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MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN TELEVISION  
FROM CARTER TO CLINTON

by

Bridget Kies

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in English

at

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

May 2018

## ABSTRACT

### MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN TELEVISION FROM CARTER TO CLINTON

by

Bridget Kies

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Tasha Oren

This dissertation examines American television during a period I call the long 1980s. I argue that during this period, television became invested in new and provocative images of masculinity on screen and in networks' attempts to court audiences of men. I have demarcated the beginning and ending of the long 1980s with the declaration of Jimmy Carter as *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1977 and Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. This also correlates with important shifts in the television industry, such as the formation of ESP-TV (later ESPN) in 1979 and the end of Johnny Carson's tenure as host of *The Tonight Show* on NBC in 1992. During this period, seemingly dichotomous images of masculinity were present in American politics and culture: the "new man" embodied by Jimmy Carter, who is sympathetic and supportive of the women's movement, and the cowboy ethos embodied by Ronald Reagan, which favors a more traditionally patriarchal social order. On television, these dueling masculinities were depicted in sitcoms, dramas, late-night comedy shows, and sports programming.

Although much of 1980s television scholarship has unearthed network and programming strategies that favored women as audiences, I demonstrate how the formation of niche cable networks and changes to traditional television genres like the action series

aggressively targeted male audiences. Masculinity on television in the long 1980s was therefore not limited to changes in representations on screen but extended to technological and industrial concerns as well. By the end of the long 1980s, these developments had the effect of increasing possibilities for queer viewing practices.

As television is an intrinsically domestic medium, this also meant a challenge to expectations for American masculinities. The connection between domesticity and masculinity encouraged more flexible identities at time when gender roles in American culture were swiftly changing. Through industrial practices, representations of “new men” on screen, genre shifts, and home viewing technologies, television in the 1980s became masculinized, but that masculinization was a move away from an aggressive patriarchy and toward a queer domesticity.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract .....	ii
List of Figures .....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction: Television and Icons of Masculinity in the Long 1980s .....	1
Technological, Industrial, and Audience Changes .....	5
The American President as a Symbol of Masculinity.....	8
The New Man and the Cowboy in Popular Culture.....	17
Changing Masculinities on Television.....	22
II. Pitying Fools: Gender and Genre in 1980s Drama Series .....	29
Serialized Storytelling on Primetime .....	32
Combining Melodrama and Masculinity: