son is plunged into the public sphere when the vice-president criticized her private life. On the other hand Becky's private sphere lack of college funds and decision to elope with Mark, who is moving because he lost his job when Dan lost his bike shop, is related to the much larger public sphere issue of the economy. Second, the private sphere issues dealt with regularly on *Roseanne* are not always those traditionally depicted in situation comedies. Several serious social issues are addressed and discursive analysis will later link this with the public sector.

Third, since we are concentrating on the individual character level, trying to determine whether women are being depicted stereotypically, it is important to note that especially on *Murphy Brown*, several of the private sphere issues were related primarily to
male characters, i.e., Miles' heart attack, his fear that he's gay, and Jim's marital problems. This trend towards television's new found depiction of men experiencing and dealing with emotional problems, and its current popularity, was noted in a *TV Guide* article, "Days of Whine and Neuroses": "Once upon a time, the only people on TV who agonized over bad relationships and bad hair were women. Now, men grope in the worry world" (*TV Guide* February 8, 1992, p.6). In the same article, *Murphy Brown* co-creator and then executive producer Diane English was quoted as saying; "acceptable behavior for men has changed ... they can express their fears, hopes and anxieties."

The *Roseanne* episode that describes Nancy's lesbianism and Roseanne's fear when confronted by an unstable customer while working at The Lunch Box alone (R#4) contains some important messages about the relativity of gender definitions and how important they seem to be. While illuminating the issues of feminine stereotypes the episode also deals with issues of masculine stereotypes. Dan's woman was threatened and he must protect her, "it's my job". Arnie's masculinity is threatened because Nancy is a lesbian. She tells her co-workers, "Arnie came by my apartment last night. Thinks he can win me back like I'm some big lesbian trophy."

As reflected in Appendix I, the sixteen *Murphy Brown* episodes which featured public sphere topics included: Murphy and Jim competing for an anchor job; Corky and Murphy's White House visit; Murphy's confrontation with the Senate; her work problems over the "appearance clause"; Phil's financial trouble; Murphy dealing with the issue of her replacement while out on maternity leave; Murphy's televised defense of the vice-president's attack; her return to work; the appointment of a new, younger and black vice president of news; Frank and Murphy co-hosting a late night news program; Election Day coverage; her trip to Paris complicated by child care issues; Murphy's coverage of Miles' parents protest; the FYI Award episode; and Will being sued for plagiarism.

The eight episodes dealing primarily with private sphere topics on *Murphy Brown* included: Jerry Gold moving in with Murphy to take care of her when she's sick; Miles
pseudo heart attack at his thirtieth birthday party; Miles questioning his sexuality; Murphy's Lamaze class; her baby shower; the baby's birth; Jim and Doris Dyal's marital problems; and Murphy's Christmas Party for her son attended by FYIers and two unexpected relatives.

Appendix I reveals that the seven *Roseanne* episodes which seemed to feature the public sphere were: the Rodbell's commercial; employee lie detector tests at Rodbell's; Roseanne and Bonnie competing to fill Leon's job; Roseanne's last day of employment at Rodbell's; Dan's loss of his business; Roseanne and Jackie planning to go into business together; and the opening of the Lanford Lunch Box.

The eighteen episodes dealing primarily with private sphere topics on *Roseanne* were: Roseanne's compulsive gambling at bingo; the bowling alley episode with multiple personal spats; Roseanne's back problems and consideration of breast reduction surgery; Becky and Mark's break-up; Jackie and Roseanne's visit to their childhood home; Jackie's therapist wanting to meet control freak Roseanne; Dan keeping Mark's secret of drunkenness at the Lobo Lounge; Becky and Darlene giving their mother a makeover to get permission to go to a concert; Becky and Mark's visit after their elopement; the power being turned off because the Conner's can't pay the electric bill; Jackie's new relationship with a younger man; Darlene's sweet sixteen birthday; Roseanne dealing with Halloween ghosts; Roseanne's mom entering a senior community; Darlene attending a rock concert with Molly; Jackie and Fisher argue; and a Christmas snowstorm stranding everybody.

While Murphy Brown functions primarily in the public sphere, in the private sphere of her home life, her "lifestyle choice" baby became a victim of the public sphere when its impending birth was criticized by then Vice President, Dan Quayle. In a classic example of intertextuality, and the rapidly disappearing demarcation line between television and everyday life, a real-life Vice President attacked a fictional character's (Murphy Brown's) choice to be an unwed mother rather than abort the child, and he made a "family value" election issue of one of the nation's most popular television programs. Television critic
Tom Shales claimed 1992 was "a year in which that very blurred line between reality and fantasy on television was subjected to a further blurring" (Associated Press Dec 28, 1992).

On the other hand, the primary focus of the character Roseanne's life is her family and the private sphere of home. However, as C. Wright Mills might suggest, she and her family are victims of the economy created by the public sphere. By January 1993, her sister Jackie was an abused woman as the result of a relationship with a frustrated, out-of-work, younger man; her daughter had eloped when her boyfriend lost his job and she found the Conner family had no money to send her to college; her husband, Dan had lost his business; and an unemployed Roseanne started a business "The Lanford Lunch Box" with her sister Jackie, her mom, and friend Nancy.

For Roseanne, the primary focus of problems/programs is most often the private sphere of family. Many of her problems are based in the private sphere but when they enter the public sphere of her work, or lack of work, it creates an additional conflict with her family obligations and duties. Murphy Brown's primary focus is the public sphere of Senate hearings, tracking down world leaders for an exclusive interview, or being banned from the White House. Her private sphere problems include her lack of a male relationship, and inability to hire a nanny for the baby, or even to name him for more than four months. Murphy's non-stereotypical empowerment seems to be seriously undercut by her near total failure in the private sphere. Roseanne has failures in both spheres but far more successes in the private sphere of home and family, especially when compared with Murphy. Does that make her a "better" woman by stereotypical definition?

After the TV Guide analysis, we now look at the focus of the ten sampled episodes. Of the five sampled episodes for each series, four of the five Murphy Brown episodes feature public sphere issues with only one concerned primarily with the private sphere. Of the five sampled Roseanne episodes, two focus on the public sphere and three primarily deal with the private sphere.

Actual problem solving will be analyzed at the individual level looking at the content
of the ten individual programs. Several areas of gender stereotypes will be analyzed in examining the types of problems characters of differing genders experience and the gender of characters who solve the problems. Prior research dictates that problems be divided into physical difficulties involving personal threats to life or physical challenges in contrast with problems primarily related to emotional areas. Deaux (1976) found women to be considered more emotional while men were depicted as more active and physical. Busby (1974) found women to be portrayed as more emotional and fragile while men were characterized as more adventurous and sturdy. Henderson, Greenberg and Atkin (1980) found in their study of programs from 1975 to 1977 that males need significantly more physical support and females need emotional support.

Murphy Brown solves her own problems, be they emotional or physical, in the five sampled episodes. She is subpoenaed to testify before a Senate committee which wants to know her news source (MB# 1). She makes her own decision, refuses to testify, and thus solves her own problem. The episode which is categorized a private issue concerns her purchase of a farm to create a part-time retreat from the hassles of urban life (MB# 2). Again, Murphy makes her own decision while the other cast members struggle with the constraints of rural life. In the sample episode in which she must make a business trip to Paris while her son is ill, she works out the problem herself but has assistance from Eldin who offers to replace a nanny who quit (MB# 3). When Miles' parents are part of a protest, Murphy's work related problem is that Miles doesn't want her to report on an important story which she ultimately covers despite his protests (MB# 4). Miles has the emotional problems of the relationship with his family. And when the FYI crew is to receive a national award (MB# 5), their competitive petty bickering is worked out by them.

Thus a disproportionate amount of emotional support is not needed by any gender and no specific gender is constantly helping solve problems. Women cannot be considered more emotional or fragile nor are men depicted as being more active, adventurous or physical. This does not support the finding that males need significantly more physical
support and females need emotional support.

A similar situation is found in Roseanne. Although the program deals with what will be manifestly categorized as private sphere issues, it does not show the stereotypical female in emotional need, seeking help from others. When Jackie and Roseanne visit their childhood home (R# 1), they are dealing with their own problems. In the subplot, Darlene is caught skipping school to attend a comic book convention in Chicago with David. The program Roseanne is much less likely to present a neat solution at the end of an episode. Darlene cleans the garage and is taken off suspension but Dan and Roseanne are still struggling with their role as parents trying to raise children.

Dan: Nice save on that double standard deal. But, you know, we don't have to look at it as a double standard, let's look at it as different kids need different rules.

Roseanne: Yes, that's good.

Dan: And we didn't cave on this David thing, we adapted to a difficult situation.

Roseanne: Well done, my man.

Dan: Thank you.

Roseanne: Hey, I got one. Darlene isn't totally out of control, she's spunky.

Dan: Quite.

In the episode which deals with the Rodbell's commercial (R# 2), the difficult situation where Jackie replaces Roseanne in the commercial is seemingly resolved when the commercial airs and only Darlene is included in the commercial. At this level, the weight issue is not resolved but the personal difficulties are. The problems faced by Roseanne when her mother opts to live in a retirement community (R# 3) are helped somewhat by open communication among Roseanne, her mother, and Jackie about the issue. The only physical threat in any of the ten sampled programs comes when Roseanne is confronted by an unstable customer when she is working alone in the Lunch Box. She does not seek help.
from Dan although he feels obligated to resolve the situation and protect his wife. Roseanne and her business partners resolve the issue themselves by taking a self defense class. This is a direct contradiction of the finding that in television, "men were most often likely to solve their own problems without assistance from others...women most frequently dealt with someone else's problem or required help to solve their own problems" (Downs 1981, p.256). Another example of female characters solving their own problems comes in the episode in which Darlene is stranded at a rock concert when neighbor Molly wants to party. The sixteen year old Darlene takes matters into her own hands and takes a $75 dollar cab ride home.

"While men are still shown as capable of dealing with and solving their own problems, women seem to represent characters who get help from others when they need it and are asked by others for assistance" (Downs 1981, p. 257). The characters in these episodes who seem to need the majority of emotional support are Miles, Frank, and Arnie. As we saw above, the new definition of male characters includes expressions of their fears and anxieties. The TV Guide article, "Days of Whine and Neuroses", quotes from a Murphy Brown episode in which FYI reporter Frank Fontana expresses his anxieties; "I have a slight self-confidence problem coupled with a need to scrutinize every detail of my life until any hope of joy has been crushed" (TV Guide February 8, 1992, p. 6). In Murphy Brown the majority of the few episodes dealing with personal problems appear to concentrate on male characters; Miles problems with his parents and how it clouds his professional judgment, his work related stress problems and his fear of being gay.

Henderson, Greenberg, and Atkin (1980) found that television women are depicted helping with problems and women characters provide more nurturance. In a fall 1992 episode in which Corky Sherwood Forest and her husband Will were experiencing marital problems we find concrete evidence that Murphy is not defined in these stereotypical terms. Corky says she needs to talk to someone and comes up with the idea of Murphy. Miles responds, "I was thinking of someone more nurturing and caring." When Corky does go
to Murphy, instead of receiving what popular psychologist Deborah Tannen contends is feminine understanding, Murphy refuses to deal with, or even discuss, Corky's personal or sex life, an attribute which would be associated with the female gender. Instead, Murphy exhibits the male-defined characteristic of being task oriented, she offers a solution, that Corky testify at Will's plagiarism trial with her diary, instead of fitting the feminine defined characteristics of being a comforting, listening pal. This does, however, present a stereotypical situation in which a female needs emotional help and seeks help from another female character.

After analyzing two characteristics which Downs found to be significantly related to gender, home orientation to female characters and work orientation to male characters, and the ensuing discussion of their relationship to the public and private spheres, two other categories that did not reveal significant gender differences have potential importance when analyzing the dialogue of these two outspoken lead characters. Downs (1981) categorized "verbal aggression" as a female characteristic. It is a powerless form of grumbling, while the "assertiveness" category, defined by Downs as a male characteristic, is a more powerful confrontational form. It would be easy to confuse verbal aggression as powerless with the more powerful assertiveness. Although Downs did not find significant gender differences, I contend that this would be an important area to examine since part of the perception of empowerment of both Roseanne and Murphy Brown is their outspoken demeanor.

Verbal aggression (f) is defined as insulting, sarcastic, or derogatory remarks. It appears to imply strength. On the other hand, assertiveness (m) is defined as disagreement with another's point of view or announcement of an alternative method for dealing with a problem. It is strong and directly confrontational.

Both programs are filled with the entertaining forms of verbal aggression. Murphy makes jokes about Stan, the network lawyer, being a rodent (MB #1). Frank tells Murphy, about Miles, "the only reason he's happy to see you go is cause the next four days he won't have to wear his bite guard (MB# 3). When Darlene is caught by Roseanne leaving
her room with David (R# 1), Darlene says, "no one was home so I figured, why not become a woman," implying they had sex. Leon informed Roseanne and Bonnie that they would not be in the Rodbell's commercial (R# 2), "I'm guessing the waitresses will be played by friendly, courteous types who don't wander off to nap in the mattress department." In the same episode, Roseanne and Bonnie criticized the attractive young actresses portraying waitresses in the commercial:

Bonnie: Check out the high heels on Barbarella over there.
Roseanne: Yeah, she steps on one moist carrot and her bony butt's gonna slide all the way to garden supply.

Nancy explained that she met her lesbian lover, Marla, at the cosmetics counter at Rodbell's (R# 3):

Nancy: She does makeovers.
Roseanne: Well she's certainly thorough.

In the same episode Darlene asked Roseanne and Jackie how they knew that Nancy was a lesbian.

Darlene: How'd you find out? Did she tell you?
Roseanne: No, we saw the, "I'm a big old dyke" bumper sticker on her car.

Darlene and Molly discussed going to a rock concert together (R# 5):

Darlene: Don't spread it around.
Molly: Don't worry, I've got a reputation too.
Darlene: Yeah, and the cold sores to prove it.

In the same episode, Dan questioned Roseanne's response that she told Darlene to be home "after the concert." "That's very vague dear, would that be a month after the
concert?"

These are all forms of the female stereotypical form of verbal aggression, stated by both male and female characters. The more powerful and confrontational form of assertiveness in the programs *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* is stated most often by female characters. When Darlene was confronted by Roseanne and Dan about skipping school to attend the comic book convention, her response was assertive, while her mother's follow-up response was verbal aggressive.

Darlene: The convention was important to us. We went cause we're serious about this stuff.

Roseanne: You can do better than that, Darlene.

When Roseanne realized that young neighbor Charlotte is shy, afraid to be home alone and afraid to ask to stay, Roseanne works on her verbal self-confidence; "Let's try something Charlotte. Right after I finish talking, then you say something back, right away." (R#5). And Nancy, who has worked out her own sexuality, explained the situation concisely to Arnie; "I'm gonna tell you one more time. I'm gay. It has nothing to do with you or your masculinity."

When Murphy was under attack from the Senate committee, she assertively fired back.

Senator: Well maybe it's just me. Maybe I don't get it. But, how can you claim to serve the public interests when the public is fed-up with you?

Murphy: Senator, I think what the public is fed up with is seeing their tax dollars spent on tropical vacations, health club memberships, and parking privileges for their elected representatives.

When Murphy complained to the FYIers about dirt, crime and traffic noise in the city, she was assertive, Miles response was verbally aggressive.

Murphy: Well you've heard the last of my complaints because I'm finally
doing something about it.

Miles: Oh boy, here it comes, the farm speech. she's fed up with the city, she's going back to the land and on her farm she'll grow some food e-i-e-i-o . . .

Murphy: I understand that you're bitter Miles. I was bitter too when I was a pasty-faced, smog-sucking, city dweller. But that was before yesterday. The day I bought a farm.

Roseanne has constantly stood up for her family facing the impact of a negative economy. In a non-sampled episode in May, 1992 an unwitting candidate for re-election as state representative rang the Conner doorbell.

Mike: Hi, I'm Mike Summers, your state representative. How ya doin'?
Roseanne: Great.
Mike: Good, I'm going door-to-door trying to get to know my constituents.
Roseanne: Oh, door-to-door. Heck, that takes a lot of time. Why don't ya just go down to the unemployment office and see everybody at once.
Mike: I hear ya. And you're right. We can't let this area's workforce lay idle. That's why bringing in new business is my #1 priority.
Roseanne: How?
Mike: Through tax incentives. See, we're gonna make it cheaper for out-of-state businesses to set up shop right here in Lanford.
Roseanne: So they get a tax break?
Mike: Yeah, that's why they come here.
Roseanne: Well, who's gonna pay the taxes they ain't payin'?
Mike: Well, you, you will. But, you'll be working - good, steady employment.
Roseanne: Union wages?
Mike: Well now. Part of the reason these companies are finding it so expensive to operate in other locations . . .
Roseanne: So they're gonna dump the union so they can come here and hire at scab wages and then for that privilege, we get to pay their taxes.
Mike: Is your husband home?

Roseanne: He's on the phone tryin' to keep us from losin' our house. Hey, let's talk about that. See, we're broke.

This conversation reflects several dimensions. First, the politician thinks he can fool the little lady with the promise of jobs. However, she asks some very important questions and discovers the man isn't offering financial salvation for her family. She directly confronts him on this and when he can't answer her questions, he asks for her husband. The implication here is that a man would understand this complicated economic situation. Roseanne shows that she understands the complicated economic situation all too well; she is living it.

Thus, while there are many situations of the less powerful form of verbal aggression identified by Downs as a stereotypical female characteristic, both Roseanne and Murphy Brown offer the directly confrontational and more powerful form of assertiveness, categorized as a male stereotypical attribute. This provides one more example of the apparent empowerment of these two female characters who present a challenge to previously defined female stereotypical characteristics as portrayed on television.

The analysis of two other areas offers possible insight into the non-stereotypical empowerment of Roseanne and Murphy. The first is an examination of whether these female characters either act or react to other characters or situations. Previous research has found that the majority of women on television are portrayed as accessories, victims, people who react instead of initiating action. The second is an examination of whose physical space is locus of program, i.e., who comes to whom. Organizational literature reveals there is a power dimension in personal space especially in organizational settings; who gets a private office, who has the largest office, office location, who is summoned by whom, who goes to whom.

The Roseanne episode in which she is threatened at work (R# 4) provides an example of a female character taking charge of a situation. Initially Roseanne reacts to the
situation by not backing down from the man who threatens her. She reacts later with fear but then takes charge. She and her friends define the situation as a potential problem with their work and refuse to be intimidated by it. They take the positive action of taking a self-defense class together in order to remove the victim and fear element from their lives. On the other hand, the male characters Arnie and Dan are depicted as reacting to the situations in which Dan's wife is threatened and Arnie's ex-wife opts for a lesbian lifestyle.

Murphy too, refuses to react to the situation of intimidation presented by the Senate subpoena (MB# 1). She refuses the silly advice of her fellow FYIers and she refuses to buckle under to the Senate committee, claiming "that's exactly what you want, to keep us at heel" and goes on to express the need for her first amendment rights.

Regarding personal space and its implied power, on Murphy Brown, the only personal space depicted regularly is Murphy's office and Murphy's home. The others come to her. While Murphy is technically supervised by producer Miles Silverberg, she is never called to his office, he comes to hers. And while all the other FYI anchors have offices, they too come to Murphy's, giving her an appearance of power. On the other hand, Roseanne has no private personal space. She shares her home with her family, her bedroom with her husband and is never depicted as having an office at work.

Interestingly, the only character on Roseanne with private space visited by the cameras and viewing audience is Darlene. Portions of episodes have taken place in her room when other characters come to her. There is no power distinction on this program that men have personal space and women do not. When the program premiered, Dan was building a boat in the garage and that seemed to be his private space. However, the boat and the dreams that went with it are long gone. None of Roseanne's bosses have had an office to which she has been summoned, the action takes place on the factory floor or in the Rodbell's luncheonette.

The similarities the characters Roseanne and Murphy Brown share include being female, verbal, and strong willed. Almost everything else is different; their marital status,
appearance, primary focus of their lives, social class, etc. Both seem to exhibit far less characteristics that prior media research on gender has determined to be female stereotypes. Although these non-traditionally defined characteristics apply to different areas for each character, both come up with a much larger number of traditionally defined male characteristics than traditionally defined female characteristics. It can be concluded, however, that based upon the several decades of findings of gender research on television, Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown do not fit the stereotypical definitions of women produced by that research. Thus, at the manifest level, Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner appear to defy prior television gender stereotypes and this challenge is equated with presenting an image of female empowerment.

H 2. The characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown manifestly represent different social classes and these class distinctions influence the construction of their gender identities.

Here we look at Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown as members of two distinct social classes. Prior research on women's magazines, during World War II and in the 1970s, reveals that media messages vary according to the social class of the intended audience (Honey 1984; Lopate 1978). World War II Rosie the Riveter media messages designed to recruit blue-collar women as workers emphasized a helpless female who needed a man for survival and who gained identity through motherhood and domestic bliss. On the other hand, media messages designed to recruit middle class women to work during World War II emphasized self-actualization and the ability to get the job done: "this wartime contrast suggests that images of female experience as filtered through the media are greatly influenced by the socioeconomic level of the group at which they are aimed... the fantasies, aspirations, and self-images of women depend on more than their gender" (Honey 1984, p.214).

A similar type of class differentiation in media presentations was revealed in women's magazines in the mid-1970s. Lopate (1978) found that images of Jackie
Kennedy Onasis differed depending on the social class of a magazine's intended reader. Magazines targeted towards middle or upper-middle class readers stressed the importance of consuming, shopping, decorating, and attending cultural events, while downplaying mothering activities. Magazines geared towards working and lower-class women minimized consumer activities and focused on motherhood. *McCall’s and the Ladies’ Home Journal*, targeted for middle class women, detailed Jackie’s society life, emphasizing her vulnerability and the tragedies that can happen to the rich. In working-class oriented magazines such as *Woman’s Day, Family Circle, and Lady’s Circle*, Jackie Kennedy Onasis was depicted as a wife and mother, caring (or not caring) for her husband and children, rather than as a society lady involved in spending money.

The characters Roseanne and Murphy can be interpreted as running parallel to these research findings, if one can assume that *Roseanne*, depicting a working-class family, is geared primarily towards a working-class audience and *Murphy Brown*, depicting a white-collar professional woman, is aimed primarily towards a middle/upper-middle class audience. An indicator of the characters’ relative class status can be found in the very titles of the programs. Both programs, with audiences of nearly forty million, in twenty million households weekly, obviously appeal to a wide spectrum of television viewers. These viewers are immediately placed on a first name basis with Roseanne, yet Murphy Brown gets both her first name and surname in the title, an immediate indicator of class status.

The program *Roseanne* has primarily focused upon her life as a wife and mother and, more recently, the impact of economic recession on the family. *Murphy Brown* has largely ignored the economic recession, and despite the fact that Murphy now has a son, producers proudly revealed the child would be the main issue in only six of the 1992-1993 season’s twenty-four new episodes. In contrast to the magazine research findings, Murphy’s society life or her spending are not emphasized. One of the few times Murphy was depicted in a shopping situation came when she took producer Miles Silverberg to Brooks Brothers so the consumer-oriented yuppie would regain his zest for life after a
pseudo-heart attack at his thirtieth birthday party. Instead of a focus on consumerism or social events, Murphy's journalistic career is the featured topic. When the vulnerability of the personal costs of her career is added however, Murphy more closely matches the images portrayed in magazines aimed at middle class readers. This does not, however, seem to be gender-related, it may be more class-related, since all the *Murphy Brown* characters are depicted as having personal problems regardless of their gender.

Before we examine the differences in gender construction based on social class in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, we must first clearly demonstrate that these two leading ladies are members of distinct social classes. *Roseanne* depicts a blue collar, working-class family with both parents struggling to find and keep jobs. Economic struggle is an integral part of their lives. Over the five-year course of the series, Roseanne has worked in a factory, and in food service at several restaurants; the most recent being Rodbell's. After being fired at the latter place, Roseanne and her sister Jackie each received $10,000 from her mother as her share in the profits of the mother's divorce from their father. They used the money to start a business, selling loose-meat sandwiches at the Lanford Lunch Box.

On the other hand, *Murphy Brown* is a white-collar professional. Her well-paid network television career gives her a wide variety of life options. Economic struggle is not a part of her life. Her energies are directed towards her journalistic career and maintenance of the respect of other network news professionals. The birth of her son in fall, 1992 added the dimension of child care/ work struggles although Murphy is wealthy enough to employ child care professionals.

The incorporation of Eric Olin Wright's (1979) class analysis illuminates many differences between the two characters. Wright divided class into popular gradational definitions, based on the amount of income/education/status an individual seems to possess, and relational definitions based on the individual's position within relations of the market or exchange relations in the actual production of goods and services.

Examples abound in both prime-time series which clearly indicate the characters'
gradational economic levels. Murphy Brown is obviously well-educated, articulate and has the trappings of economic success; her own home, an expensive sports car, and a painter-in-residence. The character, Murphy, is depicted as the only child of a well-to-do newspaper editor. Murphy's response to her colleague Jim Dial's shocked reaction when she decides not to end her pregnancy in abortion but to have the child reflects her economic status.

Jim Dial: Murphy, do you need any money?
Murphy: Oh for God's sake, Jim, I make as much as you do.
Jim: "Is that true Miles?" he huffs at producer Miles Silverberg.

Murphy's occupational status, and the respect she holds within her profession, are further demonstrated by the type of problems she encounters. She was subpoenaed to testify before a Senate committee that wanted her to reveal her news source (MB#1). She refused, based upon the negative impact such a revelation would have on other professional journalists. An indicator of her status is seen in the fact that she can successfully challenge the Senators to the point that they must back down. The power of Murphy's profession as a journalist is demonstrated, in the first place, in that her actions can bring a seven-member Senate committee together. Their professional power fades as her show of personal strength goes beyond, yet compliments, her professional power. Her decision to flee the city in her spare time by buying a farm (MB#2) reflects a large amount of discretionary income.

While the initial decision to send Murphy to cover the Economic Summit in Paris is Miles', the ultimate decision about whether or not to go is hers (MB#3). In the same episode she gets into a bidding war with her quitting nanny, she has the option to hire another, having already procured a French nanny for the journey, and she can change her plans at the last minute and decide to fly the Concorde at perhaps triple the airfare. Clearly, Murphy Brown is not a woman living paycheck to paycheck.
Murphy's colleagues not only are professionals with large incomes but also seem to reflect lives of privilege. Producer Miles Silverberg is a Harvard graduate. When his parents arrive in Washington to demonstrate (MB# 4), it is obvious that they are wealthy, without any apparent signs of employment. His mother Connie wants to help her overwrought son: "Miles, your eye is twitching. This settles it. Nathan and I are treating you to ten sessions at the Koondalinee Yoga Center and we won't take no for an answer."

However, in a strange turn-about, the wealthy parents politically refused to utilize some of the trappings of their son's success. Miles explained to Murphy that his parents were late for an interview with her because "they refused to ride in my BMW as part of their ongoing boycott of the internal combustion engine. They said they prefer walking. It's good exercise and it gives them the chance to continue their search for the ultimate bran muffin."

An interchange between Corky and Miles' mother, Connie, reveals Corky's social class.

Corky: I didn't know how long you'd be in town but I wrote down a few places I thought you might enjoy. The arboretum is always a treat. Dupont Circle has excellent shopping and you absolutely shouldn't miss the First Lady's dress collection at the Smithsonian.

Connie: Thank you, ah, but the only free time we have is this afternoon before the protest and we volunteered to serve lunch at a homeless shelter.

Corky: Well, that's fun too. If I don't see you before you go, enjoy the protest.

Miles is proud of both the economic and power dimensions of his career. After being arrested during a protest, Miles and his parents discuss their relationship in the jail cell they share.

Connie: Your father's always bragging about ya on the picket line.
Miles: You are?
Nathan: Hell, yes.
Miles: What do you say?

Nathan: Well, I say that, within the confines of the mainstream of capitalist corporate structure, Miles Silverberg is making a difference. And I tell 'em I'm proud of you.

Miles: Wanna see my weekly pay stub?

Nathan: I already saw it. You left it on the bedroom bureau.

Miles: Not bad, huh?

Nathan: Oh Miles, you know we don't care anything about money. But your Uncle Saul is gonna platz.

Thus Murphy, and the people around her, are white-collar professionals with the income, education and status levels reflective of that group. Even the series regulars who are not news professionals enjoy a much higher economic and status level than most low-level, service-oriented personnel. Phil is not a mere bartender/waiter, he owns his own establishment, where he reigns as a political pundit and knowledgeable Washington insider. Eldin was depicted in an earlier episode as selling one of his paintings for more than one million dollars. Yet, the money made him uncomfortable and he prefers to toil on, applying his artistic skills to Murphy's walls and ceilings, and now caring for her child.

A sharp contrast to Murphy's income, education and status is depicted in Roseanne. Economic struggle is a cornerstone of Roseanne's life. The spring 1992 season ended with Roseanne losing her job at Rodbell's. The fall 1992 season began with Dan's motorcycle shop in bankruptcy. The first sample episode (R# 1) opened with Roseanne and Jackie discussing the impending demolition of their childhood home as Roseanne gets the mail: "look at that, final notice from my insurance company. Well, good. I'm sick of hearing from them." Later in that episode Arnie came by to borrow Dan's truck to salvage the copper pipes from the old house. He tells Roseanne and Jackie their childhood home is being torn down to make way for a Burger Heaven. "It's great man; the whole block's gonna smell like chili." When the Conner family participates in the Rodbell's commercial (R# 2), Darlene's motivation is purely economic.
Darlene: It's a lie, it's demeaning and it represents everything I hate.

Becky: Well then, why are you doing it?

Darlene: Money.

The outward appearance of the Conner family is judged by the director of the commercial. Rodbell's is not an upscale department store; it is approximately equivalent to a Wal Mart or K Mart.

Director: We're thinking of using them as the average family.

Leon: Well, aren't they a bit too swap meet for Rodbell's?

Director: Oh, no. No, no, believe me, it's perfect. This is what America's coming to.

After Jackie's boyfriend, Fisher, physically abused her in a January 1993 episode, Dan was arrested for beating Fisher in retaliation. Roseanne commented, "people have been saying it for years but with Dan going to jail, we are now officially poor white trash." They then jump, dance and laugh.

Clothing, or style of dress, and manner of address are other indicators of occupational status. Roseanne's boss Leon, introduced a woman from corporate headquarters, Linda Wagner, to his employees, Roseanne and Bonnie. The two waitresses are introduced by first name only, the other woman as Ms. Wagner, which can certainly be interpreted as an example of class inequity; the white collar worker vis a vis the blue (or pink) collar workers. She is there to evaluate the restaurant operation and employees. The class differences of the characters is also reflected in their garments. Roseanne and her fellow waitress Bonnie wear print dresses with frilly sleeves, pink aprons with frilly edging and frilly waitress designators in their hair. In the episode depicting Roseanne and Bonnie's last day on the job, Leon refers to their "quaint little Humpty Dumpty uniforms." Ms. Wagner wears a tailored business suit.

When her son, D.J. came in bedraggled from trying to sell candy bars to benefit his
Woodchuck troop (R# 5), Roseanne offered this advice: "money is kinda tight right now and if you're gonna go around selling a fifty cent nut cluster bar for three bucks, you're gonna have to have an angle, you know? I think you need to be more pitiful. Do they know who your family is?" Roseanne's grammar, syntax and word choice are all blue-collar.

Later in the same episode, neighbor Charlotte came over to use the Conner family encyclopedias.

Roseanne: We got A through S and then we had to switch grocery stores.
Dan: Right. Then we got Shop and Save's parade of presidents but we had to stop at Lincoln cause of that bad check thing.

An episode reflecting perhaps the strongest negative economic impact on the Conner family was broadcast in May 1992 when Roseanne was searching for a job after being fired at Rodbell's. Becky was an excellent student and planned to go to college until the family's economic struggle shattered her educational hopes and dreams. The generational tone of the income, education and status categories was exposed in this scene.

Becky: What's our family income, in thousands.
Dan: Put us down for thirty-one.
Roseanne: Yeah, we only spend, say thirty-five.
Becky: You still make too much for me to get full financial aid. How much is in my college fund...please tell me there's a college fund.
Roseanne: Well there was. It's gone.
Becky: So even if I get into these schools, I can't afford to go.
Roseanne: Becky, it has been a really bad year... (suggests community college).
Becky: What was I working for - what was the point of gettin' A's? . . . All this time you told me if I worked hard and got good grades and everything I could make something out of myself.
Roseanne: You still can.
Becky: Yeah, goin' to night school, working at the Buy and Bag. I'm gonna wind up just like YOU!
Dan: Hey, you apologize for that.
Becky: No.
Dan: Your mother busts her butt for you. She's...
Becky: Hey, I busted my butt so I could get into a good school. How come you never told me there was no way?
Dan: Oh, we purposely went broke so that you couldn't go to the college of your choice.
Becky: Well, you shoulda told me I was on my own.
Dan: Oh come off it, you've never been on your own.
Becky: Well what would you call it? (she stomps out).
Roseanne: The fact that she doesn't want to end up like me just proves she's been payin' attention around here.
Dan: She's still way outta line. I mean, we may not have exactly been able to spoil her but she's still had it pretty good.
Roseanne: As good as we wanted her to...?

Relational definitions include the individual's position within relations of the market or exchange relations in the actual production of goods and services. This analysis will include; the individual's personal power in the public (work) arena, and private (personal) life, the degree of decision making and scope of options, and other economic constraints, such as, what they have to do but don't want to do to keep their job. Further differentiation of class under relations of production can be made among categories of occupations, relations of domination and subordination (Lemmon 1975), and relations of exploitation in three areas: control over money and investments, control over physical means of production, and control over their own labor. Thus, the bourgeoisie in Roseanne would include owners of Rodbell's, the store where she previously worked. In Murphy Brown the bourgeoisie would be the network owners and those who own the companies
that advertise on FYI. The power of the bourgeoisie was reflected in several non-sampled episodes: In *Roseanne*, when it was decided to close the luncheonette and fire Roseanne and Bonnie, yet promote their gay boss Leon, and in *Murphy Brown* when the network invoked the "appearance clause" after Murphy apparently cut her long hair, spotlighting the feminine construction of gender in relationship to the workplace. Another example of class control was exposed on *Murphy Brown* when the FYI on-air talent were ordered to be cordial to advertisers at a sponsor's meeting. There the cast said, under their breaths (but on camera) what they really thought, which contrasted greatly with what they actually said. As we saw in the data analysis of Hypothesis One, usually Murphy seems to function in the more confrontational "assertiveness" (m) category. However, in this episode she and her male colleagues are depicted in a situation in which class seems to override gender, and they are reduced to the "verbal aggression" (f) category.

In the area of what Steeves and Smith (1987, 52-3) call class market relations, Murphy Brown is ranked much higher on the scale because she is responsible for the hiring and firing of others. However, this intelligent, respected, well-educated and well-paid woman shows a marked lack of expertise in employing others when dealing with secretaries, nannies, and Eldin her house painter, a man who was hired for a few days job and has remained on her payroll, and in her life, for five years. She has no real "control" over secretaries or nannies because they leave her. This relates to a finding by Steeves and Smith (1987, p.52) that the wealthy women portrayed in occupational roles on *Dallas* were "limited in their knowledge and experience".

The added dimension of the character's potential range of options for other jobs is important since Murphy is an aging woman on TV and Roseanne has few skills and little formal education. Roseanne's friend and co-worker Bonnie comments ironically as they learn they're losing their jobs at Rodbell's: "there ain't a lot of opportunities out there for two career gals like us."

The dark economic tone for the 1992-1993 season was set in the season premier as
Dan held his going-out-of-business sale at the motorcycle shop.

Dan: Biggest day in the history of the shop and the best I can do is not lose my house.


Dan: This was my one shot.

Dan's comment is representative of the characteristic blue-collar reality, the American Dream deflated.

Roseanne's subordinate position in the workplace was clearly demonstrated in the episode in which the Rodbell's commercial was shot (R#2). Her supervisor Leon was upset that she was not cleaning the luncheonette.

Leon: Come on Roseanne, look at this counter. If you're not gonna do something properly now, why bother.

Roseanne: You know, you're right. (she stops wiping counter).

Leon: All right, that's it. I give up. You're fired.

Roseanne: (Laughs uncertainly.)

Leon: I'm not kidding Roseanne. Now I am the boss and you are the help and if you can't accept that then I can call security and they will escort you out.

Roseanne: Okay, I'll clean the counter, Adolph. (starts scrubbing).

Leon: That's better.

Roseanne: (to Bonnie) God I hate havin' to suck up like that.

Roseanne functions at the lower end of the class market scale. She sells her labor cheaply and has a supervisor standing directly over her. Later when the commercial is being shot, the director, Ken, replaces Roseanne with Jackie as the "mother" in the commercial. Roseanne has no power in either instance, and her scope of options is limited in both cases to quitting or withdrawing her labor.

The changing generational aspect of class relational definitions is reflected in the
episode in which Roseanne's mother is choosing a retirement community. Roseanne and Dan's economic situation would be roughly equivalent to Roseanne's parents' situation as far as income, number of children, and approximate social position is concerned. However, Roseanne's mother did not have to work, the family survived on one income, and her divorce settlement offers her some life options. When Roseanne and Jackie protest their mother's decision, Bev responds, "I don't think this is up to either of you. It's my money and my life." One gets the impression that if Roseanne and Dan divorced in twenty years, there would be no such financial settlement for her; they do not have any money saved and have no assets. Roseanne and Jackie strike out to achieve this economic independence with their own business, The Lanford Lunch Box. However, Dan's similar small business efforts ended in failure. Also, despite owning the business, Roseanne and Jackie do not have employees. Only the co-owners work there.

Another class related message ties in to aging. The elderly are depicted as powerless. Even if they have money, like Bev, many are willing to trade their life savings for the promise of security. Roseanne is appalled at the retirement community's operating policy.

Sales woman: The price of the condo includes long-term medical attention. You know, when it becomes necessary, your mother will be automatically relocated into a bed in our constant care wing.
Roseanne: What happens to her apartment?
Woman: Oh well, it will go back into a pool to be sold to new residents.
Roseanne: What if she gets better?

Overall, the Conner family is very powerless. They operate at one of the lowest possible economic levels and still maintain the trappings of respectability. In relation to gradational definitions, their educational level and occupational status are low. When both Dan and Roseanne are employed, the family income level is the most positive aspect of this category. However, they work at the behest of others and can lose their jobs easily.
1993, Dan was back doing drywall, a job he stated in one episode to be lowly and demeaning. The gradational class definitions also impact other areas of their life. Their daughter Becky, despite being an A student, eloped because her boyfriend lost his job and the Conner family had no money to help with her college education. Economics limits their degree of decision-making and life options. It also sends them down the path of no return. There are no psycho-social moratoria for the children of blue-collar families.

Murphy Brown lives and works much higher up the class ladder according to both gradational and relational definitions. She can be called before a senate committee and successfully challenge Unites States Senators (MB# 1). Her discretionary income allows her to purchase a rural farm and take her housepainter, now nanny, there to work on it (MB# 2). Her painter/nanny, Eldin, summarized his opinion of the old farmhouse: "it's got possibilities although I'm a little stumped on which way to go with a mural. You know, I'm not known for my farm themes, although I once painted a cow to represent the working class with Ronald Reagan milking it dry." Murphy's painter reflects her liberal, middle-class value structure. However, he is still clearly her employee.

Eldin: Excuse me, but I feel I should tell you, I found this bone under the house. It's either a cow or a teamster.

Murphy: It could be a pilgrim, this place is full of history.

Eldin: Yeah, well let me tell ya, if I find any more history around here, my rates are going up. It is now tea time, where did I put those scones?

Murphy decides not to buy the farm when she learns that civilization is encroaching upon the scenic rural area and that other news professionals live nearby, "Frank, I could tolerate the mall, I could learn to live with the interstate. But I'm not driving two hours to see Sam Donaldson in bib overalls and a straw hat trying to milk a horse."

We see Murphy's position within market relations in her responsibility to hire and fire secretaries, nannies, and Eldin. She has control over other people's work lives. In
the sample episode in which she has a business trip to Paris (MB#3), viewers meet secretary #54.

Murphy: Let's see now, get new passport, done. Confirm reservations, done. Check airline for bankruptcy, you can't be too careful, done. I keep thinking there's something I've forgotten...

Secretary #54 (male): (singing) "I've got rhythm, I've got music, I've got my gal, who could ask for anything more?" Oh, here's the file you wanted Ms. Brown. I'm taking my break now ... "I've got daisies. . ." 

Murphy: Oh yeah, fire secretary. I guess I can save that for when I get back.

A contrast can be noted here between the happy-go-lucky working class employee and the obsessive middle-class worker. The obsessive worker is about to fire the happy worker.

Many of Murphy's employees quit. Her painter Eldin comments, "you've been going through a lot of nannies in the last few months and, well, metaphorically speaking, the streets of Washington are strewn with nanny carcasses." When Murphy arrives home she learns that Mrs. Molina, nanny #6, has quit to go work for Maria Shriver, "Oh, Ms. Brown, I'm sorry. It's just that Maria told me that I could..." An obvious class indicator is demonstrated in both instances when the secretary and nanny refer to her as Ms. Brown while at work and home, Roseanne Conner is Roseanne or Rosie in both her occupational and home environs.

Murphy's decision-making position is demonstrated in the episode in which Miles' parents protest the environmental policies of an oil company (MB#4).

Murphy: (to secretary #55) Rita, we've got a big change of schedule. Call editing and cancel my session. Then call research and tell them I need an assistant in twenty minutes. Then see if you can reschedule my lunch with Cokie Roberts for next Tuesday. You got that?

Rita: (Her hair is stuffed with pencils). Absolutely. Just let me get a pencil so I can write that down, Just, I just had one.
Rita! (she plucks a pencil from Rita's head). Miles, I want you to hear this. Guys, you too. I'm dumping my story on hospital negligence. Something great just came up.

What do you mean, you're dumping it! You're flying to San Diego in two days to shoot it!

What's going on? Nobody told me we were having a meeting. I'm senior anchor, I should be told these things.

It's not a meeting Jim.

Yeah, that's what they told Arthur Kent when he stumbled onto their little lie. Before he knew what hit him, his Pachinko machine was out in the hall and everyone was welcoming a new guy named Bob.

Murphy, you know we don't drop stories this late in the game unless it's something really big.

Okay, Miles. You tell me if it's big or not. 20,000 people descending on Washington to protest an oil company that's been abusing the environment for over two decades.

A protest against NORAM Petroleum. No doubt a reaction to their recent tanker spill. How many people here knew that? See! Lucky I happened by.

We're all lucky, Jim. Lucky to be living in a country where ordinary citizens can stand up to a callous corporate giant and demand to be heard. I love this story. Who's organizing the demonstration, Murphy?

When Miles learned his parents were involved in the demonstration he ordered Murphy not to do the story, yet she ended up doing it despite his orders. Several factors relating to Murphy's status in the FYI office are demonstrated in this scene. First, she gives direct orders to her secretary and can summon researchers and other employees to assist her. Secondly, she does not ask Miles if she can change the story, she tells him it's being changed. Jim is insecure about his senior anchor position and possibly missing a meeting. This relates to the location of Murphy's office directly off the main newsroom area. The others come to her. Miles comes from his office on another floor of the building. The other FYIers have offices that have seldom been seen in five years. This is not accidental. Murphy's clear recognition of office politics and power is demonstrated in a
March, 1993 episode in which she challenges the new Vice President of News, Mitchell Baldwin's decision to change the FYI set to one more closely resembling a Star Trek set. Murphy is the only staffer who will challenge him.

Murphy: I think it's a piece of ...
Miles: genius.
Murphy: We hate it.
Baldwin: I'm convinced this is the way to bring FYI into the 21st century. It works well with focus groups.
Murphy: Who? . . . Klingons?

After she agrees to attend a charity event with the new network executive, she explains to the FYIers that she'll remove him from the office, "his center of power" and have him pick her up "at my center of power, my house." Then she will offer to drive, putting them in "my center of power on wheels."

A recognition of class consciousness on the part of Miles' parents, contrasted with a security guard's lack of knowledge about class, is also reflected in the protest episode.

Security guard: Let's go folks, I have orders to vacate the building.
Connie: Yeah, orders from a rapacious employer who's destroyed hundreds of miles of shoreline and tens of thousands of fish and wildlife. Were you aware of that?
Guard: Haven't had a chance to read the latest company newsletter.

Obviously, the guard is more concerned with his paycheck and employment security than the ravings of a wealthy protestor. A form of class snobbery is reflected in Miles' statement, "I was arrested today. My fingers are stained with ink. The ink that's touched the hands of robbers and murderers and dirty dregs of society. (turns to parents) Present company excluded." He differentiates his parents, as well-to-do protestors, from "the dregs of society."
Another indicator of Murphy's relational class status is found in the episode in which the FYI crew is being honored by the Museum of Broadcast Arts (MB# 5). It is to be an "Evening with FYI" honoring fifteen years of excellence in journalism.

Murphy: So Miles, how much is the cash award and do we have to split it with you?

Miles: There's no money involved and this is not an attractive side of you. Now, the evening will begin in an auditorium of adoring fans asking us questions, followed by a film retrospective celebrating FYI's past fifteen years, and then a dinner and a V.I.P. reception at the Four Seasons.

Murphy: No one gives money anymore.

Corky: It's so amazing. First, Miss America and now this.

Frank: You guys realize we are now a part of history? We're gonna live forever in the museum archives.

Jim: To be honored with the likes of Edward R. Murrow, Chet Huntley. The best part, I didn't have to die to get it. Peter Jennings was wrong.

Murphy's crass reference to cash awards demonstrates how blasé she has become about national recognition in her career field. Thus we see Murphy much higher up the social class scale than Roseanne when both gradational and relational definitions are utilized.

Now that the sharp class differences have been established between Roseanne and Murphy, the two programs will be examined for differences in gender construction which appear to be related to their respective social classes. While it is granted that clearly social class determines life options for people of both genders, these two prime-time programs send several latent messages that indicate a different definition of women, based solely upon their social class.

First, an acknowledgement that single life can be acceptable for a woman who enjoys economic stability. In this case we will look at two single women characters on these programs; Murphy Brown vis a vis Jackie. Jackie seems to
have a lot fewer life options because of economic constraints. There are reasons to suspect that her search for a husband/mate has economic dimensions. Two incomes at her economic level would raise her economic, if not social, standard of living. Romance does not seem to play a part. In a first season episode, Dan asked Roseanne what she was going to tell her thrice-divorced, broken-hearted friend Crystal. "Forget romance, get married," Roseanne retorted. Jackie goes over to her married sister's house to do her laundry. Apparently, in this case, being married means having your own washer and dryer. During the first season of Roseanne, Jackie commented about marriage, "if I could find a man with half a brain, an ounce of courage and a little bit of heart, I'd fall in love." Roseanne retorts, "well, follow the yellow brick road."

On the other hand, Murphy's single state is most often depicted as representing a fulfilling, interesting life. She has a societally-recognized important career and revels in her independence. She enjoys the material aspects of life available with discretionary income. Jackie lives in a temporary apartment which she apparently cannot stand since she spends so much time at the Conner household. Murphy has a beautiful home and, when she wants to flee the city, has the available resources to purchase a farm. Jackie's most recent relationship ended in a January 1993 episode in which it was revealed that her boyfriend Fisher, with whom she was living, was beating her. Yet, she tried to hide the bruises, fitting the traditional image of the battered woman with low self-esteem, claiming the beatings were a mistake and that Fisher was sorry. She began making excuses for the unemployed artist. She was desperately trying to hang on to the relationship at all costs.

In a non-sampled January 1993 episode, Murphy's co-workers tried to arrange a date for her for the Inaugural Ball. She tried to explain that she didn't date simply because with her career and the baby she just didn't have time. Jackie has time. As co-owner of the Lanford Lunch Box she is an unpaid waitress/cook/janitor. She doesn't challenge world leaders, attend Inaugural Balls or experience Awards functions for her career. She has worked in a factory, served as a police officer and worked as a long-distance truck
driver. Jackie spends most of her spare time hanging around her married sister's house. Murphy's emotional attachment to her career is so strong that in a first season episode, when she was suspended for insubordination she fell apart. She confided to Miles, "you've got to understand something about me. My work is just about the most important thing in my life."

While Murphy does experience her share of personal problems, these are emphasized no more than the personal problems of the single men, Frank and Miles, and the married characters, Corky (later divorced) and Jim. While Jackie's single status can be the source of problems, arguably Roseanne's marital status and her motherhood are also the source of difficulties. Thus, overall, on these two programs neither the married nor the single state is depicted as pure bliss or pure hell.

Second, single motherhood is permissible only if the mother is wealthy and won't burden the welfare system. Class plays an important role in keeping families together, according to a 1993 Census Bureau report which found that poor parents are nearly twice as likely to break up as those with money. Clifford Johnson, family support director for the Children's Defense Fund said, "this report is a striking reminder of the ways in which strong family values have to include a strong economic foundation for families" (Associated Press Jan 15, 1993). Census Bureau statistics also reveal that only one family in ten was headed by a single parent in 1970; that had skyrocketed to one family in four by 1990. In 1992 Vice President Dan Quayle stepped in to make a major political issue of Murphy's unwed motherhood, blaming the Los Angeles riots which followed the Rodney King verdict on Murphy Brown. His charges became the focal point in a presidential election. In a speech made in San Francisco, Quayle blamed the riots on a "poverty of values" arguing "the lawless social anarchy which we saw (in the riots) is directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility and social order... It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown - a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman
- mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice."

Quayle admitted that he did not watch *Murphy Brown*. Thus he was unaware of the story line which had Murphy's ex-husband, Jake Lowenstein, deciding to run off to save the rain forests of Brazil when he learned of her pregnancy and his paternal role. He suggested marriage but they decide it will be repeating the same mistakes of their previous five-day marriage. Jake tells Murphy the decision to have the child or have an abortion is her decision but "maternal is not the first word I'd use to describe you." Murphy responds that she couldn't do a worse job of child rearing than the Reagans. Murphy faces a lot of shock and negative responses to her pregnancy ranging from demeaning comments about her age, 42 at the time, to Jerry Gold's contention that the pregnancy is "some form of pre-menopausal insanity." The only character on that entire episode who expressed joy at Murphy's pregnancy was her painter, Eldin, "congratulations, this is a very good thing, you're with child." Murphy expressed her doubts when she asked, "Eldin, do you think I'll make a good mother?" "No, but I will," he responded, concluding the episode.

After raging wildly for several months, the brouhaha seemingly ended with the fall season's first *Murphy Brown* episode which aired September 21, 1992. The hour-long episode was viewed by twenty-five million American households, representing nearly forty million viewers. Murphy was depicted as a woman struggling, not very successfully, to understand her motherhood role and desperately trying to find time to take a shower. She spent the first half of the episode in a robe, her hair a mess. Even Frank seemed to know more about holding a baby, "great, Frank, you've got better maternal instincts than I do" Murphy told him. Then she was depicted hearing about Dan Quayle's speech.

Murphy: Glamorize single motherhood - what planet is he on?
      Look at me Frank, am I glamorous?

Frank: Of course not, you look disgusting.

Murphy: You're damn right. People in prison get to shower more often
than I do.
And what was that crack about just another lifestyle choice?

Frank: Murph, take it easy, the baby...

Murphy: I agonized over that decision. I didn't know if I could raise a kid by myself.
I worried about what it would do to him.
I worried about what it would do to me.
I didn't just wake up one morning and say, "oh gee, I can't get in for a facial, I might as well have a baby.

Frank reassured her that no one would pay any attention to the story, since the source was Dan Quayle. Then the publicity broke loose with real-life newspaper headlines; "Quayle to Murphy Brown - You Tramp", "Murphygate" and "Quayle has a Cow." The FYI newsroom was inundated with publicity.

Corky: I was raised to believe that if you had a child out of wedlock, you were bad.
Of course I was also raised to believe:
   A woman's place was in the home...
   Segregation was good...
   And presidents never lie...
   Oh, this is so confusing.

Jim: We live in confusing times Corky. The White House criticized Murphy for having a child while they're parading the "Terminator" (Arnold Schwartzenegger) around as a role model for young people...
The whole country is talking about family values and decency and the most popular movie of the year is a woman dressed like a cat licking a man dressed like a bat, and I don't even want to guess how the man in the penguin suit fits in.

Back at Murphy's house, when the media circus reached a crescendo, Murphy said, "he's a baby, not a political statement." Then she explained to the baby, "I was hoping you'd be a little older before you got into your first fight over something your mother did, but I guess that's not gonna happen." Murphy then decided to go to work and make a statement on network television, "the one place I've always known what to do."

Murphy: These are difficult times for our country. And in searching for the causes of our social ills we could choose to blame the media or the Congress or an administration that's been in power for 12 years, or we could blame me... But tonight's program
should not simply be about blame. The vice president says he felt it was important to open a dialogue about family values. And, on that point we agree. Unfortunately it seems that for him the only acceptable definition of a family is a mother, a father and children. And in a country where millions of children grow up in non-traditional families, that definition seems painfully unfair. Perhaps its time for the vice president to expand his definition and recognize that whether by choice, or circumstance, families come in all shapes and sizes and ultimately what really defines a family is; commitment, sharing and love.

Murphy then introduced several non-traditional families, giving a face to the situation in which so many people live (10.8 million single mothers) and others find so easy to condemn. The social class of the character Murphy Brown cannot be understated in this situation. It is doubtful that if on Roseanne, the nations' top rated sitcom, Jackie became an unwed mother that the vice president would have criticized her. As we shall see in the interpretation section, the intertextual message sent to millions was that unwed motherhood is not to be criticized if the mother is a wealthy professional woman, fictional or real.

Thus in the analysis of Hypothesis Two, we have seen that the media has been shown to send different messages depending on the social class of the intended audience, that Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner are clearly from different social classes, and that their top-rated television programs convey messages about gender definitions that are based upon these different social classes.

**H3 Women characters on prime-time television who are presented as role models of gender equality at the manifest level, are depicted in ways that reproduce the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level.**

These programs will now be placed within their socio-historical context and analyzed discursively. In the late 1980s, changes in economic structure contributed to a determination that women are a very desirable consumer demographic, especially those upscale single professionals with discretionary income, as well as women who make the majority of purchase decisions in the family. *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* appear to have
been designed to attract those women. Before this research addresses specific issues to
determine latent depiction, audience demographics for the two programs will be
compared for similarities and differences between the two programs, in order to make some
educated approximations about potential viewer interpretations. Nielsen demographic
data for the February 1992 ratings period provides some interesting information about the
Roseanne audience and the Murphy Brown audience. Geographically, Roseanne is the
higher rated program and has a larger audience in most areas with largest gaps in the West
Central (22.4 to 17.9) and Pacific areas (22.8 to 18.8). Murphy Brown has a larger
viewing audience in the East Central area (23.4 to 22.6).

A major difference between the program audiences is reflected in the category of
viewing household size. Murphy Brown has the largest audiences in single-person
households (16.0 to 11.5), and two-person households (20.6 to 18.9). Roseanne takes
over the television sets in viewing households of three (28.7 to 20.7) and four or more
(30.7 to 20.3). This information adds a dimension to the household income categories.
Roseanne has more viewers in all income categories with the narrowest difference reflected
in the $60,000 up category. It can be inferred that Murphy Brown has a more affluent
viewing base when her domination in the one and two-member households is factored in.
There is a greater likelihood of more than one wage-earner in the three and four-plus
member households.

Substantially more viewers with no college watch Roseanne (20.3 to 16.7), while a
larger number of viewers with four or more years of college watch Murphy Brown (24.2
to 20.9). Roseanne has a much larger black viewing audience (16.1 to 10.4) than
Murphy. Perhaps the widest range between the two programs occurs when the ages of
viewers are examined. Roseanne dominates the audiences with teens and younger children
by a range of two to one, to three to one. On the other hand, Murphy Brown has an almost
two to one ratio with viewers over 55.

Thus, a quick analysis of demographic figures shows that the Roseanne audience
tends to be younger, reflect a larger family size, and have a lower educational level. Conversely, *Murphy Brown* viewers tend to live in smaller households of one or two persons, be college educated and older.

Now specific issues will be addressed to determine whether the latent depictions of the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown appear to function to undermine the seeming level of non-stereotypical gender portrayal found in analysis of the first hypothesis. The presentation of the public and private spheres (Imray and Middleton 1983); the depiction of problems as individual rather than societal (Glazer 1980; Grossberg and Treichler 1987); the discursive treatment of appearance and age (McRobbie 1982, 1991; Fiske 1987); whether female characters are depicted as competitive or cooperative (McRobbie 1982; Byars 1987); whether female characters' acts of independence are punished (Byars 1987); if single characters are treated as children (Loeb 1990; Faludi 1992); if the married state is pictured as the ideal (Loeb 1990); if the personal costs for women of professional success is emphasized (Dow 1990; Feuer 1992); and the programs will be examined for "silences" suggesting the "other" or forms of alternative thought (Machery, Foucault, Marcuse), particularly the presence of feminine discourse (Byars 1987).

Imray and Middleton (1983) suggest that even if Murphy Brown seems to be an empowered woman functioning successfully in the public sphere, her ultimate definition and valuation will be found in gender, rather than in the sphere of activity. They contend that the actor, rather than the activity itself, defines a function as public or private thus valued or not valued. Thus, at the latent level, the question becomes: is Murphy ultimately defined by her female gender rather than by her function in the public sphere? Is Roseanne a more acceptable character stereotypically, but less valued overall, because she functions primarily in the traditionally defined female private sphere? There are some instances in which it seems that the ultimate definition and limitation of life options for these characters is located in gender. When Murphy became pregnant, she was instantaneously
transformed from her primary status as an important network reporter to that of a pregnant woman. During her pregnancy, Murphy learned that the office pool concerned how many doughnuts she would consume that morning. Murphy responded: "that's a lot classier than yesterday's pool when you bet on how many times I'd pee!" Her pregnancy was depicted in many episodes as a physically humiliating and mentally incapacitating "disease". In one episode during the advanced stage of her pregnancy, Murphy arrived late on the set for the live FYI broadcast because she'd made her umpteenth trip to the bathroom. She then introduced her guest interviewee and forgot where he was from. Later in a staff meeting Jim Dial commented: "on the one hand I support you. On the other hand you're huge and you're crazy." The baby shower episode opened with Murphy getting off the elevator.

Murphy: What are you saying Miles, that pregnancy has made me weak?
Miles: Welcome once again to "Name that Hormone."

In the Lamaze episode, the program opened with the FYI staffers conducting a pool on Murphy's weight gain. When she revealed the latest weigh in at 176 pounds Frank said, "unbelievable, Earl in the mail room wins again." The noted journalist had been reduced to the level of being an object, something to be bet upon like a racing horse or dog. When Murphy was seeking a Lamaze coach, Frank couldn't do it because of a work conflict and Jim couldn't because his "generation doesn't handle this sort of thing well." The third choice was Miles who confided, "at the first story meeting after the birth, I'll look across the table and I won't see Murphy Brown, hard-nosed journalist and colleague. No. I'll see a woman whose innermost secrets were spread out in front of me like a buffet table. Yuck." There were also moments when Murphy's strength overcame the perceived limitations of pregnancy. When her doctor recommended that Murphy get someone to drive her to a prenatal test, Murphy responded, "Maggie, I have hiked through 150 miles of Columbian jungle with PMS so bad the leopards fled in terror. Trust me, handling a car with minor discomfort is not a problem."
By definition, the private sphere is associated with work done inside the home and the public sphere with activities outside the household. A major factor in this division between public and private spheres is that its boundaries seem to be more fluid for men than for women. Both Roseanne and Murphy struggle with the sometimes overwhelming demands of the workplace and motherhood, the journey back and forth between the public and private spheres. Even Murphy, whose wealth gives her access to a multiplicity of domestic help, is caught in the emotional and material struggle between the demands of the two competing arenas of her life, "I'm supposed to go to Paris tomorrow and my kid can't go. Which means I've either got to give up one of the biggest international stories of the year or leave him with a nanny for four days ... You believe it? I've got a story to cover and I can't go. Well that's the first time I ever heard myself say that."

There is a strong argument that the tone of a television series is set in its first episode. When viewers first saw Murphy Brown, she was introduced as a successful television journalist who had just returned to her position at FYI, a network news magazine program, after a month-long sojourn at the Betty Ford Clinic to stop drinking and smoking. Thus, from the first moment, her professional career was modified by personal issues or limitations. Her high professional status was depicted in a telephone conversation with the Secretary of State, in which she was trying to convince him to be interviewed. Then she put the Secretary on hold to take a more important call. The second caller was a man named Eldin Berniecki, a house painter who had not shown up to do a job for her. In that episode, viewers were told Murphy was a famous and respected journalist, yet she was also seen as an individual struggling to keep two serious addictions out of her life. Murphy was a woman who substituted chewing pencils for her other problems. She also lost her first secretary. Murphy was depicted as being fearful that with the removal of alcohol from her life, she'd lost her edge, the secret to her career success. By the end of the episode the old Murphy was back, successfully taking apart a fraudulent character on the air. She had not lost her professional skills or reverted to smoking.
The first episode of *Roseanne* introduced a wisecracking woman, the blue-collar working wife and mother of three children. When two of her children were fighting, she commented, "this is why some animals eat their young." When her husband, Dan, asked "are you ever sorry we got married?" she retorted, "every second of my life." The episode also clearly established Roseanne Conner's conflict between her work schedule at Wellman Plastics and her duties as the mother of three school-aged children. In that episode, Roseanne needed time to exchange her daughter Becky's school bag and she had to attend a parent teacher conference because her daughter Darlene was barking like a dog in class. Her supervisor at Wellman Plastics, Booker, would not let her leave work an hour early to meet the teacher. When Roseanne arrived late for the meeting the teacher first insulted her obvious overweight situation by telling her to have a seat in petite student chairs. The teacher inquired about her quality time with her children. "I work and have three kids, I don't have free time," Roseanne answered. When she returned home, in time to make dinner, Roseanne and Dan argued over her seemingly overwhelming burden of work and home duties.

Dan: Fixing the sink is man's work. I'm the man, I fix the sink.
Roseanne: Yeah, and I'm the wife, so everything else is my job.

Dan angrily started fixing dinner by opening a large can of corn. The couple's fight was interrupted by Darlene who rushed in with her cut finger. The two instantly transformed into a parent team and fixed the finger. The fight was forgotten and tranquility returned to the domestic scene. Over the course of the series *Roseanne*, the endings seemed to evolve into bringing less closure than that found in the first episode.

Roseanne, who functions primarily in the private sphere of the Conner home, also has imperfections. In a society where women are judged by their home decor and personal appearance, Roseanne does not meet traditional Harriet Nelson and Donna Reed definitions of "neat." She was criticized by Barbara Billingsley, "the actress who wore June Cleaver's
perfectly starched apron for six years, 'Roseanne sure puts down her husband" (Waters and Huck 1989, p.51). The Conner home has dilapidated furniture, it has a messy, lived-in look. Additionally, there is the main character's obvious distance from societally defined physical perfection. Yet, despite her sarcasm, Roseanne is a good mother. In a first season episode, when Darlene was rushed to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy, Roseanne instantly answered questions about when her daughter had the mumps, measles and chicken pox.

Successful professional women are often defined with caveats. In a non-sampled January 1993 episode, the FYI staffers launched a discussion about their dysfunctional childhoods. Murphy had just been told by Eldin that she wasn't providing adequate parent-child interaction for her son.

Murphy: Okay, this conversation's over.
I don't remember any fun 'n games with my parents and I think I turned out pretty damn good.

FYIers (unison): Yeah, right.

Murphy: I didn't say perfect.
Okay, maybe I wasn't able to have a meaningful conversation with either of my parents until I was in my forties.
And I'm not great at relationships. I was married once, (lowers voice), that lasted for five days.
I'm a recovering alcoholic. Oh god! (plops into chair).

Another humorously depicted deprecation of Murphy concerns her inability to keep a secretary. By March 1993 she had gone through 58 secretaries. With 26 new episodes a season, over the course of five seasons Murphy lost a secretary, on average, in every other episode. The parade has included a male secretary who looked like Hitler, one of the seat-belt dummies, a woman who heard voices from Satan, a man who sang musical scores and a woman who kept her dog in her purse. While this inability to keep a secretary is seen by some, especially TV GUIDE, to be a personal limitation of Murphy, it can also be interpreted as a class-based professional putdown of clerical, or working-class workers.
Murphy is very forthright about her limitations. However, she is not the only character depicted as being imperfect. All the FYI staffers have difficulties in their personal lives due to their own imperfections. Frank is incapable of commitment, Miles is paranoid about everything.

The important question here is whether Roseanne's and Murphy's activities are judged as important by sphere (public or private) or by the gender of the person performing the activities? It appears that these two prime-time sitcom characters are depicted as performing important functions regardless of the sphere in which they primarily function. Murphy is not deprecated as a journalist because of her personal limitations, and the importance of family and primary relationships is emphasized, not disparaged, on *Roseanne*.

Thus, while Murphy arguably has personal limitations placed upon her, as do the other characters male and female, the strongest message that comes across is Murphy's strength as a journalist and her dominant personality. The writers and producers seem to have very carefully maintained the importance of, and skills involved in, Murphy's journalistic career. There is no insinuation that a man could do a better job than Murphy and she has not deteriorated into a caricature. The FYI studio is not just an amusing backdrop for the program, Murphy is actually depicted in job functions, be it testifying before the Senate committee, interrogating a dishonest politician, or ferreting out a top story. There is another issue that will only be mentioned here and that is the concern with whether Murphy has had to "become a man" to achieve the top of her profession. That is an issue which is being dealt with in society and has not yet been resolved. Suffice it to say here that Murphy exhibits enough non stereotypically female characteristics to defy the limiting gender depictions found in prior television research. She is an admired, respected professional woman.

Despite the fact that she functions primarily in the private sphere of home, domestic activities are portrayed as important on *Roseanne*. Roseanne and Dan are parents together.
Although Roseanne has felt the strain of the work-parent-wife conflict, Dan has also become a hands-on parent. Over the course of the series viewers have seen a humorous depiction of Dan's parenting skills. The first time he went to talk with one of his children's teachers, the teacher had never seen him before and was not sure he was the parent. The teacher commented that she thought Roseanne was a single parent. Dan has also had to struggle with societally defined sex-role stereotypes of masculinity as he's been unemployed much of the time, challenging the male-defined role of provider. On the day his bike shop closed, Roseanne came to see how Dan was doing.

Roseanne: How's Dan takin' it?
Jackie: Like a man.
Roseanne: That bad, huh?

In the fifth season, 1992-1993, a strong streak of feminist issues were introduced; women as crime victims, women as battered spouses, women as lesbians, but not in caricature, they were dealt with realistically and without condescension. At the same time parallel issues for men were also exposed. Arnie and Dan felt that their masculinity was threatened when Dan's wife was physically threatened by a customer and wouldn't let Dan help her, and when Arnie learned that his wife Nancy was a lesbian.

Thus, while Roseanne functions primarily in the home and Murphy in her work environment, neither program belittles women in opposite situations. There is no denigration of homemaking and child care in Murphy Brown. As a matter of fact, when one sees the competent Murphy struggling to care for the child, the difficulty of motherhood is emphasized, not glamorized or idealized as simple. And although Roseanne clearly would prefer to stay home than work, women with careers are not put down or accused of neglecting their children, or of being the cause of societal woes or the downfall of western civilization.

Problems are depicted as individual rather than societal. Many
situations depicted as individual problems in the analysis of Hypothesis One will now be viewed within the larger socio-historical context as societal problems relating to social issues. They are depicted in these programs as individual problems and often the solution to those problems is found by the individual characters. Murphy's child care, Roseanne's time conflicts as a working parent, Miles' heart attack, the alcohol problem of Murphy's replacement, and Roseanne's compulsive gambling are not depicted in these programs as being part of a larger social structure of job stress and increasing economic instability.

Two exceptions to this were found in *Murphy Brown*. The first came in the opening episode of the fall 1992 season. Vice-president Dan Quayle had attacked Murphy as not representing family values because of her "lifestyle choice" to have an illegitimate child. In her televised FYI response, Murphy spotlighted the problem of blaming individuals for social problems: "In searching for the causes of our social ills we could choose to blame the media, or the Congress, or an administration that's been in power for twelve years, or we could blame me." The FYI program ended with several people introducing themselves as families; single parent families headed by either males or females, and other non-traditional family structures which have developed in contemporary society. During the Senate hearings (MB# 1), a situation which was depicted as a personal problem for Murphy Brown involved the much larger issue of journalistic integrity and first amendment rights. Murphy's ultimate decision, she realized, would have a tremendous impact on other reporters when Frank said, "after seeing what these guys put you through today, next time something good gets leaked my way, I'm gonna have to think twice before I use it." This tells Murphy that the issue goes beyond her and that she is setting a precedent for the journalistic profession, thus as a professional she can't cop out by using her pregnancy and the "good of baby" as an excuse. She was willing to make an individual sacrifice for the wider group of journalists.

Societal issues have also been reflected as individual problems on *Roseanne*. In the second part of the fall 1992 season opening episode, viewers got a sense of Dan's true
despondency, "I want my bike shop back. I want my daughter back ... I want things back the way they were before I screwed everything up." He blamed himself and his individual shortcomings in a time when the Lanford economy, as well as the national economy, was in a tailspin. The bad state of the local Lanford economic scene was detailed in a spring 1992 episode. Roseanne and the gals gathered at the Lobo Lounge. Her friend Ann Marie announced her husband lost his job at Wellman Plastics.

Jackie: I thought he had seniority.
Ann Marie: He did. that's why they didn't lay him off last week with the rest of his shift.
Crystal: I don't believe it.
Ann Marie: It's all over, Wellman Plastics is history.
Crystal: Well, he'll find another job.
Ann Marie: Oh yeah. Now that Wellman's is closing there'll be plenty of jobs; bill collectors, repo men.
Roseanne: I'm really sorry Ann Marie.
Ann Marie; Hey, it's happening all over. Bonnie's losin' her job and you're losin' your job and nobody in this town can afford to buy a bike from your husband.
Roseanne: Boy, you're just the messenger of death, ain't ya.

Another example of a societal problem being treated as a personal problem occurred when Becky was harassed at her first job at the supermarket. The April 21, 1992 episode opened with the manager yelling at Becky,

Howard: You've got a line full of customers and a belt that's not moving ... make it move.
Becky: Okay, I'm sorry.
Howard: Hey Becky, if this job's too much for you I can get somebody competent to take over.
Becky: Howard, the longer you stand here and insult me, the longer it's gonna take for me to check these people through.
Becky felt she was trapped in the job, she came home complaining, "I can't quit cuz there's never any money around here for anything I want." Then Darlene told Dan about Becky's problems.

Darlene: She stood up to her boss and he busted her down to bag girl and he called her a bad word.

Dan: How bad a word?

Darlene: Bad. (Darlene whispers the word.)

Dan: I'll kill him.

Dan felt responsible to protect his daughter and went down to the grocery store. He approached the manager, Howard.

Dan: I have a problem - actually it's your problem. I'm Becky Conner's' father.

Howard: Oh no.

Dan: Look, if you gotta demote some kid for not doin' their job or fire 'em for mouthin' off, I can understand that. But nobody talks to my daughter the way you did. Have you got that?

Howard: Yes, you gonna hit me too?

Dan: Becky hit you?

Howard: No, thug-boy over there (points to Mark). Look, I ah already promised him I'd apologize to Becky the minute she walked in and I'm ah makin' her cashier again ... so what more do you people want from me?

Dan: I don't know yet, I'll get back to you.

Dan and Mark discuss the stomach punch in a male bonding ritual brought on by their mutual defense of "their" woman (daughter-girlfriend). Roseanne too appreciates their action and decides that perhaps Mark is not so bad after all, "maybe this guy is the guy." Becky, however, does not appreciate their assumption that she could not handle the
situation herself.

Becky: You can't just walk in there like some dumb animal and beat up my boss.
Dan: Now wait a minute, the guy called you …
Becky: I know what he called me and I can take care of myself.

Two issues are reflected here. The first, is the assumption by both men and women, (Dan, Mark and Roseanne) that women are to be protected and men do the protecting, largely with their fists. Becky stands up to this implication that she is incapable of handling her own problems, "I can take care of myself." She has to lead her life and must count on herself to develop the skills to handle an unfair work situation. The implication remains in her job situation that she has regained her status of cashier because Mark punched her manager rather than because the man realized that he was wrong in harassing her. It also tends to equate masculinity with fighting ability.

The second issue is that the societal problem of harassment in the workplace is treated, in this instance, as an individual problem. Becky's problem is temporarily solved, yet is the message sent that it is acceptable to harass an employee with a less strident family? There is no message that the workplace situation which allowed the harassment in the first place should be changed.

Physical characteristics and appearance were analyzed at the individual level in Hypothesis One. At the discursive level we will examine the ideological basis for cultural interpretations of these appearance characteristics. Women, more than men, seem to presented as having stringent controls over their appearance in the workplace. While it is clear that Murphy's colleagues Jim Dial and Frank Fontana have some limits upon their appearance options, they do not have an appearance clause. In a first season episode when a gunman interrupted the FYI broadcast, Frank's movement from out behind the anchor desk revealed that he was wearing tennis shorts. Murphy is the only one of the FYI
anchors whose legs are exposed on-camera because she often sits in the interview section of the set. In the working-class comedy, *Roseanne*, frilly "humpty-dumpty" outfits were worn by Roseanne and Bonnie at Rodbell's. At a fast food restaurant, Roseanne and her female co-workers also wore ridiculous costumes. Regardless of class, women seem to be more often tagged with silly outfits and appearance clauses.

The *Murphy Brown* episode concerning her appearance clause (March 16, 1992) was based on a real-life incident that resulted when Jane Pauley changed her hair, sending NBC executives into a frenzy and by the media tizzy caused when ABC's Diane Sawyer's cut her hair. A fictional network executive told Murphy, "let's face it, the news is ugly, we need attractive people reading the news ... If ugly people read the news our suicide rate would be as high as Sweden's." Demographics were quoted to inform Murphy that 60% of male viewers stated the characteristic they liked most was her "mane of hair". Another executive commented that situation was "as bad as Jane Pauley's perm fiasco." At the end of the episode Murphy removed the wig of short hair covering her coveted "mane of hair." But the rigid controls over the appearance of a seemingly independent professional woman had been exposed.

Age is another issue raised about women in television news but seldom mentioned in relation to male journalists. During the Dan Quayle flap, *Baltimore Sun* reporter Theo Lippman Jr. questioned Murphy's decision to have the child and have to simultaneously handle postpartum depression and menopause, "I look a little farther down the road. I wonder how she's going to raise a teen-age son after, having 'grown' out of her job - not a lot of fiftysomething women in television news - she finds herself unemployed as well as unmarried" (June 3, 1992). This is clearly an intersection of age and appearance restrictions on the female gender. Even a fictional, noted television journalist is being defined primarily by the societally imposed limitations of gender.

Murphy is portrayed in some episodes as a slob at home, suggesting perhaps that there is a less than perfect natural state and that her work facade is constructed. Or perhaps
she does not want to spend her spare time on such chores. She is depicted at work as the
perfection of dress and grooming, however, she does not have what has been defined as
the ultimate goal for a woman, a husband. Roseanne is overweight, casual about her dress
and hair, but she has a husband. When she and Jackie were arguing in the episode in
which viewers learned that Fisher was beating Jackie.

Roseanne: You'll go with any man.
Jackie: And you, the perfect 500 pound couple.

The construction of gender appearance as a mentally fragile business was seen
when Jackie announced that she was going shopping with Nancy so they could buy
dresses for a singles dance. Jackie asked Roseanne: "Do you want to come along and
undermine my self-confidence?" Later in the episode, Jackie was dressed for the dance.

Jackie: What do you think? It's for the singles dance tonight, so I'm ... I look too desperate don't I?
Roseanne: No, you look just desperate enough.
Jackie: Thanks a lot Roseanne!
Roseanne: Aww. With all I've been going through, I don't have the strength
to lie to you.

In another fall 1992 episode, Roseanne's mother visited the family. Darlene asked
her why she was putting a variety of gooey substances on her face.

Bev: It's a lot of responsibility being a woman. God made us the bearer of children,
we keep the human race going and it's all very drying to the skin.
Darlene: It hardly seems worth it.
Bev: If you're old enough to have a boyfriend, you're old enough to have a beauty regimen.

Jackie had just started dating a younger man. Later in the episode, when Fisher
arrived to take Jackie out, Bev answered the door and called out, "Darlene your boyfriend's here," suggesting he was too young for Jackie. Society has no problem with men dating women decades younger, however Jackie was, by implication, criticized for dating a man perhaps ten years younger. The situation caused her a great deal of concern which was expressed over several episodes.

Darlene does not take kindly to most of the aspects of the feminine construction of gender. In the spring 1992 Mother's Day episode, Becky and Darlene accompanied their mother to a beauty make-over at The Beauty Box. They purchased the gift in order to soften her up and ask to attend a concert. Darlene unwillingly suffered the indignation of "beautification." While her face was covered in a vampire-like facial she commented, "Oh man, this is sucking my brain out, right through my face."

Another issue critical of the way women have been depicted in television relates to the portrayal of **female characters as competitive rather than cooperative and friendly**. The programs *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* were analyzed for signs of female competition or cooperation. The fierce competition between women, ultimately for men, is well-documented in media studies (McRobbie 1982; Byars 1987). It appears in *Murphy Brown* at least, that the competition here is over jobs. In the episode dealing with Murphy's replacement while on maternity leave, viewers met Hillary Wheaton. The other FYIers assumed that the two strong women would clash.

Murphy: Oh nice, assuming just because we're two women we'll end up rolling around on the floor scratching each others eyes out.

Hillary: If we have any problems we'll handle them like men - we'll bottle up our feelings, have a heart attack and die."

The assumption of female competition was addressed in that episode when Murphy began to suspect that Hillary had a drinking problem. Rather than realize that Murphy would be likely to recognize such a problem because of her own experiences, Miles jumped to the conclusion that Murphy was trying to undermine a competitor. Miles accused her of
feeling threatened and then disparaged Murphy's intuition, "next week we'll have you read Mario Cuomo's tea leaves." Even Hillary raised the female competition issue when Murphy confronted her, "I did everything I could to keep you from feeling threatened, I guess that wasn't enough." Then Murphy found Hillary passed out in her office a mere twenty-five minutes before the program. Hillary tried to explain, "I just wanted to be great tonight." Murphy responded, "I know you Hillary. I know all the work, the pushing you've done to get here. The Saturday nights you've spent in airports." There is a bond between the women who are assumed to be competitors, "you know how hard it is to be a woman in this business." And the two had resorted to the same crutch, alcohol. But Murphy had recovered from "that 80 proof ringer." Murphy helped Hillary, attempting to concoct a believable excuse for her absence from that night's program which was to have been her premier, "I've got it, food poisoning. It's quick, dramatic, and no one wants to know the details."

One would expect that the militantly feminist Murphy Brown offers little in the way of expressing cooperation. She is competitive with everybody. Maria Shriver steals her nanny, she views other anchorwomen as competition, and even competes with other mothers. A small amount of grudging friendship has been demonstrated with Corky but Murphy doesn't really know how to be a friend. If women can't get along, there is no way to see the commonality of child care problems and dual work/home conflicts. Over the course of the series, viewers have seen her realize her sisterhood with her Soviet counterpart, and she came to a real understanding with her mother, and eventually, Corky.

On the other hand, the majority of the relationships demonstrated in Roseanne are female-female. Roseanne is best friends with her sister Jackie and has a circle of women friends. The only continuing male characters in the sitcom are her husband Dan, and their son, DJ. Here too, the competition between women is for jobs. In a spring 1992 episode, Roseanne learned the Rodbell's luncheonette would be turned into a "bargain bin" putting her and her friend Bonnie out of work. Dan encouraged her to apply for Leon's
management job which created friction between Roseanne and Bonnie who also wanted the job although neither got the job.

Thus, female characters were not presented as being competitive with each other at all for men, which has been defined as a female stereotype. The only competition found was in job-related areas where competition have been traditionally defined as a male characteristic.

**Female characters' acts of independence are punished.** In the early days of television, programs like *I Love Lucy* were built around Lucy's comical striving for some form of independence, usually portrayed as directly disobeying an order from her husband, Desi. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has been accused of replicating that situation: "the series consistently and systematically repressed women, in the form of Mary Richards, that any 'independence' on her part is punished by the end of the episode, much like the 'independent' acts of Lucy Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*" (Byars 1987, p.294).

Several instances of women's acts of independence went unpunished in *Roseanne*. In the second part of the fall 1992 season opener, Becky returned to pack her things after eloping with Mark. Roseanne was very hurt but tried to remain non-judgmental. However, sarcasm crept in, before she revealed her personal maternal pain.

Roseanne: Are those like your wedding jeans, cuz you might want to save those so you can pass 'em on to your own daughter.

Becky: We just wanted to get married. It didn't matter.

Roseanne: It did to me. You know, I didn't want much. I just wanted, like a cake and some flowers and a band. And ... I wanted to be there.

Becky: I'm sorry mom. (they hug).

Later in the episode, Roseanne tried to explain to Dan the importance of their remaining calm and his not punching Mark, "This way at least we get birthdays, we get holidays. Maybe we get a phone call once in a while. But if you go up there and you do something stupid Dan, we lose her." The parents struggle to maintain the family even
though their oldest daughter has eloped at eighteen.

The episode in which Roseanne, Jackie and Nancy apply for a small business loan to start the loose-meat business appears, at first, to be an instance of a woman's act of independence being punished. The male SBA official noted that they were all women and said that might help. Roseanne wisecracked, "thank God we brought our ovaries with us." The official determined that the trio was a "bad risk" and it looked like the business venture was defeated. "Back to truckin," Jackie commented and Roseanne said, "back to looking for some low paying crap job." However the women were not easily defeated and with a little ingenuity, and some humility, they decided to approach Bev for another $10,000, making their mom the fourth partner. What could easily have become a wisecracking situation of defeat and an act of independence punished, was redeemed. Their act of independence, combined with creativity, was rewarded. They could start their business enterprise.

This was not the case in a *Murphy Brown* episode. *Phil's, est. 1919*, the FYI eating, gathering site and Washington insiders' food and watering hole, was experiencing financial problems. Murphy found out, and her involvement was reminiscent of an *I Love Lucy* episode. First, Murphy, in a bumbling attempt to help, utilized her power to invite Washington insiders to patronize and try to save *Phil's*, embarrassing the owner, Phil, who had revealed his problems to her in confidence. Then she lent him money, instantly transforming herself into an annoying and incompetent, unofficial food service consultant. The last straw came when she had her house painter, Eldin, draw sketches of the lunch patrons, and insult them. Phil returned his loan and by the end of the episode realized that the answer lay in the simple economics of raising prices. *Murphy Brown* in this episode was a female incapable of keeping a secret, who made bumbling attempts to save *Phil's*, with him ultimately finding his own successful conclusion. Gender stereotypes not usually associated with the program were reflected in this episode.

**Single characters are treated as children.** In her best selling book,
Backlash, Susan Faludi traces the dismal treatment of single women television characters. She cites thirtysomething as a series of cautionary tales "aimed exclusively at women" (Faludi 1992, p. 160). In her analysis of thirtysomething, Loeb contends that marriage is depicted there as the natural or preferable state. Loeb found two major sets of relationships operating to preserve traditional values in thirtysomething where married characters functioned as parental figures to the single (child) characters, "thus reaffirming the traditional lifestyle of marriage and parenthood as the only route to adulthood and self-actualization" (1990, p.250). This research will examine the treatment of single characters in Roseanne and Murphy Brown: Roseanne's sister Jackie, Murphy, Miles, Frank and Eldin to see if they are treated as childlike in comparison with the married characters.

All the Murphy Brown characters were treated as children in the episode in which FYI was honored by the Museum of Broadcast Arts (MB# 5). After ruining the ceremony with their petty bickering, Miles tried to restore some semblance of order so they could work.

Miles: The question then seems to be, where do we go from here? We have four very strong willed people with four very healthy egos, who I believe, would like to apologize to each other and desperately want life to get back to normal. But everyone's afraid to go first and risk the chance of rejection. Am I right? I think I am. So, here's my idea. Anyone who would like to apologize for their behavior, scratch your chin. On three, one two three.

(all scratch).

Miles: Beautiful. Now, if you would like to accept these, ah, eloquent apologies, knock on the table.

(all knock, knock).

Miles: And finally, anyone who would like to promise that in the future they will heed the wisdom of the executive producer, rub your tummies while you're ... Okay, too far. One last thing. In this box is our lovely award. (Holds box, rattles). There's enough for everyone to have a piece. Take it proudly, but carefully, there's some jagged edges. And ah, I just want you all to remember that no matter what happened, we're still the best damn news team in the business.
A related area concerns whether female characters are represented as children, reinforcing the second-class status of childlike and emotional women in comparison with more rational and goal-oriented men. Both Murphy and Roseanne have resorted to childish revenge. In a first season episode, Murphy punished producer Miles Silverberg by having pizzas delivered to his apartment all night at fifteen minute intervals. "After 3 a.m. I stopped tipping," Miles told her. When Murphy planned to take the baby with her to Paris her joy is that she's "now one of those annoying 'we get to board first because we have children' people."

Both characters Roseanne and Murphy Brown are from dysfunctional families, a group defined as "Adult Children." Roseanne and Jackie were reminded of the dysfunctional aspects of their childhood in the sample episode (R# 1) in which they return to their childhood home.

Roseanne: And uh, remember what was over there Jackie?
Jackie: Come on Roseanne, we don't need to get into this ... we're having a good time here.
Roseanne: Come on, You want to get into our memories here, this is part of our memories.
Jackie: The belt, dad's belt. Okay, I mean it was 30 years ago Roseanne, parents spanked their kids back then.
Roseanne: Spanked! Come on Jackie, he hit us with a belt.
Jackie: All kids got hit with belts.
Roseanne: Yeah, but did their dads strap some great big old razor strap thing up on the wall there right by the front door so when you came in you'd see it and then you'd, all the time have to worry about what was gonna happen to ya if you stepped out a line?
Jackie: Maybe he was just tryin' to psyche us out.
Roseanne: Yeah, well he was good at that. Remember he'd make us go get it and bring it to him?
Jackie: Well mom wasn't any help eiother, you know, she coulda said something. She'd just stay in there washing dishes.

Roseanne: Well, that was mom, ignore it and it'll go away.

Jackie: Yeah, she let the damn thing hang up there and then we're supposed to explain why it's there to our friends.

Roseanne: I used to tell people it was Elvis' belt.

Jackie: Yeah, you had stupid friends.

However, their individual responses to this aspect of their upbringings are very different. Murphy's shortcomings, workaholic, former alcoholic and smoker, seem to be much more socially acceptable, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Roseanne's are less socially acceptable, she's fat, married to a poor man who is also fat (less of a man?), ostensibly her kids don't obey her, and she is not a good housekeeper or cook. She refuses to fit the perfect Donna Reed mold rejecting certain aspects of the categories Lopate (1978) found more important for working-class women: home and family.

Married state as ideal. Thirtysomething's "Michael and Hope Steadman and Elliot and Nancy Weston are alternatively positioned as ideal versus troubled marriages, with one couple occupying the ideal state while the other occupies the troubled state, to reaffirm conservative gender roles and values" (Loeb 1990, p.250). In Murphy there are no ideal marriages. Jim and Doris have problems, Corky and Will appeared to have been blissful but were separated and divorced. Phil's marriage and eight kids seem okay, but it certainly isn't held up as a model. Murphy's parents were divorced. In The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Rhoda constantly bemoaned her single state, however, Murphy's single status seems to be immaterial.

Roseanne's parents divorced after her mother found out about, and got disgusted with, her husband's mistress of twenty years. Tom and Nancy split, Nancy is revealed to be a lesbian and later bi-sexual. Dan's dad married Roseanne's friend Crystal, making Dan
the stepson of one of Roseanne's friends and giving him a forty year younger step-brother. Their next door neighbor is widowed.

The heavy personal costs for women of professional success have long been depicted in movies and television programs. Bonnie Dow calls for a hegemonic analysis of *Murphy Brown* to expose the tension between the oppositional concepts of feminism and patriarchy. She claims that Murphy's embodiment of the masculine defined qualities of success "is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness" (Dow 1990, p.271). Feuer similarly finds *Murphy Brown* regressive for its presentation as part of the post feminist era: "Murphy represents the fruition of the middle-class women's movement: tough, successful, and alone as she approaches middle age" (1992, p.156). When Mary Tyler Moore is compared with Murphy, Mary achieves success at the expense of traditionally conforming in her roles. This does not seem true of Murphy. Murphy still technically has a male boss but Miles Silverberg is definitely not Lou Grant. He is not a paternal father figure and Murphy quite often outmaneuvers him or bullies him down. There is a real recognition in the show of Murphy's journalistic skills that did not exist or were not evident in Mary Tyler Moore. However, Murphy's reaction to Miles and his authority can be and often is, "childish". On the occasion where she sent him pizzas all night, when he tried to exert his influence she retorted, "I have record albums older than you."

At the end of the Lamaze episode Murphy confided to Eldin, "Why do I always act like such a jerk. Making fun of love and togetherness and all that stuff. I guess it just makes me uncomfortable. I've always done things on my own. And usually, it's been okay. But, I don't know. Maybe I've finally hit that place in my life where its time to admit I need somebody. Eldin, I'd like that somebody to be you." This is not a romantic relationship, it is, thus far, a platonic friendship based on mutual respect. Eldin responded, "You know, as an artist I tend to look at people as works in progress. When I first met you there were some interesting colors but I wasn't impressed. The tones are getting
deeper."

Murphy is described in *TV Guide* as "an acerbic newscaster who can't even maintain a steady relationship with a secretary." In a first season episode, Murphy met her Soviet alter ego, an unmarried *Tass* commentator who shared the problem of chewing pencils and was also unable to keep a secretary. In a quiet moment of exchanged confidences both revealed they often think about having children.

Both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* seem to celebrate the dysfunctional family. This was demonstrated in the episode in which the death of Murphy's mother was announced. Murphy's father surprised her with a visit.

Dad: I thought we could spend the night together reminiscing about the good times.

Murphy: Dad, there weren't any good times.

Dad: Oh come on, I can name a dozen ... well maybe five ...

As Murphy went through the family album, a part of her mother's possessions, her father's face was cut out of all the pictures. The two had gone through a bitter divorce and Murphy's father had remarried a much younger woman and was starting another family. Murphy was not happy to have a newborn sibling, forty years younger than her. Murphy and her dad started reminiscing, obviously holidays were not a happy family time, "you know, that year I thought we were actually going to have a good Christmas, until mother snuck up and took the ladder." Murphy and her dad came to an understanding and as she hugged her father she admitted, "I don't think I've seriously hugged anyone since Nixon resigned."

When Miles parents came to picket in Washington (MB# 4), Miles and Frank compared problems they had with their families. Murphy interrupted, "Whoa, what is this, dueling dysfunctionals?"

The programs will also be examined as cultural objects for what Pierre Machery
calls "silences" in a text. Thus, while observing and interpreting what is being said, critical note will also be taken of what is not being said. We will look for producers efforts to trivialize the subcultural meanings and homogenize any potentially rebellious interpretations. Important questions can be asked about what social problems are being trivialized, in what light they are presented and what is presented as the cause of the problem and whether it is superficially resolved. Foucault claimed that when a theory seeks to explain everything in one way, it leaves out what cannot be explained, excluding the "other".

When cultural objects do achieve a radical status, they are often co-opted, redefined, transfunctionalized into more marketable, less radical meanings. Feminism has been coopted and turned into a way to market products for "today's woman", i.e., the slogan "you've come a long way baby" is used to sell health-threatening cigarettes to women as a symbol of progress and empowerment. Feuer (1992) similarly contends that Murphy Brown is coopted by presenting itself as post feminist when compared to Mary Tyler Moore's appearance at the height of the "feminist movement"

One aspect of "silences" or alternative thought is feminine discourse. The question concerns whether feminine discourse, just as in the concept of social revolution in Tolstoy's writing for Macherey, is implicit in the text of the television programs but is never actually suggested or discussed and therefore ultimately repressed. There is much evidence to the contrary in these two programs in that feminine discourse plays a major role in Roseanne and although less frequent, certainly many positive examples can be found in Murphy Brown. Feminine discourse includes both conversations between women and the conversational content of sharing, support and mutual respect. One example was seen in the baby shower episode after all the guests, the "blonde street gang" of real television anchorwomen and mothers, departed.

Corky: I can teach you to make a Batman costume out of an old Emmy dress.
Confidence in Murphy as a professional, by a female colleague, is a given here. Viewers get to see a competent journalist express concerns about the terrifying challenge of trying to be a supermom, balancing babies and career. Corky provides encouragement. She sees Murphy as a unique individual, "you are not like anyone else." Corky also sees Murphy as her role model not only as a journalist but as a professional and a mother.

In *Roseanne* there have been several examples of feminine discourse. Roseanne and Jackie are sisters and friends. Jackie is Darlene's aunt and a strong supporter of her sports activities and her comic book creations, "Oh, I'm just so proud of you," Jackie says in a way that conveys she really means it.

*Roseanne* breaks new ground with its emphasis on female-female interaction. One of the sampled episodes (R# 3) provided an entire half-hour of all female interaction, with the exception of two lines by Dan in the opening. This was not a fluffy episode dealing with light topics. The issue of aging parents and senior care, facing one's own aging and mortality as a result of that situation, and a close personal friend announcing an alternative sexual orientation are all treated in a humorous but non-condescending manner.

Another aspect of considering the "other" is the presentation of alternative thought. Many societies have emphasized the importance and desirability of male children, in contemporary society the most frequent gender complaint about a child comes from
disappointed parents of girl babies who wanted a boy. Murphy challenged this assumption by wanting to have and raise a female child. She was extremely upset when testing revealed that her child was a boy.

Murphy: I don't believe this. I was sure it was a girl. It was the one thing I had no doubt about. I was going to have a daughter. I was going to teach her that being a woman didn't mean you were second class. That she could do anything she wanted and be judged solely on her ability. And then I was gonna take her shopping for Donna Karan separates. This is not what I planned, not what I planned at all...

...Frank: So it's a challenge. Have you ever backed down from a challenge before? You know I'm right, right?

Murphy: Okay, I guess deep down I always wanted a kid I could show how to throw a knuckle curve. Someone I could teach the finer points of seven-card high-low, and teach to balance the carburetors on a classic MG. Well, I guess I'm just gonna have to do it with a boy.

This disappointment relates to her inability to pass on the hard-earned information she has obtained as a successful professional woman. This is important for Murphy, who at 42 and without a male partner, will probably not have another child.

Gender limitations also work to eliminate men from some activities. In the baby shower episode, Frank was very upset when he was told that Murphy's baby shower was for women only: "are you kidding me. I can't come because I'm a guy? That's not fair, I'm Murphy's best friend." Later, after the shower concluded, Frank, Miles, Jim and Phil arrived at Murphy's with a deck of cards for a poker game, declaring themselves to be "official representatives of the Y chromosome," giving her the best of all possible worlds, a poker shower.

The episode dealing with the baby's birth featured all the FYIers, Murphy's extended family, who sent messages to the new baby on videotape. A concerned Frank empathized with Murphy and "the pain only a woman can feel." However, in the throes of labor Murphy reached out and inflicted upon him "the pain only a man can feel." Shortly
after the baby's birth, Murphy confided in her newborn son that she may not be the "traditional" mother. "While we're on the subject of mothers, I better warn you, up front, I'm not gonna be like other mothers. I don't cook or sew or make stuffed animals talk in funny voices but I promise that you won't have to wait until after the cake to open your birthday presents." Then she sang the Aretha Franklin song, "You Make Me feel Like a Natural Woman" softly to him.

Miles Silverberg's obsession with the stereotypical definition of a "normal family" was demonstrated as a reaction against his non-traditional, but loving, upbringing.

Miles: Cop a plea? My mother wants me to cop a plea. You should be making a three-bean salad or sitting under a hair dryer bragging to your friends about my salary. What is wrong with you people? Why can't you be normal parents?

Nathan: What's that supposed to mean?

Miles: We are having this conversation in a jail. Does it not, doesn't that say anything to you? My whole life has been about you and your causes. Even our summer vacation. We never went to Disneyland or the Jersey shore or the Grand Canyon like I wanted. No, the Silverbergs drove to California to pick grapes with Cesar Chavez.

Connie: That's right, and you learned Spanish and met some very nice people...

...Nathan: I realize that we haven't been the most conventional parents but we were trying to give you something better than a new bike. We were trying to give you a better world...

...Miles: What would you think if I, if I called you both, mom and dad?

Nathan: Miles, mom and dad are figurehead titles, a power trip. We had this discussion when you were three.

Connie: We wanted you to think of us as equals.

Miles: Okay, we're equals. Now can I call you mom and dad?

Connie: If it'll make you happy, it's okay with me. Nathan?

Nathan: Which one do you want me to be, mom or dad? I'll be dad, how's that?

Miles: I like it ... Tonight we are going back to my place and we are doing
what a normal American family does?

Nathan: What? We're gonna watch TV and not talk to each other?

The sampled episode (MB# 3) concerning Murphy's business trip to Paris ended with Eldin admitting that he wants to take care of Avery, and Murphy admitting that she came home a day early because she missed the child. Murphy inquired about how long Eldin planned to handle the child care.

Eldin: I'm an artist. I don't think in linear concepts like, like time.

Murphy: Tell me about it.

Eldin: Look at this house. Do you see any unmitered corners? Do you see any visible tape joint seams? I don't think so. Well, let me tell ya, I will do no less for this guy. And I will stay right here, until the work is done. Okay?

Murphy: Okay.

Eldin: Did you hear that Avery? We are now officially a threesome.

Murphy: Yeah, that's us. Just your typical American family.

The child is poetically defined as an artistic work in progress and the "typical American family" consists of an unmarried mother, her son, and her painter/nanny.

We have seen Miles' definition of a normal American family and Murphy's definition of a typical American family. In Roseanne, by the end of the spring 1993 season, the Conner family consisted of Dan, Roseanne, D.J., Darlene, Darlene's boyfriend, David, and Roseanne's sister Jackie who is there all the time. The alternative offered in these programs is one of the expanding definition of "family."

Another societal "silence" explored is the issue of homosexuality. In the episode dealing with Miles' identity crisis after having an erotic dream about a gay male colleague, the message is the absurdity of prejudice. USA Today television reviewer Matt Roush praised the program as "a terrific example of how the hit sitcom confronts other delicate issues with its own value systems of honesty, warmth and non-judgmental humor" (June
Roush found the balance of neurotic Miles with a gay character, a network publicist, comfortable in his sexuality to be humorous and to reflect what he perceived to be the writers goal of not encouraging derision of homosexuality: "the upshot: Values are in the eye of the beholder, and the politics of fear and ignorance aside, 'family values' don't have to be at odds with the virtues of tolerance for those of alternate lifestyles."

*Roseanne* has also dealt with the lesbian issue in a non-judgmental and humorous manner. Roseanne and Jackie were surprised when their friend Nancy announced she was gay (R#3).

Jackie: For God sakes, why didn't you tell us about it before?

Nancy: I don't know, I was scared. I, I, I didn't know how you'd react.

Roseanne: Well, we'd react the same way we react when you tell us anything personal: make fun of you till it gets old, then we move on.

Nancy: I can feel the love.

Later Roseanne and Jackie discuss the possibilities of the lesbian lifestyle, one that they had obviously not given much thought to before their close friend announced her involvement.

Jackie: Imagine what it would be like going through life without wanting or needing a man.

Roseanne: Ahh, that's easy - hey, it's my turn to be unselfish and giving.

Jackie: No, you got to be unselfish and giving yesterday, today you have to be supportive and nurturing.

Roseanne: Yeah, this could be good.

Jackie: No ESPN.

Roseanne: Twice the PMS.

Nancy's lover Marla is appreciative of their understanding and lack of
condemnation: "Nancy is so lucky to have friends who are so supportive." That Nancy is a lesbian is treated as her decision, accepted by the other women characters. It is the male characters who have problems dealing with it.

Another alternative introduced here is that women can defend themselves. A major media industry has arisen around the "women in jeopardy" genre of movies and made for TV movies. Women have often been depicted as victims. However, after Roseanne was threatened by a customer (R# 4), she and her business partners took charge of the situation by attending a self-defense class that Jackie had taken while she was in police training.

Instructor (female): Now passivity is your worst enemy. So the first thing we learn here is to say "no" to men.

Roseanne to Jackie: Are you sure you took this class?

Instructor: This "no" gets you in touch with your power. So what's the first thing you say to a man who wants to hurt you.

All: "No".

This treatment of the subject of fear and victimization of women does not emphasize the dangers of business ownership or of women working alone. Instead it presents the positive message of women banding together to pro-actively solve the problem, refusing to be trapped. No man is needed to step in and save the day, although Dan tries, just as the pathetic Arnie tries to "save" Nancy from the curse of lesbianism.

Our discursive analysis of *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* has revealed several factors to support the thesis that both programs present women who are not limited by gender stereotypes, at the latent as well as the manifest level. The exceptions seem to be the issues of appearance and emotionality which, because they are taking on increased importance for men, cannot be claimed to present a gender bias. While structural public problems were presented as private issues, this was done across the board, regardless of gender. Thus, several examples of alternative thought and feminine discourse have been found, not supporting the third hypothesis.
CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

The television world is "overshadowed by representations of women as extensions of men, as bitterly competitive with other women... and as isolated and confined within and used by a male world. But to understand the role of television texts in a hegemonic ideological process we must see challenge as well as dominance (where it exists), and we must be able to recognize the exceptional" (Byars 1987, pp. 299-300). Data analysis of the three hypotheses presented in this research project reveals a great deal of evidence that the top-rated, prime-time situation comedies, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, challenge four decades of television research on gender stereotypes. They actually seem to make progressive statements concerning women's status at both the manifest and latent levels. We will examine each hypothesis within this context.

**H1. The two most popular prime-time television sitcoms in 1992, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, present the manifest message to viewers that they are non-stereotypical and thus empower women.** This hypothesis was supported.

Tuchman (1978) defines gender stereotypes as confining portrayals of sex-appropriate appearance, interests, skills, behaviors, and self-perceptions. Gender stereotypes present accepted standards of what is valued about male and female gender roles, the qualities which are positively or negatively associated with each gender, and how are they applied. At the manifest level *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* appear to defy prior
gender stereotypes and present an image of female empowerment, contradicting to some degree each of the major findings of four decades of prior research about the depiction of female characters on television.

1. The large gap in the ratio of men to women characters on television was not found in *Roseanne* but was found, to a certain extent, in *Murphy Brown*.

   In *Murphy Brown*, the gender split for regular series characters is roughly 2:1, with slightly more male characters in minor parts. This partially reflects earlier findings, although its significance is largely offset when the size and importance of roles is taken into account. A much more female-dominated gender ratio in roles is found in *Roseanne*. This program is not gender equal, it is female-dominated, ranging from an equal 1:1 ratio to a 1:7 male to female ratio.

   However, beyond quantity is the issue of quality of portrayal. Media research was heavily focused for a long time on quantifying the absence of women in television, but there are more important absences or unconsidered alternatives to be explored as well. Vande Berg and Streckfuss found it valuable to utilize qualitative research to enhance quantitative analysis, claiming that the duality of their study produced: "several significant differences ... in the scene-by-scene analysis of the actions of organizational characters that did not appear in the single overall character analysis" (1992, p.204). Thus, as we move to an analysis of the size of female roles we will also consider the character's subjective importance in the overall program. All of these quantitatively developed categories will be qualified with qualitative examples.

2. Overall, the size of women's roles were smaller, and less important, than men's roles, and the range of women's roles was found to be limited in all forms of programming (Dominick 1979; Downs 1980, 1981; Meehan 1983). This situation was not found in *Roseanne* or *Murphy Brown*. Analysis of *Murphy Brown*, however, reveals that while the male characters outnumber the female, nearly half the dialogue involves females speaking, mainly Murphy. The largest roles in the two programs are those of Murphy and Roseanne.
Whether they are on screen or off, all other characters are defined in relation to them. Most action takes place either directly around them or as a consequence of something they've done, might do, or plan to do. Even when other characters are featured in an episode, they are most often defined in terms of Roseanne or Murphy, who dominate both the action and the dialogue. Even in the extremely gender unbalanced (13:2) episode on the Senate hearings, Murphy was the center of every scene, as is Roseanne Conner in *Roseanne*.

Although in *Murphy Brown* the ensemble roles are played predominantly by men, largely reflecting the male dominated world of network television in which the program takes place, in *Roseanne* the ensemble roles are played predominantly, in some cases exclusively, by women. Thus, while *Murphy Brown* does present a male-female character ratio similar to that found in prior research, when the size of roles and their centrality to the action is considered, the program presents a more egalitarian picture. Neither of the first two claims, of larger numbers of male characters or larger roles for male characters, was found in *Roseanne*.

3. The centrality of male images with limited amounts of female-female interaction is another consistent finding in previous research. Utilizing Parsons' and Bales' (1955) division of action into male, instrumental or "task-oriented" behavior and female, expressive-oriented or "socio-emotional" behavior, Mackey and Hess (1982) found the most frequent type of gender interactions on prime-time television to be between men and women, followed by men interacting with men. Along with Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992), they also found that male characters assumed more task-oriented roles with women depicted more often assuming socio-emotional roles.

*Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* provide a wider variety of gender interactions than found by Mackey and Hess or Vest (1992). Roseanne Conner is depicted primarily in the private sphere. The program presents a significant amount of female-female interaction with her sister Jackie, daughters Becky and Darlene, and Roseanne's friends. *Roseanne's* five year reign as the top-rated series on commercial television seems to undermine Mackey
and Hess's biocultural argument that women are not interesting as the focus of television programs: "woman-woman dyads are not often found in centers of political, social or economic dominance; and viewers prefer the shows which focus on such nuclei of activity. The viewer's attention structure is, therefore, ill suited to triangulate with a large number of woman-woman interactions" (Mackey and Hess 1982, pp. 210-211). This argument is not supported by the large proportion of female-female dialogue and interaction in *Roseanne* where female-female interaction is the major aspect in many episodes. An interesting observation was that the small amount of male interaction on *Roseanne* was largely concerned with the topic of woman, mainly wives, as "boss" or controllers of male lives.

While *Roseanne* offers a wide array of female-female interaction, *Murphy Brown* presents more of a challenge to Mackey and Hess's second finding that men are presented as task-oriented and women are presented as socio-emotional. Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found that even when characters are depicted in organizational roles, women are more likely to be portrayed performing interpersonal functions and men are more likely to be portrayed performing operational, decisional, informational, and political functions. In contrast, when male and female characters are compared for task-orientation, *Murphy Brown* presents several examples of Murphy as the most task-oriented character while various male characters were portrayed as more emotional.

When the lives of the lead characters are broken down into interaction by personal and professional situations, there are some contrasts. Because Roseanne is depicted primarily in the private sphere of home and family, it is perhaps more acceptable for her to have primarily female interaction. When the setting moves to her workplace, she, as a pink collar worker, has always been depicted as working for a man. In one case, a brief job at a fast food establishment, her immediate supervisor was a teenaged boy. Over the course of the series, from 1988-1992, she had a succession of male supervisors and bosses, from the young lothario, Booker, at Wellman Plastics, to the homosexual, Leon, at Rodbell's. In the Fall of 1992, that situation changed when Roseanne opened her own business, the
Lanford Lunch Box, with female business partners.

In contrast, Murphy Brown works in the male dominated world of network television news. She has little female contact professionally, except with the younger journalist Corky. In early episodes she bemoaned that lack when she compared her heavy job demands with a successful female Soviet journalist, and when her friends hired an actress for the day to pretend to be the sister she never had. Over the course of the series, however, Murphy developed a more positive relationship with her mother, Avery, and in the fifth season viewers were beginning to see Corky as more than an airhead ex-beauty queen once she and her husband, Will, were divorced. However, Murphy still has a practically non-existent personal life. She is closest to Eldin, her house painter and nanny. Her only other primary relationships are close friendships with professional colleagues. She had only a brief relationship with her ex-husband, the father of her baby, and with Jerry Gold, an obnoxious talk-show host she dated.

4. The fourth finding focused on the tendency for the range in age of women characters to be much more limited than that for male characters (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli 1980; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974). Examples of the predominance of younger, attractive women characters abound in television, while males have been represented in wider age groups from the days of Ben Cartright to Matlock.

The characters Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner violate the younger woman stereotype. Murphy Brown is a successful professional woman in her mid-forties. A large part of the charm of her character involves tales of her more than twenty years as a television journalist. Her varied life experience makes her more interesting. When she announced her pregnancy, several comments were made about her age, which was 42 at the time. Roseanne turned forty in her fifth season. While prior research found women characters to have a significantly more limited age distribution than male characters, that is not evidenced in either Roseanne or Murphy Brown. Younger and older characters of both genders are part of the two programs with the relationships between Roseanne and Murphy
and their mothers playing a key role. Most of the series regulars are leading edge baby boomers.

5. A limited occupational range was also represented for women characters (DeFleur 1964; Dominick 1979; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Miller and Reeves 1976; Tedesco 1974). No differences in occupational range, based on gender, were found in either program. It appears that the range of occupations for characters on *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* is limited more by social class than gender. Most of the characters on *Roseanne* are blue collar, although Roseanne and Jackie struggled in the fifth season as small business owners of the Lanford Lunch Box. Small business ownership is often the dream of the working class. However, prior attempts at small business have not been successful for characters on the program; such as husband Dan's failed motorcycle business. Roseanne, a pink collar worker, has been employed in the service industry, primarily as a waitress. She began the program as a factory worker at Wellman Plastics. Jackie has had two non-traditional jobs since factory work; policewoman and truck driver. A very interesting female career possibility on the program is Darlene's work writing comic books.

On *Murphy Brown*, most characters are news professionals, except Phil and Eldin, who work in service professions but both have their own businesses; bar ownership and free-lance house painting. Other characters in *Murphy Brown* include her endless succession of secretaries, both male and female, and the television studio crew, which is all male, as are most television crews.

Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found women workers depicted in organizational settings to lack competitiveness, failing to achieve the "occupational hierarchical power and status of male workers" (1992, p.205). This is absolutely not true of Murphy Brown, since her overwhelmingly competitive spirit is the source of much of the program's humor. She is as combative, in many cases more contentious than her male co-workers, in a profession known for cutthroat competitiveness.
Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992, p.203) found the organizational actions of women are more likely to be presented comedically, less likely seriously. Since these programs are both sitcoms, that representation is to be expected for characters of both genders. However, Murphy's comedic depiction is juxtaposed with the presentation of her as a competent, driven journalist who has made major career gains. As a multidimensional character, Murphy's decisions or acts of childish revenge may be portrayed lightly. However, her news judgment and job capabilities are seldom questioned. Her mental state and job competence were questioned only when she was pregnant, i.e., more womanly. The actions of the male news professionals are also presented in the same comedic manner. Roseanne's humorous depiction does not downplay the importance of her role in the family and her ultimate competence in that role.

6. Women are defined and limited by marital status more than men, with marriage and the workplace portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men. (Downs 1981; Gerbner and Gross 1976; McNeil 1975; Meehan 1983; Signorelli 1982, 1989; Tedesco 1974; Weigel and Loomis 1981). On Roseanne and Murphy Brown, marital status was defined no more often for women than for men and no aspects of the workplace were portrayed as being more incompatible for women than men. Neither the married nor the single state is represented as more desirable for men or women, and problems with both types of personal relationships are the source of many storylines.

Atkin found that "single working women were 'broken-in' through situation comedies" (1991, p.520), with 62.9% represented in the 1966-1990 time frame of his study: "although Lucy stands as an early example of a widowed single woman, only a small portion of female principals were allowed to appear as divorced or otherwise unconcerned about relationships" (1991, p.522). Murphy Brown exemplifies the new working woman, divorced and deeply involved in her career, and now having a baby, leaving her little time for relationships. This may also reflect class differences. If a woman has total economic independence, the single state is perhaps easier and more desirable. On
the other hand, in *Roseanne*, Jackie is still looking for a partner. She struggles economically, as do Roseanne and Dan.

Concerning the charge that women are defined more often by their marital status, there is some evidence that all the characters in these programs, both men and women, have some aspect of their definition related to their marital status. In *Roseanne*, Dan and Arnie's masculinity is, to them at least, defined by their primary relationships. Dan felt like less of a man because Roseanne wouldn't let him sit around the Lunch Box in the evening to protect her, whereas Arnie's masculinity was questioned, by him, because the wife he deserted later became a lesbian.

Marriage and the workplace were found to be no more incompatible for women than men. However, reflecting reality for many women, motherhood is depicted in both programs as being more difficult for working women. Motherhood and work are difficult for both Murphy Brown and Roseanne. However, this does not imply any kind of sisterhood - mainly because of class differences and their symbolic isolation on separate programs. Over the five-year course of the program, Roseanne has constantly struggled to balance her chores as wife, mother of three, and her job demands. However, in neither program are maternal responsibilities presented as making Roseanne nor Murphy a less functional worker. In the sample episode in which Murphy challenged the Senate committee, she refused to let her unborn child compromise her journalistic ethics because of the impact it would have on other reporters. Her lawyer Stan urged her to "wear something maternal. You're pregnant, we should use it." Similarly, in an episode of *Roseanne*, her next door neighbor revealed his difficulties with being a single parent.

Signorelli summarizes these six charges in her finding that prime time television's sex role portrayals have changed very little in the past two decades, with these portrayals maintaining traditional and stereotypical gender roles: "women are seen less often than the men and in many respects may be considered as less important. When women do appear, they usually are younger than the men, more attractive and nurturing, portrayed in the
context of romantic interests, home, and family, and are more likely to be victimized. Women are somewhat more likely than men to be married (although both men and women are much more likely to be single), and if they are married, they usually are not employed outside the home ... men, on the other hand, are older. They tend to be more powerful and potent than the women, and proportionately few are presented as married. Significantly more men are employed outside the home, and they usually work in high prestige and traditionally masculine occupations such as doctors, lawyers, police, and other higher status jobs" (Signorelli 1989, p.352). Both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* present important challenges to these prior depictions of women on television.

The six above-listed categories are nominal, basically related to form in that they merely count numbers and types of women portrayed. Personality analysis, also done quantitatively, similarly found women to be portrayed on television as more dependent, weaker, submissive, less intelligent, less task-oriented, more emotional and more peaceful (Tedesco 1974; Busby 1974). Mackey and Hess (1982) found TV male characters' behavior to be instrumentally oriented, females' to be expressively oriented. Turow (1974) found that men give 70% of the orders, and Sternglanz and Serbin (1974) found male behavioral outcomes more often positive and female outcomes to be more often neutral or negative. Greater depth to these findings is achieved by data analysis conducted at the individual level, focusing on characters, comparing and contrasting them to the psychological profile of women on television that has been constructed over the past several decades. *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* have been compared to each other for similarities and differences, to determine if one or the other is more or less gender stereotyped. For the purposes of this project, the term "empowerment" is equated with not matching the sex-role stereotypes listed above in the six categories and below in the psychological profile of women portrayed on television. This is based on the ideological linkage that equates masculine characteristics with power, the challenge of which is the topic for further research.
Prior communications and media sociological research has suggested categories involving sex-role stereotypes that have been used to psychologically describe and differentiate male and female characters. These categories have been taken from three studies representing progressive decades of gender research in media referenced in the methodology section (Tedesco 1974, Downs 1981, Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). Some of the categories have been found to reflect statistically significant gender differences, while others have developed as general descriptors.

Tedesco (1974), in a four-year sample of major characters in prime-time network programs, determined several gender stereotypical categories. Female stereotypes included: attractive, fair, sociable, warm, happy, peaceful, youthful, rich and clean. Male stereotypical definitions included: powerful, tall, masculine, smart and stable. One of the key categories for women is their depiction as attractive, a category rife with subjective definitions as suggested by Fiske (1987). Long & Simon (1974) found that physically, women portrayed on television are usually tall, thin, attractive, well-dressed and less physically active. Angela McRobbie (1982) found attractiveness and the creation of an "appropriate" feminine appearance has long been the focus of women's and teens' popular culture where women were preoccupied with personal appearance as part of their active competition with other women for men.

Physically, Murphy Brown is tall, slender and very attractive. As a network anchor, her hair is perfectly coiffed and her clothes reflect her professional status. On the other hand, Roseanne Conner is short, overweight and has apparently spent little time or money on her appearance or grooming. She wears oversized blouses that would be considered casual, bordering on sloppy. Her hair seldom looks like it has even been combed. Neither character is depicted as being fair, sociable, warm or peaceful.

Both Roseanne and Murphy are depicted as powerful women, found by Tedesco to be a male stereotype. Roseanne's power is seen primarily in her personal life and Murphy's in her professional life. Reflecting their respective classes, Roseanne is no more
or less powerful in her work arena than the other characters in the program and Murphy is no more powerless in her personal life than the other characters, male and female, in that program.

Downs' analysis of fourteen top-rated, prime-time programs suggested that home orientation, high sociability, empathy, emotionality and fearfulness typify female gender stereotypes. Male characteristics included: work orientation, other activity, low sociability and high confidence. Downs found statistically significant sex differences for only three of the eleven above listed categories: Work orientation (m), home orientation (f) and emotionality (f) where "women were more likely than men to cry or express emotional upset" (1981, p.256). While Murphy reflects the traditional male work orientation, Roseanne personifies the traditional female concern with home and family, although in a non-traditional manner. Neither character is especially emotional or very likely to cry, presenting a challenge to the statistically significant female characteristic of emotionality.

Two of the three categories where significant gender differences were found, home and work orientation, relate to the public (m) vs. private (f) distinction. Keeping in mind that in the theoretical section this split was found to be artificial, we recognize that most previous research has concluded that the majority of women on television are portrayed as accessories, victims, people who react instead of initiating action, concerned only with the private sphere but absent or underrepresented in the public sphere. This has an economic dimension. Steeves and Smith find that "in the context of 20th century America and Europe, gender oppression can be considered evident in inequitably divided labor which relegates women disproportionately to unpaid domestic labor, to lower paying occupations, or both" (1987, p. 45). Earlier research found women concentrated in the home and their problems to be emotional, family, and relationship-oriented even when working outside home. Most of that research found women television characters functioning predominantly in the private sphere. Even those functioning in the public sphere were found to be largely concerned with private sphere issues. This research suggests that Roseanne and Murphy
Brown present challenges to those findings on several levels.

For the purposes of analyzing Hypothesis One, the TV Guide descriptions for each program for a full year were collected (Appendix I). In 1992, twenty-four new episodes of Murphy Brown and twenty-five new episodes of Roseanne were listed. These brief descriptions were analyzed to determine in which sphere the programs most often took place. While Murphy represents a non-traditional concentration in the public sphere (16 public: 8 private), Roseanne has a more traditional concentration in the private sphere (18 private: 7 public). However, there are several mediating factors. First, there is a large amount of overlap between spheres, making it very difficult to categorize the programs. For example, the private sphere concern of fictional character, Murphy, struggling to take care of her newborn son, was plunged into the public sphere when the real-life, vice-president criticized her fictional private life. On the other hand, Roseanne's daughter Becky's private sphere problem of a lack of college funds and her decision to elope with her boyfriend, Mark, is related to the much larger public sphere issue of economics.

Second, the private sphere issues dealt with regularly on Roseanne contrast sharply with how these issues are traditionally depicted. Several serious social issues are addressed and discursive analysis will later link this with the public sector. Regarding the third mediating factor, while remaining at the individual character level and trying to determine whether women are being depicted stereotypically, it is important to note that, especially on Murphy Brown, several of the private sphere issues were related primarily to male characters, while on Roseanne the public sphere issues were related primarily to Roseanne herself.

Another research focus in the analysis of Hypothesis One was the area of actual problem solving. Prior research indicates that the type of support needed falls into two areas: physical or emotional (Deaux 1976; Busby 1974; Henderson, Greenberg and Atkin 1980), and that "men (characters) were most often likely to solve their own problems without assistance from others (41.67%)... women most frequently dealt with someone else's problem (32.25%) or required help to solve their own problems (25%)" (Downs
To the contrary, both Roseanne and Murphy were depicted as solving their own problems, which ranged from physical threats to the threat of imprisonment. Even the younger female, Roseanne's daughter Darlene, solved her own problem when stranded after a rock concert. In contrast with prior findings, the characters in the sampled episodes who seemed to need the most emotional support were males: Miles and Frank on *Murphy Brown* and Arnie on *Roseanne*.

Downs identified two categories with potential significance when analyzing the dialogue of outspoken lead characters. Verbal aggression, considered a female characteristic, is defined as "insulting, sarcastic, or derogatory remarks"; while assertiveness, classified as a male characteristic, is defined as "disagreement with another's point of view or announcement of an alternative method for dealing with a problem" (Downs 1981, p.254). It would be easy to confuse powerless verbal aggression with the more powerful assertiveness. Although Downs did not find significant gender differences, this is an important area to examine in this research since part of the perception of empowerment of both Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown comes from their outspoken demeanor. Many instances of the less powerful form of verbal aggression, identified by Downs as a stereotypical female characteristic, are found in both programs and exhibited by both male and female characters. However, both Roseanne and Murphy Brown frequently offer the directly confrontational and more powerful form of assertiveness, categorized as a male stereotypical attribute. This provides another example of the apparent empowerment of these two female characters who present a challenge to previously defined female stereotypical characteristics as portrayed on television.

Two other areas offer insight into the non-stereotypical empowerment of Roseanne and Murphy. The first stems from an examination of whether these female characters act or react to other characters or situations. Much previous research has found that the majority of women on television are portrayed as accessories or victims, people who react instead of initiating action. The second derives from an examination of whose physical space is the
locus of program, i.e., who comes to whom. Organizational literature reveals there is a power dimension in personal space, especially in organizational settings; who gets a private office, who has the largest office, office location, who is summoned by whom, who goes to whom.

The *Roseanne* episode in which she was threatened at work provides an example of female characters taking charge of a situation. Initially Roseanne reacted to the situation by not backing down from the man who threatened her. Later she experienced some fear, but then quickly took charge. She and her friends defined the situation as a potential work-related problem and refused to be intimidated by it. They took the positive action of enrolling in a self-defense class together in order to remove the victimization and fear element from their lives. On the other hand, the male characters Arnie and Dan were depicted as reacting to the situations in which Dan's wife was threatened and Arnie's ex-wife opted for a lesbian lifestyle.

Murphy, too, refused to react to a situation of intimidation presented by a Senate subpoena. She rejected the silly advice of her fellow FYIers and refused to buckle under to the Senate committee, instead expressing the importance of her first amendment rights.

Regarding personal space and power, on *Murphy Brown* the only personal space depicted regularly is Murphy's office and home. The other characters come to her. While Murphy is technically supervised by producer Miles Silverberg, she is never called to his office, he comes to hers. And while all the other FYI anchors have offices, they too come to Murphy's. On the other hand, Roseanne has no private personal space. She shares her home with her family, her bedroom with her husband, and is never depicted as having an office at work. Interestingly, the only character on *Roseanne* with a private space visited by the cameras and viewing audience is Darlene. Portions of episodes have taken place in her room when other characters came to her. However, there seems to be no gender-based power distinction on this program that men have personal space and women do not (this may again be a class-related issue). When the program premiered, Dan was building a boat
in the garage, which seemed to be his private space. However, the boat and the dreams that went with it had vanished by the fifth season. None of Roseanne's bosses have had an office to which she has been summoned. In workplace scenes the action takes place on the factory floor, or in the luncheonette where she worked.

The similarities the characters Roseanne and Murphy Brown share include being female, verbal, and strong-willed. Almost everything else is different; their marital status, appearance, primary focus of their lives, social class, etc. Both seem to exhibit few characteristics that prior media research on gender has determined to be female stereotypes. Although these non-traditionally defined characteristics apply to different areas for each character, both exhibit a much larger number of traditionally defined male characteristics than traditionally defined female characteristics. This raises the question of whether a woman has to become more like a man in order to be perceived as being stronger. While that charge has been made about Murphy, primarily before she became a mother, it has not been made about Roseanne, perhaps because she functions primarily in the private sphere.

Multidimensionality is interpreted as a sign of non-stereotypical characters: "a multidimensional character will have paradoxes. She will be assertive and vulnerable, depressed and hopeful. To avoid a stereotype, we want to see all sides of a woman in terms of her social roles: wife, mother, worker - as well as in terms of her dimensions as her own person" (Seger 1989 quoted in Silver and Shears 1989, p.2). Silver and Shears present Cagney and Lacey as examples of multidimensional television characters and they cite Roseanne Conner as a non-typical female character. Beyond her "decidedly hefty" appearance, "despite complaints of malebashing and other wisecracks, the show exudes a certain sweetness. Roseanne's size matches her inner strength, but her struggle to face the rejection of job hunting, her quarrels with her sister and the family's money troubles are unusual among the relentless feel-goodism of most TV families" (Silver and Sears 1989, p.3). A certain amount of multidimensionality has been achieved in both programs by the mere fact of their five-year tenure as prime-time situation comedies as viewers have seen
these women characters experience a variety of crises and unusual situations.

Another aspect of multidimensionality is cited by Fiske who found internal contradictions in *Cagney and Lacey*'s gender similarity: "for instance, Cagney's appearance contrasts conventionally with her masculine name and interpersonal style. Such contradictions take her beyond characterization by stereotype, because the practice of stereotyping necessarily implies the sort of close fit between representation and dominant ideology that is refuted or denied by internally contradictory values of this sort" (Fiske 1987, p.408). Murphy Brown and Roseanne Coner also represent internal contradictions. Like Chris Cagney, Murphy Brown's attractive appearance (f) contrasts with her masculine name and interpersonal style, which seems to be uncaring (m) and competitive (m). That uncaring style was reflected in an episode where Corky needed marital advice. Murphy was not seen by producer Miles Silverberg as a nurturing or caring person.

It is too early, and not the focus of this phase of the research to determine, whether, due to changes in the socioeconomic climate where women are required to work, the definitions of gender are being changed or, if in fact, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* represent challenges to existing gender definitions and stereotypes. Hanke warns against "falling prey to the progressive fallacy in which any changes in images of male and female characters are taken as the displacement of dominant gender ideologies" (Hanke 1990, p. 245). It can be concluded, however, that based upon the several decades of findings of gender research on television, Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown do not fit the stereotypical definitions of women produced by that research. Thus, at the manifest level, Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner appear to defy prior television gender stereotypes and this challenge may be equated with presenting an image of female empowerment.

**H2. The characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown manifestly represent different social classes and these class distinctions influence the construction of their gender identities.** This hypothesis was
supported. Here we look at social class as an intervening variable in gender definition. This analysis takes place initially at the individual level. However, the characters are now analyzed as members of different social classes, thus they are broadening out past the individual to represent social, economic and political values. Class is not defined solely in economic terms, i.e., merely the amount of salary. Differences between the two characters are highlighted by incorporating Eric Olin Wright's (1979) division of classes into popular gradational definitions based on the amount of income/education/status an individual seems to possess, and relational definitions defined as the individual's position within relations of the market or exchange relations in the actual production of goods and services.

Roseanne depicts a blue-collar, working-class family with both parents struggling to find and keep jobs. Economic struggle is a cornerstone of the Conner family life and they are relatively powerless. They operate at one of the lower economic levels. In relation to gradational definitions, their educational level and occupational status are low. Their grammar, syntax and word choice are all blue-collar. When both Dan and Roseanne are employed, the family income level is the most positive aspect of this category. However, they work at the behest of others and can lose their jobs easily. Economics limits their degree of decision making and life options. This is graphically depicted in the generational difference between their options when compared to their parents.

There is some evidence, within the context of the program, of confusion over whether the Conner family identifies with the middle or working class. Becky's disparagement of attending community college at night, while working at the "Buy and Bag" is an apparently middle-class rejection of what would be acceptable in the working-class. The ideal of wanting to advance, to cross class boundaries, is represented by both Roseanne's and Dan's attempts at small business ownership. However, contemporary American society seems to reflect an economic shift in the other direction as growing numbers of middle-class workers find themselves in a situation of unemployment, of having to take part time work, or employed at a lower wage without benefits. Others who
have retained their jobs suddenly find themselves in the new position of living paycheck-to-paycheck, fearing a disaster that could cost them their homes and what little security they have.

Murphy Brown lives and works much higher up the class ladder according to both gradational and relational definitions. As a white-collar professional she is obviously well-educated, articulate and has the trappings of economic success: her own home, an expensive sports car, and a painter-in-residence. When called before a senate committee she successfully challenged United States senators. Her discretionary income allows her to purchase a rural farm and take her housepainter-nanny Eldin, there to work on it. She not only employs Eldin, she also has the responsibility to fire secretaries.

Prior research on women's magazines, during World War II and in the 1970s, reveals that media messages vary according to the social class of the intended audience (Honey 1984; Lopate 1978). During World War II Rosie the Riveter media messages designed to recruit blue-collar women as workers emphasized a helpless female who needed a man for survival and who gained identity through motherhood and domestic bliss. On the other hand, media messages designed to recruit middle class women to work during World War II emphasized self-actualization and the ability to get the job done: "this wartime contrast suggests that images of female experience as filtered through the media are greatly influenced by the socioeconomic level of the group at which they are aimed... the fantasies, aspirations, and self-images of women depend on more than their gender" (Honey 1984, p.214).

A similar type of class differentiation in media presentations was revealed in women's magazines in the mid-1970s. Lopate (1978) found that images of Jackie Kennedy Onasis differed depending on the social class of a magazines' intended reader. Magazines targeted towards middle or upper-middle class readers stressed the importance of consuming: shopping, decorating, and attending cultural events, while downplaying mothering activities. Magazines geared towards working and lower-class women
minimized consumer activities and focused on motherhood. *McCall's* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, targeted for middle class women, detailed Jackie's society life emphasizing her vulnerability and the tragedies that can happen to the rich. In working class magazines such as *Woman's Day, Family Circle*, and *Lady's Circle*, Jackie Kennedy Onasis was depicted as a wife and mother, caring (or not caring) for her husband and children, rather than as a society lady involved in spending money.

A pertinent question here concerns whether Roseanne's focus on the private issues of family and Murphy Brown's focus on public issues, with depictions of her personal vulnerability, are actually a continuation or updating of class-based gender definitions found in earlier media representations. The characters Roseanne and Murphy can be interpreted as running parallel to these research findings, if one assumes that the Conner family represents the working-class and *Roseanne* is geared primarily towards a working class audience while *Murphy Brown*, featuring a white-collar professional, is focused primarily towards a middle/upper-middle class audience. An indicator of their relative class status can be found in the very titles of the programs. Viewers are immediately placed on a first name basis with Roseanne, yet Murphy Brown gets both her first name and surname in the title. Other indicators are found in demographic data which suggest that *Roseanne* is watched by younger, less-educated viewers in larger families while *Murphy* is viewed by an older, better-educated audience in households of one or two members.

The program *Roseanne* has primarily focused upon her life as a wife and mother and, more recently, the impact of economic recession on the family. *Murphy Brown* has largely ignored the economic recession, and has downplayed Murphy's motherhood, the main issue in only six of the 1992-1993 season's twenty-four new episodes. In contrast to Lopate's magazine research findings, Murphy's society life or her spending are not emphasized. Instead of a focus on consumerism or social events, Murphy's journalistic career is the featured topic. When her personal vulnerability and the personal costs of her career are added, however, Murphy more closely matches the images portrayed in
magazines aimed at middle class readers. This does not, however, seem to be gender related, and may be more class related, since all the *Murphy Brown* characters, male and female, are depicted as having personal problems. This was seen before in programs such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty* which depicted the travails of wealthy men and women of those families.

**This research found two ways in which female gender construction as depicted in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* seems to differ by social class.** While it is granted that social class clearly determines life options for people of both genders, these two prime-time programs contain latent messages that indicate a different definition of women, based solely upon their social class. **First is an acknowledgement that single life is more acceptable for a woman who enjoys economic stability.** An examination of two single women characters on these programs; Murphy Brown herself and Jackie on *Roseanne*, revealed several class-based differences in the depiction of the single lifestyle. Jackie is presented as having fewer life options because of economic constraints, suggesting that her search for a husband/mate has economic dimensions. Two incomes at her economic level would raise her economic, if not social, standard of living.

On the other hand, Murphy's single state is most often depicted as representing a fulfilling, interesting life. She has a societally recognized important career and revels in her independence. She enjoys the material aspects of life that come with discretionary income. Jackie lives in temporary apartments which she apparently cannot stand because she spends so much time at the Conner household. Murphy has a beautiful home and, when she wants to flee the city, has the available resources to purchase a farm. Murphy has explained that she doesn't date simply because she just doesn't have time (given her career and the baby). Jackie has time. As co-owner of the Lanford Lunch Box she is an unpaid waitress/cook/janitor. She doesn't challenge world leaders, attend Inaugural Balls, nor is she honored at awards functions for her career achievements. Jackie spends most of her spare time hanging around her married sister's house, with Roseanne and her family serving as a very
important facet of her life. Murphy's work is just about the most important thing in her life and her work colleagues are also friends.

While Murphy does experience her share of personal problems, these are no more emphasized than the personal problems of the single men, Frank and Miles, or the married characters, Corky (later divorced) and Jim. While Jackie's single status is the source of problems, arguably Roseanne's marital status and her motherhood are also the source of difficulties. Thus, overall, on these two programs neither the married or single state is depicted as ideal.

Although both Murphy and Jackie are single women, there is a possibility that some of the difference between Jackie's more idealistic conception of marriage and Murphy's less idealistic viewpoint may relate to the fact that Jackie has never been married and Murphy has. There is also the potential that Darlene might be an exception to the class-based differences in reasons for wanting or needing marriage. The daughter has a strong sense of self and viewers get the feeling that if Darlene marries it will happen because she wants to, not because she feels she has to for economic reasons.

Second, the message is conveyed that single motherhood is acceptable only if the mother enjoys financial stability and won't burden the welfare system. In 1992 Vice President Dan Quayle made a major political issue of Murphy's unwed motherhood, blaming the Los Angeles riots following the Rodney King verdict on Murphy Brown. His charge became the focal point in the 1992 presidential election and boosted the Murphy Brown ratings. These charges were made despite two facts. First, class plays an important role in keeping families together, according to a 1993 Census Bureau report poor parents are nearly twice as likely to break up as those with money. Second, Census Bureau statistics also reveal that one family in four was headed by a single parent in 1990.

The politically charged battle began, waged in network newscasts, major newspapers and news magazines, talk shows, and at such diverse events as the Republican
National Convention and the Emmy Awards ceremony. "If the Vice President thinks its
disgraceful for an unmarried woman to bear a child, and he believes that a woman cannot
adequately raise a child without a father, then he'd better make sure abortion remains safe
and legal," retorted *Murphy* co-creator and co-executive producer, Diane English. Neil
Postman blamed a much wider communication process than a single prime-time sitcom for
creating a need for instant gratification which led to the riots, "if anyone wants to relate the
Los Angeles riots to TV shows, everyone in the U.S. sees television shows
communicating the message that these are the things all Americans are entitled to: TV sets,
cars and so on. The riots were in part driven by this sense of entitlement" (*Time Magazine*
June 1, 1992, p.31).

Within the context of the original speech, Dan Quayle was talking about mothers in
the ghetto. However, demographics show that Murphy Brown is not a role model for
young black females. While *Murphy Brown* was the third ranked program nationally, it
ranked 56th in popularity among American blacks (*Time* June 1, 1992 p.30). Quayle's
attack was categorized as class-based and racist by many, who felt his real target was
unwed mothers on welfare (Klein 1992; *USA Today* 1992; Hochschild 1992). When
family counseling experts added their voice, claiming that Murphy, with financial security,
maturity and a strong support network of friends, qualified for successful single
motherhood, the class basis of the argument was evident.

The social class of the character Murphy Brown cannot be understated in this
situation. It is doubtful that if on *Roseanne*, the nations' top rated sitcom, Jackie became
an unwed mother, that the vice president would have criticized her. It would not have been
called a "lifestyle choice". However, the *Murphy Brown* situation was used, according to
many critics, as a class based criticism of unwed motherhood on welfare. *Newsweek*
senior editor editor Joe Klein, in a cover story entitled "Whose Values?," finds the
problems of single parenthood, "far more intense in slum neighborhoods, where the out-
of-wedlock birthrate often approaches 80 percent" (*Newsweek* June 8, 1992, p.21).
Citing the 1960s shift from politics of working-class and lower-middle class voters concerned with economics to upper-middle-class reformers interested in cultural issues and foreign policy, Klein contends that much has changed since the days of *Ozzie and Harriet*, "logic dictates that changes in family structure alone can't have caused this mess. Economics plays a role; Harriet now has to work in most two-parent families. And then there are the things Dan Quayle doesn't talk about; the allure of excess, the deluge of crass propaganda - buying is more important than giving, having is more important than being part of. It often seems that the sterile ceremonies of consumerism are the most profound rituals Americans share as a people" (Klein 1992, p.19).

Administration officials inadvertently highlighted the class-basis of the Quayle speech in their defenses. Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater waffled between praising the pro-life values of Murphy's decision to have the baby yet expressed concern that "the glorification of life as an unwed mother ... does not do good service to most unwed mothers who are not highly paid, glamorous anchorwomen." In a *USA Today* cover story (May 21, 1992), Judy Keen and James Harney state, "beneath the surface of Quayle's rhetoric another motive was apparent: Racial issues are again being flexed for political gain. Quayle tried to shift responsibility from government and its programs to individual morality." The class based aspect of Quayle's speech was evident in an earlier part of the speech. "Marriage is probably the best anti-poverty program...Among families headed by married couples...there is a poverty rate of 5.7%. But 34.4% of families headed by a single mother are in poverty." The vice president was merely recognizing the fact that two incomes are necessary for survival for many Americans.

A *Time Magazine* reporter contended that Murphy's baby was a lifestyle perk, "for the successful, glamorous woman who has everything: Now, live from Hollywood, your very own baby, father optional. . . With her high income, Brown seems a poor vehicle for examining the problem of children born without fathers. Yet she has more in common with the inner-city teenager than we might think. The 14-year old gets pregnant as a way to give
her life meaning. Murphy Brown and fortyish women like her want a tiny version of their nearly perfect selves to give their lives more meaning ... Single pregnancy commingles the worst of the Me decade - let's have more of me - with feminism, which seeks to make it as much a woman's as a man's world" (Carlson 1992, p.30).

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild claimed in a *Los Angeles Times* article (September 20, 1992), "the debate on Murphy Brown is an entirely diversionary tactic - smoke and mirrors to get our attention off of unemployment and the crisis in the economy." Hochschild noted that Murphy's class status made her a more politically correct target for Quayle than more typical unwed mothers: "focusing on Murphy Brown makes it look as if Quayle is attacking a white, affluent woman when, in fact, the real focus of the Republicans' ire is minority, inner-city single parents. . . By focusing on Murphy Brown, Quayle is able, in a hidden way, to say to poor women, 'This is your fault that you're alone and jobs have fled your neighborhood; your only problems are your values and what you believe'."

Family counseling experts weighed in next, contending that Murphy fit the criteria for successful single motherhood. These criteria include: financial security, being mature and secure in her position and having a strong support network of friends. Again, the first issue alone, economic security, leaves out many single mothers and more clearly spotlights the class basis of these analyses.

The Quayle flap seemed to end with a whimper when the Vice President sent fictional character Murphy Brown's fictional baby a gift. He had tried to maintain political correctness by criticizing an upscale professional woman for a "lifestyle choice" utilizing her to condemn poor single mothers. The gift to the baby seemed to be a message that professional-class Murphy's fictional baby was all right. However, the discussion about single motherhood and non-traditional families didn't seem to carry over to include the vice president's goodwill towards less upscale, less professional single mothers.

Thus in the analysis of Hypothesis Two, we have seen that the media has been shown to send different messages depending on the social class of the intended audience,
that Murphy Brown and Roseanne Conner are clearly from different social classes, and their top-rated television programs convey messages about gender definitions that differ based upon these different social classes.

**H3** Women characters on prime-time television who are presented as role models of gender equality at the manifest level, are depicted in ways that reproduce the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level. This hypothesis was not supported.

Analysis here involves a discursive reading strategy where the self is seen as historically specific and socially constructed (Fiske 1987). It adds depth to, and places in context, the individual character analysis conducted in Hypothesis One. A more political or discursive analysis of gender based stereotypes has the potential to reverse any findings about non-stereotypical behavior found in Hypothesis One: "based in material reality, the stereotype is a discursive inversion whose effect is the suppression of the power of its object" (Byars 1987, p.295).

Discursively, these programs have been placed within their socio-historical context. In the late 1980s, changes in the nation's economic structure contributed to a determination that women are a very desirable consumer demographic, especially those upscale single female professionals with discretionary income and women who make the majority of purchase decisions in the family: "the feminization of television has surprisingly little to do with feminism. At its roots lies an intriguing demographic shift: female viewers have seized control of the prime-time dial as the networks' male audience increasingly drifts to the cable channels...At the same time, market research reveals that women have become the principal purchasers of the products most advertised by prime-time sponsors" (Waters and Huck 1989, p. 48). Television programs were developed to attract that demographic group and, with their strong ratings, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* are arguably the two most successful examples.

Imray and Middleton suggest that even if Murphy Brown seems to be an
empowered woman functioning successfully in the public sphere, her ultimate definition and valuation are located in gender, rather than the sphere of activity. They contend that it is the actor, rather than the activity itself, that defines a function as public or private thus valued or not valued. Economic, political or cultural activities in themselves have no absolute and unchanging value. Importance is assigned to activities based solely on the gender of the person who performs them and those who control their social meaning and importance: "it is not work *per se* which is valued and which is part of the public sphere but rather that it is work done by *men*" (Imray and Middleton 1983, p.16). The problem comes not from the public/private concept itself, but from "an assumed split between women as natural, reproductive beings and men as cultural, economic, political beings" (Imray and Middleton 1983, p.13).

Thus, at the latent level, the crucial question becomes: is Murphy ultimately defined by her female gender rather than by her function in the public sphere? Is Roseanne's second-class status as female reinforced by her primary function in the private sphere, which is stereotypically female? Who Murphy is (female) as an actor would be more important than the activities she performs in the public (male) sphere. The ultimate definition and limitation of life options would be located in gender. This was found to be true when her pregnancy was depicted as a mentally and physically debilitating disease. It was not, however, found to be true in any other instances because male characters on *Murphy Brown* have more often been depicted as having similar personal limitations.

Socio-historical analysis reveals parallel incidents of strong women being looked at ultimately in terms of personal issues in contemporary society. During the 1992 "Year of the Woman", noted feminist, author and publisher, Gloria Steinem's, book describing the negative impact of low self-esteem on her life, *Revolution From Within*, debuted at the top of the best seller list. While this represented a life-long struggle with self-esteem for Steinem, it gave others the opportunity to evaluate this publicy strong woman in terms of a private issue. Successful professional women are often defined with caveats. As we saw
in the review of literature, the well-known actress and successful movie producer, Penny Marshall, was defined similarly in a book on powerful Hollywood insiders: "the club is proud of her success, and wishes that she would find a husband - as does Penny herself" (USA Today April 22, 1992, p.2D). None of the descriptions in the same book of male movie power brokers contained such personal references. Discursive analysis would question how the single status became defined as a negative. However, it is obvious in this context that director Penny Marshall, the book's author, Paul Rosenfield, and columnist Jeannie Williams all agree that the single state is a negative, at least for Penny Marshall.

By definition, the private sphere is associated with activities conducted inside the home and the public sphere with activities outside the household. A major factor in this division between public and private spheres "is that its boundaries are more fluid for men than for women. Men are able to work and compete successfully in the public sphere and still return home to fulfill private roles as husbands and fathers. This is evident in TMTMS [The Mary Tyler Moore Show] as well. While Rhoda and Phyllis rarely appear in work contexts, Mary's male colleagues are frequently seen outside of the newsroom" (Dow 1990, p.268). Both Roseanne and Murphy struggle with the sometimes overwhelming demands of the workplace and motherhood, travelling back and forth between the public and private spheres. Even though Murphy's wealth gives her access to a multiplicity of domestic help, she is caught in the emotional and material struggle between the demands of the two competing arenas of her life, "I'm supposed to go to Paris tomorrow and my kid can't go. Which means I've either got to give up one of the biggest international stories of the year or leave him with a nanny for four days ... You believe it? I've got a story to cover and I can't go. Well that's the first time I ever heard myself say that."

The important question here is whether Roseanne's and Murphy's activities are judged as important by sphere (public or private) or by the gender of the person performing the activities? It appears that these two prime-time sitcom characters are depicted as performing important functions regardless of the sphere in which they primarily function.
Murphy is not deprecated as a journalist because of her personal limitations, and the importance of family and primary relationships is emphasized, not disparaged, on *Roseanne*.

Thus, while Murphy arguably has personal limitations placed upon her, as do the other male and female characters, the strongest message that comes across concerns Murphy's strength as a journalist and her dominant personality. The writers and producers seem to have very carefully emphasized the importance of, and skills involved in, Murphy's journalistic career. There is no insinuation that a man could do a better job than Murphy, and she has not deteriorated into a caricature. The FYI studio is not just an amusing backdrop for the program, Murphy is actually depicted performing job-related functions, be they testifying before the Senate committee, interrogating a dishonest politician, or ferreting out a top story. There is another issue that will only be mentioned here and that is whether Murphy has had to "become a man" to reach the top of her profession. That is an issue which is being dealt with in society and has not been resolved. Suffice it to say here that Murphy exhibits enough non stereotypically female characteristics to defy the limiting gender depictions found in prior television research. She is an admired, respected professional woman.

If the public/private split described by Imray and Middleton were in effect in these programs, Roseanne would be defined, and thus denigrated, by the fact that she primarily functions in the private sphere of home and family. However, although she does function primarily in the private sphere, domestic activities, such as raising her children, are portrayed as significant on *Roseanne*. adding an important dimension to the public/private issue. The program presents the private, home-based, sphere as one of importance.

Thus, while Roseanne functions primarily in the home and Murphy in her work environment, neither program belittles women in opposite situations. There is no denigration of homemaking or child care in *Murphy Brown*. As a matter of fact, when one sees the otherwise competent Murphy struggling to care for her child, the difficulty of
motherhood is emphasized but not glamorized or idealized. And although Roseanne clearly would prefer to stay home, women with careers are not put down or accused of neglecting their children, or of being the cause of societal woes and the downfall of western civilization, on the program.

Problems are depicted as individual rather than societal in origin. This reflects the value placed on individualism in American society and obscures, leaving unchallenged, the structural nature of these problems. Many situations depicted as individual problems in the analysis of Hypothesis One are now viewed within their larger socio-historical context. Situations depicted in the programs as individual problems usually are solved by inventive individual actions by leading characters. Murphy's child care, Roseanne's time demands as a working parent, Becky's harassment on the job, and Roseanne's mother's move to a senior community are depicted as individual issues that are resolved by resourceful individuals. The personal issues of Dan's unemployment, the lack of college funds for Becky, Miles' heart attack, the alcohol problem of Murphy's replacement, and Roseanne's compulsive gambling are not depicted within the larger social structure of job stress and increasing economic instability. Upon closer examination the individual problems of Dan losing his bike shop and Roseanne's firing at Rodbell's can be viewed as the result of the negative economic climate of the fictional town of Lanford, rather than personal limitations. However, within the context of the program it is clearly presented as a personal, not societal problem. "I want my daughter back ... I want things back the way they were before I screwed everything up," Dan proclaimed in the depths of despair during the opening episode of the Fall 1992 season.

Two exceptions to the presentation of problems as individual were found in Murphy Brown, largely due to actual historical events that took place within the research time period. The first was the issue of Murphy's single parenthood, which became a larger issue when she was attacked by the vice president. In her fictional defense, she spotlighted the problem of blaming individuals for social problems: "In searching for the causes of our
social ills, we could choose to blame the media, or the congress, or an administration that's been in power for twelve years, or we could blame me." The second came when Murphy had to testify before a senate committee. She perceived her harassment to reveal a news-source to be part of the wider issue of journalistic first amendment rights. However, that situation could be widened out even further, to examine the issue of the public's right to know versus the government's right to hide information when it might be doing something wrong. This could lead to a challenge of the absolute power of government often assumed to be natural in our society. The sitcom *Murphy Brown* does not take the issue that far, although the public might have been more receptive given the outraged reaction to the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings which the program was mimicking.

Murphy's problem of balancing career and her baby are presented as personal, individual problems, just as Nona Glazer's (1980) study of *Working Woman Magazine* found women's "double day" to be portrayed as a personal problem. The solutions suggested in the magazine were individualistic; work harder, be assertive, manage time better, delegate chores to other family members or hire help. Murphy's problem to some extent is shared, as viewers saw in the baby shower episode, by the exclusive sorority of other famous anchorwomen/moms. The episode that depicted Maria Shriver stealing Murphy's nanny, reflected the old, negative, stereotypical theme of competition between women, in this case over a child care worker rather than a man. However, the need of working mothers for adequate child care is never portrayed as a social problem. The work/family dichotomy Roseanne faces can seemingly be solved by a more sharing family, but ultimately Roseanne must work harder and accept the artificial dichotomy and resulting conflict as an "unchallenged" given. She wisecracks about "hiring help", an impossible concept for a working-class woman. Grossberg and Treichler contend "unlike other media, television creates and sustains its own world, a world that is comparable to (and even substitutable for) our own lived reality" (1987, p.279). In the world of television this "reality" pinpoints some serious social issues as mere personal problems. Broader
social issues, such as the impact of the economy on Roseanne and the two situations cited above on Murphy Brown have been featured intermittently in both programs. However, to a large extent the male-dominated political status quo is unchallenged in these programs by masquerading structural social problems as personal issues.

Physical characteristics and appearance were analyzed at the individual level in Hypothesis One. At the discursive level we examined the ideological basis for cultural interpretations of these characteristics, such as the belief that fat is undesirable and equates with personal characteristics such as sloppiness and laziness: "the body is as much a political metaphor for womanhood in patriarchy as it is for the individual in capitalism and in both cases it works as a naturalizing agent for the dominant ideology ... the naturalness of the body masks the socio-political construction of character, of womanhood ... The body is political, not natural, despite powerful attempts by our ideology to naturalize and depoliticize it" (Fiske 1987, p.418). The issue of appearance is an area where class and gender intersect and relate to power (Grossberg and Treichler 1987; Williamson 1978). We live in a society where much is judged and evaluated on appearance, and if this approach was not created by television, it is strongly reinforced by it.

These programs reveal, each in their own way, that women have much more stringent controls over their appearance in the workplace. Murphy's network contract has an appearance clause. This issue was based on real-life incidents when networks were sent into a frenzy when Jane Pauley at NBC and Diane Sawyer at ABC changed their hair. No mention is made in Murphy Brown of whether Jim Dyal or Frank Fontana have appearance clauses in their contracts. One cannot imagine the FYI network upset with their decisions to get haircuts, within a certain range of acceptability. In that Murphy Brown episode a fictional network executive told Murphy, "let's face it, the news is ugly, we need attractive people reading the news." This leads to the question of whether the older Jim Dyal or the balding Frank Fontana are subjected to the same appearance criteria as women broadcast journalists. For decades male newscasters have been allowed to age gracefully on
television from "uncle" Walter Cronkite, to David Brinkley and Eric Severeid, among others, who have maintained on-camera careers into their sixties and even seventies. Older women journalists with gray hair are noticeably absent. At the working-class level, Roseanne has been depicted wearing a "humpty-dumpty" uniform at Rodbell's and has had to wear uniforms in nearly all her jobs.

Appearance can be seen as an economic and political issue when placed within the current socio-historical context. The media enhanced concentration on looking perfect has led thousands of young girls into diseases such as anorexia and bulimia. It has also had an impact on the entertainment industry, killing singer Karen Carpenter. More recently, Tracy Gold, the young actress on Growing Pains from 1985-1992 was suspended from the program when her weight dropped to 80 pounds. The culturally constructed perception of perfection as thin has helped create the five billion dollar weight loss industry. These businesses advertise extensively on television and in women's magazines, providing a major source of income for media corporations. On March 25, 1993 the Federal Trade commission announced an investigation of more than a dozen weight-loss companies for false and misleading advertising including such famous firms as, Nutri/System, Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers.

In the early 1990s, the fashion industry announced the return of the emaciated-looking model Twiggy, who set fashion and weight trends in the 1960s. A model is defined as "a person or thing considered as a standard of excellence to be imitated" according to Webster's New World Dictionary Second College Edition. Clothing designers admit that their expensive fashions look better on tall, thin models, even on hangers, than they do on most women. Yet, their fashion shows are nonetheless depicted as the ultimate in clothing styles.

At the same time, the television industry also works in contrary fashion to the diet industry by advertising a large array of fattening food products. Attractive, thin actors and actresses are depicted scarfing down high-fat, fast foods and snack items which go with
their fast-track lifestyle. Consumer desire is created for the food items and when viewers gain weight eating these items they must spend more money to lose the weight they gain in order to achieve the constructed appearance ideal depicted on television, in movies and magazines. The multi-billion dollar coffers of both industries are enhanced with a third industry, television, taking its own large share of the profits.

Murphy Brown fits this appearance ideal but Roseanne Conner does not. Murphy, to some degree, has to fit the image because of a clause in her work-contract covering such world-shattering issues as the length of her hair. She would not have been hired initially as a broadcast journalist if she hadn't met appearance criteria. Usually Roseanne is not ridiculed for her weight, the exception comes when she enters the public sphere. In an episode where a television commercial involving her family was being shot, she was replaced by Jackie when the director said: "let's keep the nicer, thinner mom."

In contemporary society it seems that equality of gender appearance definitions and requirements is not being achieved by removing such definitions for women but rather by subjecting men to similar superficial standards of judgment. This can be seen in increasing numbers of men seek liposuction, plastic surgery, hair transplants and signing up by the millions at health clubs and for diet programs. Thus in considering appearance standards, Roseanne and Murphy Brown represent progress only in relation to the issue of a new acceptance of older women, since both lead characters are in their forties. The programs themselves have not concentrated on the expansion of such standards to men, although characters such as Frank Fontana are shown expressing concern over appearance-related issues. At the same time, commercials and the general body of television programming is moving in that direction. The compensation seems to be to allow men to also exhibit neurotic tendencies long associated with women: "once upon a time, the only people on TV who agonized over bad relationships and bad hair were women. Now, men grope in the worry world" (*TV Guide* February 8, 1992, p.6). This does not represent a new freedom from stereotypes, instead it suggests the pseudo-equality of the enslavement of both
genders in artificially constructed appearance standards that, in turn, generate billions of dollars in profit for the weight-loss, food, and television industries.

Several other issues have been analyzed discursively in relation to Hypothesis Three, in order to determine whether the programs support or challenge the status quo of gender discrimination at the latent level. These issues are derived from recent research on prime-time programs such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, I Love Lucy,* and *thirtysomething,* as well as some early commentaries on *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown."

Female characters have been depicted as **competitive as opposed to cooperative and friendly** to other women. The media-depicted fierce competition among women, ultimately for men, is well-documented (McRobbie 1982; Byars 1987). Women competing with other women is as much a part of television and film history as the portrayal of women as victims. Situations even remotely approximating the highly-rated, vicious physical battle between Crystal and Alexis on *Dynasty* or women's competition for men reaching the murderous stage depicted in the hit movies *Fatal Attraction* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,* were not found in *Roseanne* or *Murphy Brown.* The only competition portrayed in either program was job-related, such as Murphy's initially competitive attitude towards a female Soviet journalist, and toward her replacement during her maternity leave. What was assumed by other characters to be a competitive situation ended with Murphy helping a fellow female journalist with a serious alcohol problem, demonstrating a fellowship of two colleagues who "know how hard it is to be a woman in this business." Roseanne competed with a co-worker, Bonnie, to succeed her boss, Leon, at Rodbell's. On the other hand, several examples of female cooperation were found in *Murphy Brown,* including the conclusions of both above mentioned episodes. Most of the relationships demonstrated in *Roseanne* were female-female the majority of which involved friendship and cooperation. Many strong examples of positive feminine discourse were found in both programs: on *Roseanne,* Jackie and Roseanne are close friends as well as being sisters; Jackie defends Darlene to her mother; and Roseanne is quick to defend
Nancy when Arnie returns. On *Murphy Brown* Murphy's close relationship with her mother; Corky's desire to give Murphy a great baby shower; and Corky's rush to aid Doris when she and Jim are arguing are a few examples.

According to prior research, acts of independence by female characters were often punished. In the early days of television, programs like *I Love Lucy* were built around Lucy's comical striving for some form of independence, usually portrayed as directly disobeying an order from her husband, Desi. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has been similarly accused: "the series consistently and systematically repressed women, in the form of Mary Richards[,] so that any 'independence' on her part is punished by the end of the episode, much like the 'independent' acts of Lucy Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*" (Byars 1987, p.294). The treatment, and punishment, of acts of independence on the part of Murphy and Roseanne, as well as of other female characters, was not found in *Murphy Brown* or *Roseanne* except in one instance. That involved Murphy's bumbling attempt to help Phil by loaning him money to relieve his financial problems. The tone of that episode, however, was not reflective of Murphy's overall representation in the five-year series. Overall both Roseanne and Murphy are depicted as strong independent characters. They make mistakes but for the most part their decisions are correct for them.

Other research suggests that single television characters are treated as children. In her best selling book, *Backlash*, Susan Faludi traces the dismal treatment of single women television characters who, she contends, reflect two stock types: "the coldly calculating careerist or the deeply depressed spinster" (1992, p.159). She cites *thirtysomething* as a series of cautionary tales "aimed exclusively at women" (Faludi 1992, p.160). In another analysis of *thirtysomething*, Loeb contends that marriage is depicted as the correct alternative or "natural" state. While television is "continually updating shifts in the socioeconomic structure ... at the core, fictional programming remains fairly stable and conservative. Ultimately, support and affirmation are given to traditional views of family, patriarchy, gender roles, and other values and definitions held by the dominant ideology"
(Loeb 1990, p.249). She found two major sets of relationships operating to preserve traditional values in *thirtysomething*; "married characters function as parental figures to the unmarried (child) characters, thus reaffirming the traditional lifestyle of marriage and parenthood as the only route to adulthood and self-actualization" (Loeb 1990, p.250).

The single characters in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, Roseanne's sister Jackie, Murphy, Miles, Frank and Eldin were not treated as any more childlike in comparison with the married characters. This research found that much of the humor from both programs involved depicting nearly every character as exhibiting childlike tendencies. In a related area, the female characters were not found to be represented as children any more than the male characters. If found, this could have reinforced a second-class status of childlike and emotional women in comparison with more rational and goal oriented men. Even the treatment of Murphy's pregnancy as a disease both physically and emotionally unbalancing was no more serious than the treatment of Frank, Miles and Jim as neurotic. The married state was not presented as being any more ideal than the single status. And both programs offered strong challenges to stereotypical definitions of the "normal" family.

**The heavy personal costs for women of professional success** have long been depicted in movies and television programs. In the early episodes of the program, Murphy is criticized by Dow because her success "is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness" (1990, p.271) and by Feuer as "the fruition of the middle-class women's movement: tough, successful, and alone as she approaches middle age" (1992, p.156). While Dow and Feuer might have perceived that Murphy had difficult relationships and viewed her being alone as a negative in the early days of the sitcom, the message seems to have changed as the series develops. Subcultural interpretations might not find being alone to be the worst alternative; Murphy has economic independence, a rewarding career and a good life. While being without a man has long been presented to women as equivalent to life disaster, the female professional with a personally and economically rewarding career may have a different definition of "lonely" or
"disaster". The fact that Murphy also has a son and a strong support network of colleagues has been emphasized in more recent episodes of the program.

In contrast to Dow and Feuer's claims, after five seasons *Murphy Brown* is itself being offered as a real-life problem solver for career women, as we shall see in the syndicated radio ads discussed below. *Murphy Brown* also offered a disturbed nation an alternative interpretation of the Clarence Thomas hearings that featured what many found to be a more positive outcome. While she has been described in TV Guide as "an acerbic newscaster who can't even maintain a steady relationship with a secretary," Murphy's depiction within the context of the program is much more positive.

While Roseanne has not exactly enjoyed professional success, she is depicted as a competent woman with some conflicts between her duties as wife and mother and her job schedule. *Roseanne* has raised and dealt with an increasingly serious set of social situations, alternative sexuality, the crushing personal impact of current economic problems, a widening of the definition of "family values", a re-examination of what constitutes a normal family, and a presentation of feminine discourse. These topics are not dealt with, or even recognized as valid, on most popular prime-time programs. In this sense, these programs have the additional advantage of providing a format and a forum in which to examine serious social issues.

Two other important issues must be examined: intertextuality and the variety of potential viewer interpretations. By definition, discursive analysis involves an intertextual approach. "Because of their incompleteness, all popular texts have leaky boundaries; they flow into each other, they flow into everyday life. Distinctions among texts are as invalid as the distinctions between text and life." (Fiske, 1989, p.126). The interpretation or "reading" of the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown is a culturally determined activity which involves placing the programs within the viewers' social and historical context. Publicity about television programs and their stars (actors) in *TV Guide, USA Today, People Magazine, Variety*, and *Entertainment Tonight* suggest
how to interpret the program or text.

There has been an avalanche of publicity about the top-rated sitcoms and the personal lives of Roseanne Barr and Candice Bergen outside their programs. Roseanne Arnold and Sara Gilbert, the actress who plays Darlene, both had nose jobs, performed by the same surgeon, during the summer hiatus in 1992. Roseanne's husband and executive producer of Roseanne, Tom Arnold, was quoted in USA Today as saying, "they both looked good before; they look a little less Jewish today" (August 5, 1992, p.1D).

The Dan Quayle/Murphy Brown brouhaha most radically exemplifies Kristeva's concept of intertextuality where the lines between fictional television programs, a Republican party platform, and the Vice President of the United States are non-existent. The controversy ended with the Vice President taping promotional ads for Murphy Brown syndicated reruns in Los Angeles and sending the fictional child a present to celebrate its televised fictional birth. This exhibits an overwhelming argument for the influence of television on peoples' lives. Many can no longer tell the difference between fictional characters and people they know. Fans have admitted feeling closer to their soap characters than their families. This represents a form of alienation to an incredible degree.

Ultimately, television is a business. Thus the outcome of the Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown situation, in industry terms, is measured in dollars. At the time Quayle voiced his criticism in May 1992, thirty second commercials on Murphy Brown cost approximately $145,000. These costs more than doubled to $310,000 for the same spot, "the highest ad rates of any series on TV," (Time Magazine Sept 21, 1992), four months later, when the new season began in September, 1992. During that fall season, Dan Quayle lost his reelection bid and became a former vice-president.

When the scope of this analysis is shifted to the discursive level we observe that the program itself is offered as a real-life problem solver. Radio ads for syndicated re-runs of Murphy Brown were sent to all stations that had purchased the syndication rights from Warner Brothers Domestic Television Distribution. The script for this commercial came in
thirty second and one minute formats. The following is the thirty second format:

Radio Spot Script :30 "What Would Murphy Do?"

Woman: First I ask my secretary to type a report and she says no it'll wreck her manicure. Then my boss turns down my raise, and that night my boyfriend hands me his dirty laundry and says "What's for dinner?"
So I asked myself, "What would Murphy Brown do?"
So I tell my secretary to cut her nails or I will, told my boss where to stick his bad toupee, then served my boyfriend dirty sweat socks au gratin.
Hmm mmm, Murphy would be proud.

Announcer: Change your life with more Murphy, more often. Murphy Brown.

Thus, Murphy Brown, a television program, is being offered as a way for viewers to model their lives, as a form of empowerment. A deeper analysis of this role-model ad, however, reveals some problems. The woman is still serving dinner, albeit a sarcastic blend of laundry and cheese. She still doesn't get her raise and a man is still her boss, unless he fires her for the 'toupee' remark. The only person the woman has control over is the female secretary with long nails. This is an example of a situation discussed in the analysis of Hypothesis One, the difference between verbal aggression and assertiveness. The message of Murphy Brown is being bastardized into verbal flippancy.

Audience interpretation or "reading" of the characters Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown would be viewed by structuralists and semioticians as a culturally determined activity that must be situated within the viewers' social and historical context. Bennett's concept of "parallel texts" points out how publicity about television programs and their stars (actors) in TV Guide, USA Today, People Magazine, Variety, and Entertainment Tonight suggest "an appropriate framework of ideological and cultural reference" (1983, p.213). They tell us how to interpret the program or text. However, viewers make their own decisions and the text leaves gaps for interpretation, intended or not. Questions about the production and use of these television representations "clearly move us beyond an
account which identifies and assumes gender as already and necessarily constituted" (Grossberg and Treichler 1987), justifying the need for the present research project, with its focus on class differences in gender construction and interpretation of television gender representations.

Discursive analysis also includes a consideration of the variety of possible viewer interpretations. *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* have the largest audiences among situation comedies on television. We can draw some inferences about what these programs provide for the twenty to thirty million viewers who tune in to each weekly episode, and what makes these characters likeable to various demographic groups, through analysis of Nielsen demographic data. This analysis revealed several differences between the *Roseanne* audience and the *Murphy Brown* audience. The *Roseanne* audience tends to be younger, represents a larger family size, and has a lower educational level. Conversely, *Murphy Brown* viewers tend to live in smaller, one or two person households, to be college educated, and older. *Murphy Brown*’s producer, Diane English acknowledged that a dedicated portion of the audience is independent, single, childless working women. Many of those viewers let her know that they were very upset with the decision that Murphy would have a child. English responded to their accusations of betrayal in the following fashion: "mostly the protest we got was from our very loyal following of independent, single, childless working women who felt we sold out and sacrificed the character to a formula every other show is doing. I wrote back personally to a lot of people who wrote intelligent letters." *(USA Today* May 22, 1992) 

Another interesting interpretive issue is that of subcultural interpretations. Despite the fact that most communications analysts and media sociologists have dismissed mass society or hegemony theories, these theories have not disappeared altogether. Gibbs criticizes Susan Faludi’s best-selling book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, for its adoption of hegemony theory "because it treats women as victims, passively accepting what the culture imposes on them" (1992, p.54).
The rejection of "preferred" readings suggested by mass society theories is explained by Grossberg and Treichler who recognize that "viewers appear to construct their own personal, social and subjective readings" (1987, p. 282). A prominent example can be seen where sociologists, feminists, and communications researchers criticized *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as anti-feminist, citing consistent pattern of examples of "systematically repressed women, in the form of Mary Richards." However, "a member of the audience passionately countered this reading, arguing that the character Mary had meant a great deal to her, and to other women; she had represented for them 'independence' and had allowed them to think that freedom; she had inspired them" (Byars 1987, p.294).

Similarly, Feuer criticizes *Murphy Brown* as an endorsement of the post-feminist era: "Murphy represents the fruition of the middle-class women's movement: tough, successful, and alone as she approaches middle age" (1992, p.156). Viewer subcultural interpretations might not find that to be the worst alternative, since Murphy has economic independence, a rewarding career and a good life. Man-lessness to the female professional may no longer be equated with life disaster. And with her son, her colleagues and friends, she is certainly not alone. Murphy seems to be an embodiment of Gloria Steinem's statement that professional women have become the men they once aspired to marry.

An alternative approach is to examine some of the various ways audiences may interpret *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* - the multitude of possible interpretations and personalized meanings. Byars calls for the search for alternative or feminine discourse, citing the example of a "real picture of female friendship" in *Cagney and Lacey* and charging that "ignoring feminine discourse already at work in mainstream texts grossly underestimates the complexity of these texts and their role in the ideological process" (1987, p.302). She calls for analysis to "identify and to use to our advantage discourses different from - and perhaps true alternatives to - the discourses that overwhelmingly reinforce the configuration of ideologies now - but perhaps not forever - dominant" (Byars 1987, p.302). Calling prime-time network television programming "the bastion, we might
suppose, of dominant ideologies," Byars nonetheless, finds signs of strong feminine
discourses at work and argues that television presents a discursive system open to varying
interpretation. Marcuse would cite feminine discourse as a form of alternative thought,
Foucault would call it the "other." The lack of feminine discourse would be an example of
Macherey's concept of "silence", an alternative position implicit in the text which is never
actually considered or discussed.

This research found numerous instances of feminine discourse in both programs
and that it served as the dominant format on Roseanne. Also, true female friendship and a
spirit of cooperation has built steadily over the five-year course of Murphy Brown between
Murphy and her mother, Murphy and Corky, and Murphy and other female journalists.

Another example of important feminine discourse was cited by writer Barbara
Ehrenreich. She praised Roseanne for helping to add a new class dimension to feminism by
incorporating it into the family setting. "Roseanne gave working-class feminism a face.
The typical image of a feminist in the media has been the Murphy Brown type - the very
successful, very slender, very perfectly organized professional woman. And we didn't
have a media image of another kind of feminist who, obviously, is not slender or
successful or organized" (Time Magazine March 9, 1992, p.53). The focus on economic
situations in a struggling blue-collar family in Roseanne is deliberate. The executive
producer of Roseanne, Tom Arnold, was quoted in USA Today as fully recognizing that
having the Conner family struggle financially reflects, "how bad it is for a lot of people.
We're trying to have them living the way a lot of families are living right now" (August 5,
1992, p.1D). His wife, actress and producer Roseanne Arnold thinks the blue-collar image
has cost the top-rated program Emmy nominations, "They have that snobbish thing about
shows about blue-collar people. America is a class divided society. It's like India."

A TV Guide article previewing the Emmy Awards described Roseanne's bitterness
that the nation's top-rated sitcom had not, in its five seasons, been nominated as
Outstanding Comedy Series: "They are stupid. There is no other reason. They don't get
what the most-watched show in America is about" (Weiner 1992, pp.6-9). In contrast, *Murphy Brown* was nominated in nine categories in 1992, and Candice Bergen won Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series in 1989, 1990 and 1992. One commentator noted that Roseanne contemplated what she should wear to the Emmy ceremony where she was about to lose to Bergen: "She will be wearing her new nose, but the rest is still in doubt as Roseanne Arnold ponders how she ought to look - brassy or classy? - when she finally makes an entrance at the Emmy Awards ceremony. She has been thinking of something shockingly Cher-like, some skimpy confection of feathers and faith that would flaunt the rose tattooed on her breast in the appalled faces of the elitists who have ignored her work all these years, but now she isn't so sure. She's wrestling with slippery questions of identity and image. Perhaps demure and dignified would be more sensational" (Weiner 1992, pp.6-9).

In Fall 1992, *The Jackie Thomas Show*, produced by the Arnolds and starring Roseanne's husband Tom Arnold, premiered in the coveted time slot immediately after *Roseanne*. Roseanne and Tom Arnold were not hesitant to admit that she used her considerable clout with ABC, "Hey, I didn't have to hold a gun to anybody's head. I'm too powerful," she said. One of the on-air promotions for the program featured Tom Arnold alluding to the fact that people were saying he was just riding his wife's coattails, "So what if I am?" he shrugged into the camera. The program premiered as the highest rated premier in years, then the ratings steadily dropped over the following weeks. Roseanne sent scathing letters to media critics Howard Rosenberg of the *Los Angeles Times*, Ray Richmond of the *Los Angeles Daily News* and Matt Roush of *USA Today* who had panned the program. "These people never talk about the work, but about me, my weight, my marriage," she told the *Los Angeles Times*. By March 1993, *The Jackie Thomas Show* was on "hiatus". USA Today television reviewer Matt Roush called *Murphy Brown*, "the classiest of all current sitcoms" and the 1991-1992 season a "landmark season" for the program. Far less was written on Candice Bergen's lower
profile, and less controversial personal life.

Another possible message in Roseanne is geared towards teenagers. Darlene is a very strong character. She exemplifies a female teen who is not defined by her interpersonal relationships. And she is very responsible. When the lights went out in the Conner house, due to non-payment of the electricity bill, Darlene and David were in her room. He pressured her to have sex, complaining that other couples had been dating for less time and were "doing more." Darlene, however, makes her own decision and it is not based on others' actions or opinions. When Roseanne discovered that David had spent the night, she wanted to take Darlene to a gynecologist for birth control pills. Darlene explained that she didn't have sex because she wasn't ready. Darlene and David had a relationship built on friendship and the task-oriented goal of creating comic books although they also consummated their relationship by the end of Roseanne's fifth season before Darlene left for school in Chicago.

Both programs have also been platforms for other forms of alternative thought. Murphy Brown challenged the sexual harassment of the Senate committee and she challenged the narrow, right-wing definition of the family unit. The program also introduced the concept that certain forms of gender limitations work to exclude men from such female-defined roles as participating in a friend's baby shower and that men are not interested in, or good at, child care. Finally, both programs have dealt with the issue of homosexuality in a non-exploitive, non-judgmental manner.

Since discursive analysis includes a consideration of the variety of possible viewer interpretations, it raises the issue of vicarious fulfillment and its relation to the ideological implications of the sources of viewers' pleasure. Roseanne and Murphy Brown have the largest audiences of any sitcom on television. What do these programs provide for the more than twenty million viewers who tune in to each weekly episode?

Perhaps one explanation can be found in the way in which Roseanne exposes and deals with important social issues. The need for adequate senior care is a predicament
many people find themselves facing. Even though Roseanne's mother is healthy and has
the financial resources to make decisions, the situation is still fraught with emotion.
Roseanne has a difficult time with her own mortality and aging when faced with the
circumstance of her mother's choice of a place where she buys an apartment which
automatically is no longer hers when she gets sick. She told Jackie: "that would be the last
place mom would ever live. That's the place we'd have to go to get her stuff after she
dies." Roseanne feels her own life is passing too quickly: "I'm forty Jackie. This is all
just going way too fast. How long till I'm shuffling towards that medical alert button?"
Roseanne dealt with this important social issue in a non-preachy, non-threatening way that
created recognition and understanding.

There are at least two possible interpretations of the episode in which a Canadian
journalist, Hillary Wheaton, arrived to replace Murphy while she was on maternity leave,
first aired on May 4, 1992. On the negative side, two successful career women had let
their careers drive them to alcohol and had lost their memories; one from booze the other
from pregnancy.

Hillary: Who am I interviewing?
Murphy: The Secretary of Defense?
Hillary: What's his name?

Murphy can't remember either. She's forgotten the names of prior guests due to
her pregnancy. One could conclude that the cost of professional success for a woman is
alcoholism and memory loss. However, there is another message offered, the comraderie
that two women feel for each other having shared the sometimes lonely battle for the top of
their profession. Murphy and Hillary share a sisterhood as strong as the brotherhood men
feel who have fought together in a war. Both situations are created by societal factors
outside the control of the individuals involved.

The character Murphy is aware that she is a role model for FYI viewers, just as the
character in *Murphy Brown* provides a role model for many viewers. In an episode in which the *National Tattler* is writing untrue stories about Murphy, some harmless fun at Phil's bar is misinterpreted as Murphy falling off the wagon: "I've struggled for three years to stay sober. I'm an example to millions of people and now these vultures write that I downed drink after drink. It was club soda." Later in the episode Murphy was frustrated that she couldn't find the source of the untrue stories about her, "I can crack the KGB like a walnut, but I can't find the rat who's making my life miserable in my own back yard."

When Murphy faced the Senate subcommittee, she was much calmer and in control than her male colleagues. She showed personal courage in confronting the powerful senators with a strong verbal and substantive challenge. The empowerment of Murphy seemed to restore a feeling of equality and balance in the wake of the unbalanced aura surrounding the Anita Hill testimony at the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings.

Another message about a less restrictive range of options for women is offered in the sample episode in which Murphy purchased a rural farm. The question that she could not do it because she was a single or pregnant woman was never raised. It would certainly have been an issue in many other television programs. A change in female lead characters' demeanor and attitude is also reflected in these two programs. "Nice and sweet are out," *Murphy* producer Diane English stated. "TV's new women aren't trying to please other people. Saying what's on your mind is in. Not being afraid of what people think of you is in. You have to have edges to work today" (Waters and Huck 1989, p.49).

These programs are entertaining, they must give some form of pleasure to viewers in order to create loyal audiences. One aspect of this pleasure could possibly come from vicarious fulfillment, two female role models representing empowerment in contrast to what viewers see as their own powerless lives. These sitcoms may also represent a form of controlled problem solving in thirty minutes that is neat, easy and amusing. This controlled situation contrasts sharply with most viewers lives, that are often difficult and seldom so amusing. Things that happen to the characters and make viewers laugh would
probably not be funny if they happened to them: "Popular texts must offer popular meanings and pleasures - popular meanings are constructed out of the relevances between the text and everyday life, popular pleasures derive from the production of these meanings by the people, from the power to produce them. There is little pleasure in accepting ready-made meanings, however pertinent. The pleasure derives both from the power and process of making meanings out of their resources and from the sense that these meanings are ours as opposed to theirs" (Fiske 1989, p.126).

The creation of meanings is possible at many levels. *Murphy Brown* appears to send a dual message. The first is to professional women. Murphy doesn't need (or want) a man, so if the cost of their career is the loss of a private life, they're not alone. Conversely a message potentially sent to working-class women is that education, being beautiful, and having designer clothes does not equal a perfect life- so if they aren't beautiful, or well-educated, or don't have designer clothes, they should be content if they have a personal life. In five years Murphy had at least two romantic relationships: one with talk show host Jerry Gold, despite professional differences, and the other with her ex-husband, Jake Lowenstein.

Murphy is not lesbian and she is not asexual, it just seems that in the ongoing basis of her daily life she has little time for such relationships. Again, viewer interpretations might not find being alone to be the worst alternative, Murphy has economic independence, a rewarding career and a good life, although life without a mate has long been presented to women as equivalent to disaster. The female professional with a personally and economically rewarding career may have a different definition of "lonely" or "disaster". At the same time, statistically, women are in the most danger in their own homes from domestic violence. These shows also send a negative message to career women. In letting them know that the sacrifices they make are not unique, it also presents the situation as "normal", and implicitly defends the status quo which make it necessary for career women to make these sacrifices in their personal lives to a much greater degree than their male
counterparts. It also leaves unquestioned that some women's work is more financially valued than others who work just as hard, i.e., it reinforces status and pay inequities.

Even on *Roseanne*, where Jackie's search for a husband seems to have an economic dimension, she has moments where her single state has positive aspects. In the Thanksgiving 1991 episode, Jackie told her visiting mother, "I don't have a boyfriend now because I'm feeling independent and secure." Presentation of the single state as a viable alternative for women is a new form of alternative thought for television where "only a small portion of female principals were allowed to appear as divorced or otherwise unconcerned about relationships" (Atkin 1991, p. 522).

In order to be entertaining, *Roseanne* never glosses over or glamorizes the problems of a working-class existence in contemporary society. Signs of political class consciousness were reflected in a first season episode. The women at Wellman Plastics were on break and one complained that there were no paper towels. Roseanne responded, "they divert our attention with the small stuff like no paper towels to divert us from the big stuff."

The discursive analysis of *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* has revealed several factors to support the thesis that the programs present women who are not limited by gender stereotypes. The ultimate definition of Roseanne Conner or Murphy Brown does not come from either's gender or sphere of activity. These two dynamic women characters appear to be valued for themselves. One exception seemed to be found when we looked at career-woman Murphy's treatment as less sane and career competent when in the womanly state of pregnancy. This approach seemed to cross class lines and be rooted in gender, since Crystal's pregnancy with Dan's father's child was also played for laughs as an unbalanced condition. However, men are also treated as neurotic or unbalanced in both programs.

Another gender-based difference which crossed class lines was the emphasis on female appearance. In both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* women employees seem to
have, as part of their work contracts, various forms of appearance clauses. This is reflected in real life. In 1993, women employees of the Nevada State Legislature were still banned, by law, from wearing slacks to work. Age is another work-related, appearance-related, issue for women, especially for women on television. In several episodes, age was a limitation mentioned in Roseanne's job searches. Age is becoming a job-related issue for men also. This eliminates the charge of gender bias but the question arises, whether discrimination against both genders based on age is truly equality?

While the issues of appearance and age crossed class lines, and are now becoming an issue for men as well as women, another silence or unexplored alternative is the consideration of a structural challenge to the standard that calls for judging individuals on the basis of age or appearance. Also, strong support of the status quo was found in the near universal definition of problems as individual leaving no room to challenge their structural nature. However, neither of these structural problems was treated differently by gender thus no sex-role stereotyping was found.

In summary, this project began with the individualistic categories of character analysis and found Murphy Brown and Roseanne to be, in fact, non-stereotypical women, supporting Hypothesis One. Some gender distinctions were found to be based on their respective social classes, supporting Hypothesis Two which is not a positive finding. Discursive analysis placed these findings within the broader social context of the current socio-political historical setting, determining that, to a large degree, the manifest message of empowerment found in Hypothesis One and the less obvious message of class differentials in gender definition found in Hypothesis Two are not limited or undermined at the latent level for these two characters, except in the areas of appearance and the depiction of problems as personal rather than structural. This represents a challenge to Hypothesis Three when gender bias is the exclusive concern.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Grossberg and Treichler summarize the goal of this research project, which was designed to create a situation or format where "gender is examined not as an unproblematic given but as a socially and historically constructed category, produced in televisual texts through specific representations" (1987, p.273). A central concern has been the determination of whether the status quo of gender stereotypes is reinforced or reproduced by the ideological creation of structures of gender in Roseanne and Murphy Brown. When this project began, we acknowledged the possibility that many viewers might be drawn to these shows in order to see strong women challenge the status quo, but would then be given an artificial, substitute sort of pleasure that actually accommodates the status quo. This was found not to be so. The summary of prior research provided standards against which Murphy Brown and Roseanne were compared in order to determine whether these seemingly empowered women matched or challenged four previous decades of findings about women's stereotypical depiction on television. The answer, at the manifest level, was that in large part Murphy Brown and Roseanne defy prior gender stereotypes and present images of female empowerment, supporting Hypothesis One. The "real strong ladies," Roseanne and Murphy Brown, appear to oppose and expose the patriarchal status quo rather than reinforce it.

Support of Hypothesis Two, while predicted, cannot be interpreted as a positive finding in relation to the removal of gender stereotypes. The hypothesis was supported
when class differences in female gender construction were found in two areas: the subjectively defined desirability of single life and the relative acceptability of single motherhood. While many gender-based stereotypes are being challenged by these programs, class-based gender stereotypes are unfortunately still being reinforced.

At the discursive level, analysis of these programs challenged Hypothesis Three. No major indicators of a negative, latent-level undermining of the positive, non-stereotypical portrayal of Roseanne Conner or Murphy Brown was found. One difficulty was found in the continued emphasis on appearance, even though it was attacked with sarcasm in both programs. A positive aspect was spotlighted in the exposure of the existence of discrimination against women by including appearance clauses in their professional contracts and the exposure of unfair discrimination against Roseanne because of her weight. However, intertextually, the overwhelming television message to women, and now men, reinforces the importance of societally defined standards of appearance.

Another serious difficulty was found in that most problems are presented as personal rather than being reflective of societal problems, thus protecting the status quo by concealing the source of problems. This obfuscation is an example of what Foucault meant by excluding the other, Macherey meant by silences and what Marcuse described as a situation of one dimensionality that blocks out alternative thought.

*Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* are the product of female creators and women have primary say in the definition of their leading characters. Roseanne Barr Arnold has won several personal battles in the production of *Roseanne* and the definition of her character. The program is based upon the role Roseanne Barr created for herself as a stand-up comedienne. When the television program irritated the Hollywood establishment, she clashed with executive producer Matt Williams, whom she felt was stereotyping her character as a "sarcastic bitch." Arnold emerged from that battle victorious, Williams left the program, and she won complete control over all aspects of her role. Thus it is clear that the character Roseanne Conner is being defined by a woman. The co-creators and
executive producers of *Murphy Brown* for the first four seasons were Diane English and her husband Joel Shukovsky. English was the most visible partner in this process so the character Murphy Brown was primarily defined by a woman. This contextual point adds an important dimension to our discursive analysis. Claims cannot be made that the two popular characters, Roseanne and Murphy, are being defined directly by males, although that might still hold at the more general network or societal levels.

In the early episodes of both programs, Murphy was harsh and caustic, her stridency had an edge. Roseanne seemed to be mean-spirited, leaving one to wonder if the sarcastic wisecracks about her children and husband were more than jokes. Both seemed to be off-putting. In 1993, after five years, these characters appeared to have developed multi-dimensional personalities and they were depicted as leading multi-faceted lives. Murphy cares about her FYI colleagues and they care about her. Roseanne loves her family and they love and respect her. Both have very strong friendship and support networks based on respect and trust.

Like a friend one gets to know, viewers begin to understand why they react certain ways. In contemporary society, television characters have started to replace primary relationships for many people. The sitcoms and characters become friends, a vicarious extended family. According to recent studies, the thirty minutes a week viewers spend with these fictional characters may exceed the amount of time they spend communicating with spouses or children. Viewers know their programs and characters, they've gone through crises and joys and holiday seasons with them. Each of these programs has become a five-year constant in the lives of thirty million viewers.

There is a danger however, that in analyzing programs in the manner done here that the researcher does not truly understand the programs by lifting a few selected episodes and placing them under microscopic examination. That is why, throughout this project, the entire body of both programs has been heavily utilized for analysis. Another possible danger exists in making claims concerning ongoing programs that have experienced many
changes and may, in fact, change course in the future. Thus, it is clearly stated here that this research reflects only the first five years of each series, through the spring of 1993.

Overall however, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* seem to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Could this just be a minor societal adjustment to include working women who have been increasingly driven to the workplace out of necessity, not as an option, since 1973? Prior evidence of media redefinitions of gender to meet economic societal needs are found in the World War II case of Rosie the Riveter. "Certainly the propaganda campaign of World War II was the most comprehensive, well-organized effort this society has made toward ending prejudice against women in male occupations and toward legitimizing the notion that women belong in the paid labor force" (Honey 1984, 211). Are we perhaps witnessing another comprehensive, well organized re-definition of women due to external economic and societal changes?

Media critics offer extratextual commentary on women's progress in television:
"Look at it cynically, an attitude not entirely alien to video critics, and you might conclude that they've won only the most dubious of victories: the right to set their own standards of ineptitude, cowardice and everything shabby that most of television represents. But look at it literally, actually watch them in action, and you can't help detecting some glints of hope for us all" (Waters and Huck 1989, p.54). These critics cite *Murphy Brown* as the best example of changing stereotypes: "after setting out to integrate a men-only club for Washington journalists, after lying down in front of Morley Safer's car, after resorting to blatant extortion to get her foot in the door and after finally finding herself ostracized by the entire membership, Murphy wearily confides to a friend: 'sometimes I wonder about a person who gets into her 40s and she's still pushing her way into everything. I wonder whether everything is worth the fight.' Don't worry. Like the quarterback who's her idol, Murphy's just catching her wind before bouncing back up. After all, this woman belongs to a mighty tough club" (Waters and Huck 1989, p.54). In this context, Murphy and Roseanne seem light years away from Lucy Ricardo, who had to beg Ricky for $5, or the
Nelson family where Harriet implored Ozzie, "how can I get a permanent if you won't tell me whether you want me to or not?" or Mary Richards' continual crying on Lou Grant's shoulder, "Oh, Mister Grant!"

Although Roseanne and Murphy are not noted for the traditional feminine characteristics of fairness, sociability, peacefulness or even being open-minded, there is still something very likeable about both characters. Part of the clue to their audience drawing power was seen in episodes of each program aired on March 1 and 2, the week after the February 1993 ratings period.

Viewers saw Murphy struggling to do the best for her son, feeling guilty that she didn't have time to read him a story, and she could not find his favorite food at the store because it had been discontinued. Part of her problem was that she tried to deal with the baby and other aspects of her personal life in the same competent, organized way she approached her work. However, as Murphy was learning, total control is not possible with a baby. Her colleague and friend, Frank Fontana, was in therapy for his fear of commitment: "I've had the same therapist for three years, now that's a commitment." In a touching moment, Frank, who seems incapable of participating in a healthy relationship himself, explained to Murphy that spending time with her child was more important than consuming unnecessary time making the no longer available, favorite baby food from scratch, a project for which Murphy was ill-equipped. Yet, in this incident, viewers got a glimpse of how important her son is to her and how much she wants to do the best for him.

The *Roseanne* episode dealt with Darlene's boyfriend, David, and the problems he was having at home. Darlene asked if David could move in with the Conners since his parents were divorcing and his mother wanted to take him to Michigan with her. Roseanne and Dan said no. However, Roseanne visited David's mother, who is also the mother of Mark, who eloped with her older daughter, Becky. Roseanne merely wanted to warn the woman that David might be planning to run away. Yet, when David entered and Roseanne saw how badly the woman treated her son, she got angry and told David that he could live
with them. When Roseanne explained to Dan why she made the decision, and why he should agree, she said, "I grew up in a family like that," and Dan tenderly responded, "that bad, huh," and he understood the decision.

Viewers are presented with characters who seem to be real people struggling to make sense of a constantly changing world. Murphy has done everything she can to achieve the highest ranks in broadcast journalism but there have been personal costs. She has made it obvious that she has little time for dating games. But when she was suddenly confronted with her unplanned pregnancy, she made a thoughtful and responsible decision. The decision to keep the child might not have been the masculine, career-oriented option but it seemed to be the right choice for her. And she plans to make it work even though she seems to be ill-equipped to nurture.

Roseanne and Dan Conner are struggling financially. He alternates between being unemployed or scrounging part-time employment doing drywall, a job he hates. She is struggling with a new business. Dan lost his motorcycle shop, their eighteen year-old daughter Becky eloped for two economically-based reasons: Mark worked for Dan and lost his job when the shop closed, and the best offer he had was out of state. Becky was an excellent student but was crushed when she learned the Conner family had no college fund for her. Despite this constant financial instability, Roseanne and Dan saw a need and took in David.

These two female characters are non-stereotypical, having moved far beyond being caricatures, though they have class differences and are part of a television system that traditionally conveys negative, sexist messages. Overall, these are very likeable women when one comes to understand their struggle to survive and make sense of their confusing lives in confusing times. They don't always do the right things or make the right decisions but that, too, is part of their charm.

The two programs have exposed many important social issues. Roseanne has dealt with spousal abuse, the problem of aging parents, and economic hard times. Both
characters, Roseanne Conner and Murphy Brown, are survivors of dysfunctional families who are trying to make things better for their children. Beneath their tough exteriors Roseanne and Murphy are two decent women who reflect a strength that is admirable. Murphy satirized the Clarence Thomas hearings, but this time her Anita Hill character got to fight back and win. In a humorous manner, viewers saw that when an elderly woman came to FYI as an intern, the FYIers ageist feelings wouldn't let her fully participate and learn. They learned too late that the woman was extremely capable just as she was hired by a rival network news organization. Both programs have exposed the pain of divorce, the difficulties of family living, the problems of the single and married states and difficulties with relationships of all types, from friendship, to love relationships, to work relationships.

The message apparently projected in these programs is that it isn't a perfect world but people struggle to do their best. There are no critical messages here about changing the economic, social and political structures which create these situations. However, several instances of alternative thought are presented without being condemned. The expanding definition of families is routinely supported. When a character in Roseanne announced she was a lesbian, she was not condemned by her friends. The program presented the issue as their struggle to understand lesbianism, during which other characters offered unconditional friendship.

Many important social issues are isolated and treated as individual problems, however, these programs present crucial coping skills. It is easy for theorists to suggest the abstract ideal of structural societal change, yet most people live on a day-to-day basis of realistic coping and survival. In the Roseanne episodes about spousal abuse, it was made clear that women should not accept that type of treatment. The message was sent that Jackie must get out, despite her boyfriend's apologies, which are frequently part of the cycle of abuse. Roseanne is fortunate that her mother is healthy and can afford to make choices about where she will spend the remainder of her life. We see that part of the pain
of the process of dealing with aging parents is that their adult children must confront their own aging and mortality. We have also seen characters survive painful relationship problems. When Corky and Will divorced, Corky survived with a little help from her friends. Murphy, her son, and her painter have become a "typical American family."

Some very positive messages, some serious problems and some alternative thinking are presented through two very strong, very human, women. It is important to identify factors in society that create dysfunctional families, spousal abuse, unemployment, and the problems of aging. Yet, at the same time we must recognize that people's everyday lives are spent confronting these situations. Perhaps if two strong women lead characters in prime-time television offer some coping guidelines, with a dose of humor, and at the same time, expose viewers to alternative ways of thinking, they should not be condemned because they are not calling for major societal change. The fact is, they may open the door for some societal change at the level of everyday life.

This research project concluded on a positive level, supporting the apparent challenge to gender stereotypes described in forty years of television research. This challenge was found at both the manifest and latent levels. Variations in gender construction based on social class were supported, perhaps indicating that economics is the ultimate life predictor, even more important than gender.

There is the possibility, however, that this new view of women is as much a media creation designed to compensate for changes in the economic, political and social spheres as did the Rosie the Riveter campaign of World War II. During the course of this research, several societal changes have been noted. The first is a change in economic conditions, the disillusionment of millions of American workers who expected their jobs to create a form of security for them in their lives. The patriarchal ideal of the company town and the "company man" being taken care of, has vanished. A study of Kenosha, Wisconsin, reported by the Associated Press in April 1993, demonstrated that when a Chrysler plant cut back, the average income in the community dropped from $35,000 to $15,000. We
have also witnessed the recent resurgence of an army of part-time workers who toil without health, retirement or vacation benefits. Millions of middle-class workers laid off since the economic downturn of the late 1980s, many of them victims of corporate downsizing, have returned to the workforce at far lower salaries and benefits. They have moved from the middle-class to subsistence-level existence. Recent college graduates with their degrees and large student loans to be repaid are being forced to move back home and take any job they can get.

The previously dominant image of wives and mothers who stayed home and took care of the family home, husband and children has systematically been challenged since 1973 when economics began to dictate the need for two incomes for family survival. The "normal" family consisting of mom and dad and two children has been supplemented by millions of single parent families. 1990 Census figures show that one in every four families is headed by a single parent.

At the same time, two major social trends have emerged. First, demographic data show that women have become a much larger segment of network television, prime-time viewers as men move to cable channel viewership. "Market research reveals that women have become the principal purchasers of the products most advertised by prime-time sponsors" (Waters and Huck 1989, p. 48). Television programs have been developed to attract, and perhaps co-opt, that demographic group. Ratings dominance shows that Roseanne and Murphy Brown are successful examples of female-oriented shows being able to attract large network television viewing audiences. Second, male television characters are also suddenly subject to neuroses stereotypically associated with women characters: "once upon a time, the only people on TV who agonized over bad relationships and bad hair were women. Now, men grope in the worry world" (TV Guide February 8, 1992, p.6). Men are now not only invited to worry about bad hair, they are increasingly confronting appearance requirements which bring them into the multi-billion dollar world of cosmetics, plastic surgery, and dieting.
Fiske's observations about the characteristics depicted and analyzed in *Cagney & Lacey* parallel our comparisons of *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*: "What is striking about this list is the preponderance of traits that are not derived from the nature of the individual, but are social, political, or economic in origin" (1987, p.408). This raises the question of whether these television characters are merely social, political, or economic caricatures. If so, would a change in their depiction be reflective of changes in the social, political or economic structure? As we saw, television programs are developed largely to attract the increasingly desirable female demographic group. Their strong ratings indicate that *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* were the two most successful examples in 1992. Thus, Murphy and Roseanne may be seen as being cultural creations dictated by the economic structure.

Again, the question that arises here but has not been dealt with in this research, though it certainly should be in future projects, concerns the possibility that gender stereotypes are being redefined for economic and political reasons that have nothing to do with female empowerment or progressive status. This was previously reflected during World War II in definitions of Rosie the Riveter. The possibility of a repeat of this situation is raised by close examination of the appearance issue and the depiction of problems as personal rather than structural. In short, does the challenge of traditional stereotypes depicted in these programs represent a true challenge or a form of economic cooptation?

Given these economic and social trends, a certain cynicism creeps in to disturb the positive findings of this project. "Television is nothing but a game of three card monte designed to distract the natives while the country goes to hell. They don't care what they put on as long as it sells. They're greedy and I know, I've been one of them for decades," said character Gene Kansella, fictional Network Vice President of News on *Murphy Brown*. Knowledge of the dominant control of the broadcasting industry and its inseparable ties to related interests of the economic and political spheres provide but one
reason for a hesitancy to fully embrace the changes in gender depiction seen in *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*. The bottom line may be that the television industry and its advertisers are making money on these two programs. However, given viewers tendencies to challenge dominant media messages, even if the adjustments reflected in *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* are not intended to create permanent changes in gender definitions, they could, in fact, have that unintended effect. That could be the bottom line.

It is too early, and not the focus of this research to determine, whether, due to changes in the socioeconomic climate in which women are required to work, the definitions of gender are being functionally adjusted or if, in fact, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* truly represent challenges to existing gender definitions and stereotypes. This question, of course, raises the larger issue of the role of mass media like television in an advanced, some would say postmodern, society like the United States.

Postscript: An interesting shift began taking place in spring 1993 when two sitcoms featuring male characters began moving up the ratings. *Home Improvement* pushed *Murphy* to #4, taking the #3 spot for the season, and *Seinfeld*, in a new time slot after *Cheers* in that program's final season, began drawing larger audiences than *Murphy* in March. Roseanne Arnold is only contractually committed to *Roseanne* for one more season. Thus, the unique reign of the nation's two top-rated situation comedies featuring women characters may be coming to an end.
APPENDIX I

TV GUIDE PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS
JANUARY - DECEMBER 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murphy Brown</th>
<th>Roseanne</th>
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<td><strong>Jan 6.</strong>  Jim and Murphy compete to fill a part-time anchor slot, lowering themselves to a game of one-upsmanship that really rocks the &quot;FYI&quot; boat.</td>
<td><strong>Jan 7.</strong> A night out with the gals at a bingo parlor does such a number on Roseanne that she can think of nothing but winning. Guidelines: The spectacle of Roseanne sporting a beehive hairdo and horn-rimmed glasses signals her newly acquired addiction to bingo, prompted by a girls'-night out at church bingo.</td>
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**Ad:** Anchors away! Can FYI stay afloat with Murphy and Jim competing for the same job?  

**Jan 13.** When Corky is asked to a White House luncheon, Murphy, always hungry for a Presidential quote, sees her meal ticket and butters Corky up for an invitation.  

Guidelines: On a very funny MB episode, Murphy and Corky, a.k.a. "Thelma & Louise" visit the White House, and attract the attention of the Secret Service - again.

**Jan 20.** When Murphy is confined to the house for 2 weeks, Jerry moves in to help out, but cohabitation lowers the ceiling on their tolerance levels.

Guidelines: Murphy and Jerry Gold pick up right where they left off - at each others throats - as Jay Thomas returns to MB.

**Jan. 14.** - Repeat

**Jan 21.** The bowling alley frames a performance by Bonnie and Duke (rockers Bonnie Sheridan, David Crosby), plus problems between Roseanne and the gals, and Dan and Arnie.  

Guidelines: On R, scenes at a bowling alley feature veteran rocker David Crosby, and series regular BS (a former member of the group Delaney & Bonnie).

**Ratings:**  
**Feb. 3.** On Miles' 30th birthday, Murphy throws him a one-step-closer-to-death party,  

**Feb. 4.** After Roseanne throws her back out, Bev arrives to help out - and to
the theme of which he seems to take to heart as he has a stress-induced attack.

Guidelines: MB, cited as the # 1 cause of stress in Miles' life, doesn't exactly kill him with kindness after he keels over at his 30th birthday party, although she does try to teach him to let off some steam - by shopping.

Feb 10.   Winter Olympic Games
           ABC's Good Morning America
           broadcast from the set of Murphy B

Feb 17.   Winter Olympic Games

Feb 24.   Murphy appears before a Senate committee to defend her First Amendment rights, but she isn't left much freedom to speak once the politicians have their say. Guidelines: M Brown takes a satirical jab at the Thomas-Hill hearings as Murphy testifies before a Senate committee.

Mar 2.    Murphy takes the gang for a weekend visit to a farm she's considering buying, only to harvest a bumper crop of boredom after being cooped up with no modern conveniences.

Mar 4.    After ratings - out of regular time-slot. Miles loses sleep over a dream that features him help spoil the grandkids by offering to buy Becky a car and D.J. a Nintendo game.

Guidelines: On a rib-tickling R, all is not rosy when Rosey's mom, played by Estelle Parsons, comes to her bedridden daughter's aid. Grandma proves to be more of a thorn in the side than an angel of mercy

Feb 11.   A doctor recommends that Roseanne get to the bottom of her back problems by having surgery. 
Guidelines: Roseanne is at her witty best in tonight's clever episode about whether or not she should have breast-reduction surgery. (It's title: "Less is More"). One high point is R's chat with her women friends about what men like about women. There's also a cameo by Neil Patrick Harris.(Dr. Doogie Howser).

Feb 18.   Breaking up is hard to do for Becky and Mark, but Roseanne and Dan breathe a sigh of relief to have the boy they call "Old Stupid" out of their hair.
Guidelines: Becky dumps Mark during an argument on a funny and memorable episode that finds R and Dan jumping for joy over their breakup.

Feb. 25.  On a last visit to their childhood home, Roseanne and Jackie relive memories of growing up, while considering the severity of punishment for Darlene, who skipped school with Mark's brother David to attend a comic-book convention in Chicago.

Mar 3.    The Conners are sitting pretty for a TV ad for Rodbell's luncheonette. At home, however, things get ugly between D.J. and Todd after the Bowmans announce they're moving. Guidelines: Rick Dees guests as a TV director who's shooting a commercial at Rodbell's, where the Conners are slated to make their TV debuts as a typical American family.
'frolicking' with new publicity guy Rick, awakening Miles to the possibility that he might be gay.

**Guidelines:** MB pays a visit to Wednesday, with an episode that has Miles questioning his sexuality after he has a dream about a gay co-worker.

**Mar 16.** The network wigs out when Murphy, angered over the appearance clause in her contract, messes with her trademark tresses (Secty #49).

**Guidelines:** In a hair-raising look at society's obsession with beauty, MB shocks her bosses when she sacrifices shocks of hair to protest the "appearance clause" in her contract.

**Mar 23.** Murphy's loose lips could sink her friendship with Phil (Pat Corley), after he asks her not to reveal that he's having trouble keeping the bar afloat.

**Guidelines:** The recession hits Phil's bar on an uproarious MB. Murphy offers a loan to her favorite bartender - but there are apron strings attached when, as a "not so silent partner," she suggests a take-out window and offers Eldin's services as a caricaturist.

**Mar 30.** Repeat

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<th>Ratings:</th>
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| **April 27.** Murphy picks a partner and enrolls in Lamaze class, but there's a push to get her expelled when, after her wisecracks, no one's breathing easier about birthing.  
**Guidelines:** MB labors to choose a Lamaze partner tonight. We'll give you a hint - after hearing how Corky assisted a calf's birth, she chooses somebody a little closer to home. It's somebody who was kind enough to install a prism in the nursery so it will be "flooded with rainbows" for the new arrival. The imagery isn't so pretty in class, though, as Murph refuses to focus on giving birth.  
**May 4.** Everyone, including Murphy, is intoxicated by her replacement (Kate Mulgrew) a Toronto anchorwoman, but Murphy has a |
| **Mar. 17.** Jackie's therapist wants to have a word with control freak Roseanne, who's picked out just the man for Jackie - dull tax accountant Art. |
| **Mar. 24.** Roseanne squirms when Rodbell employees must take a lie-detector test; David gets fresh with Darlene but she won't talk to her mom about the incident. Leon (Martin Mull).  
**Guidelines:** Roseanne is taken by surprise when Rodbell's coffee shop imposes a mandatory lie-detector test on the boss (Martin Mull) and his staff.  
**Mar. 31.** A pregnant Crystal snaps at everyone in sight; Darlene delivers a message to David to quit crowding her and R acts like a big baby fighting with Bonnie for the job that Leon is vacating.  
**Apr. 28.** Dan pays dearly for keeping a secret about Mark's drunken, reckless get even evening at the Lobo Lounge.  
**May 5.** Becky and Darlene give Roseanne a Mother's Day makeover in hopes of softening her up for the news |
feeling this Canadian isn't dry.

May 11. Katie Couric, Faith Daniels. Joan Lunden, Mary Alice Williams and Paula Zahn storm into town for Murphy's baby shower, unleashing a flood of self-doubt the mother-to-be.

Guidelines: There are plenty of belly laughs when newswomen PZ, MAW, JL, FD and KC come to Murphy Brown's baby shower.

May 18. (Birth 101). Murphy goes into labor -on the air- and the FYI gang rallies to help her through a long delivery. Still unable to conceive of the fact that she's actually having a baby, she checks out the view from her window and Lamaze coach, Eldin is not to be found.

Guidelines: Murphy Brown stands and delivers on a fantastic season finale (co-written by departing series creator Diane English) that's both hilarious and heartwarming. In it, Murphy goes into labor at long last - and it lasts long.

May 19. Repeat.

Sept 21. "You say potatoe, I say potatoe." Murphy is a woman in desperate need of some sleep and a shower as she adjusts to her new life as a mother. She must chose a nanny, name the baby and learn to hold it, from Frank: attacks by V.P. in speech on family values - hounded by press.

"But Murphy, though wracked by sleep-deprivation and postpartum depression, isn't one to shy away from a fight." Ad picture: in bathrobe/ hair messy.

that they're attending an out of town rock concert.

May 12. D.J.'s scholastic honor is the only bright light on the Conner horizon: it's Roseanne's last day on the job and the outlook for another is dim, then Becky in discovers there's nothing in her college-fund-coffer.

Guidelines: Roseanne's goofy season ender has the domestic goddess unable to find work and pestering a state representative about the status of the economy. After all, the family motto is: "We're Conner's, we gotta eat."

May 19. Repeat.

Sept 15. The bike shop goes belly up in the 5th-season opener, leaving Dan and Roseanne with a barrel of debts, an unemployed Mark with job prospects outside of Lanford, and Becky shaky about her future. Part 1 of 2.

Guidelines: The recession hits home - or make that work - when Dan's prized motorcycle shop goes belly up on Part 1 of the two-part R season opener.

Sept 22. (Part 2.) Becky returns with Mark to the nest to say goodbye, then flies the coop after reassuring Roseanne and Dan that she's a big girl now.

Guidelines: Roseanne fit-to-be-tied after 17 year-old Becky ties the knot with Mark and they return home from Minneapolis. Ad: Roseanne the mother-in-law from Hell. R treats Becky's husband just like a member of the family.

Ad picture: w/ bow in hair like groomed poodle.
Sept 28  Armed with a new nanny, a ton of stuffed animals and a baby monitor, Murphy goes back to work - much to the FYIers dismay.
Guidelines: Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's back to work she goes. And it's a harried Murphy who arrives at the office with baby in tow and another nanny.
Ad: When Murphy's baby visits FYI, her co-workers change more than their attitudes.

picture: FYIers looking down at baby/camera.

*Sept 29. In the dark after their power is turned off for nonpayment, Roseanne and Dan must look at Darlene in a new light after David spends the night in her room.
Guidelines: The well-crafted 100th episode of R deals with the Conners' continuing efforts to make ends meet during the yet recession.
Ad: Roseanne is powerless. Just what goes on when all the lights go out at the Conner house?

picture: R, Dan & Darlene look up at camera.

*Oct 5. The FYIers are shocked to hear that the networks' big bosses is being replaced by a hot newcomer who plans big changes for the show.
Guidelines: FYIers are shocked when a new vice-president of news is hired to replace Kinsella, but are even more surprised when Murphy Brown is uncharacteristically nice to him.

Oct 12. Jim feels his life is a roller-coaster ride when, after 30 years together, Doris tells him that she thinks their marriage is off-track.
Nanny # 6. Secretary # 52.

Ad: Jim's wife pursues a career that makes her heart sing.


*Oct 6. Jackie's got a new, much one younger beau and Roseanne's got a new, much more exhaustive dilemma - Mother Bev is threatening to move to Lanford.

Oct 13. Roseanne mortifies Darlene with a Sweet-16 party, then sends her off to her friends while the adults enjoy the festivities, which include flashing the new neighbor in a game of Truth or Dare.
Guidelines: Roseanne considers going into business with Jackie, and Darlene celebrates her 16th birthday on tonight's funny outing.

Oct 20. In the kitchen, Roseanne and Jackie finalize plans for their sandwich shop - now all they need is a loan.
Upstairs, Darlene catches D.J. peeping at neighbor Molly.

Oct 27. Disappointed over Becky's the absence on Halloween, Roseanne sends everyone off to a lodge party while she stays home - with the ghosts of Halloween past, present and future.
Guidelines: The Queen of the Pranksters is so depressed over Becky's absence she stays home from the lodge's costume party. This invites visits from the ghosts of Halloween - past, present and future.

*Nov 2. On Election Day, FYI staffers scramble to provide news coverage while each

Nov 3. Election - Program pre-empted.
recalls their first-time voting experience.

*flashbacks.*

Guidelines: What could be more appropriate than a politically themed MB episode on the eve of an election?

**Episodes in the sample:**

**Nov 9.** The problem: Murphy is all set to go to Paris when she loses another nanny. The solution: have Eldin watch her son. Catch: Murphy feels guilty about leaving him. Secty # 54. Nanny # 6. Guidelines: MB frets about leaving her baby a touching episode that has her preparing for an assignment in Paris. She also makes some overdue decisions about a name and a nanny.

**Nov 16.** Miles protests when his activist parents show up in Washington D.C., to march against an oil company and Murphy wants to do a story on it. Guidelines: On a hilarious MB, yuppie Miles Silverberg feels his militant parents protest too much when they travel to Washington to demonstrate against an oil company.

**Nov 23.** FYI is honored with an award from the Museum of Broadcast Arts, but the staffers ruin the tribute dinner with their petty squabbling.

**Nov 30.** Repeat.

**Dec 7.** Corky's husband (Will) is sued for plagiarism. But the trial has trouble written all over it when Corky has to read parts of her diary to prove his innocence. Guidelines: On a clever and pivotal MB, the premier of Will's movie brings a lawsuit to the Sherwood-Forrest home. The case can only be resolved by reading excerpts from Corky's diary which could prove disastrous for FYI morale and her marriage.

**Nov 10.** Roseanne's feeling over-the-hill dealing with Bev's decision to move to a senior community, and The Nancy's revelation about a new friend Marla (Morgan Fairchild).

Guidelines: MF guest stars as Nancy's on new friend in a thoughtful episode that deals primarily with Roseanne's concerns about her aging mother. Ad: Isn't it enough that mom's moving to town for good...wait till you hear R's friend's big bombshell.

**Nov 17.** The Lunch Box welcomes its first customers, including a weirdo whose presence sends the gals to a self-defense class. Meanwhile Arnie (Tom Arnold) questions his manhood after hearing the latest about Nancy.

**Nov 24.** Darlene thinks its high time her parents trusted her, but Roseanne and Dan many soon regret letting her attend a rock concert with neighbor Molly. Guidelines: Roseanne goes out on a limb to give Darlene the benefit of the doubt on tonight's affecting outing.

**Dec 1.** D.J. makes the city-league hockey team, but it's Fisher, his coach, who ends up facing off - with Jackie, after she dumps him for talking to a woman his own age.

**Dec 8.** Repeat.
Dec 14. Murphy plays ho-ho-host of a Christmas Party for the FYIers and two surprise guests; her father (Darren McGavin) and her aunt who happen to hate each other. **Guidelines:** On a hilarious MB, Murphy wants her baby to have a normal Christmas - not like the ones she had as a child. But her hopes are dashed when two of their warring relatives - her father and her mother's sister - for a surprise visit.

Dec 15. There's no place like home for the holidays. But when a snowstorm keeps everyone apart, Roseanne and Jackie are stuck at the Lunch Box with Bev and Nana Mary. **Guidelines:** A charming holiday episode of R features guest star Sally Kirkland (who plays Mrs. Healy, David's mother), along with appearances by Shelley Winters as Nana Mary, Estelle Parsons as Mother Bev and Morgan Fairchild as Nancy's lover Marla.
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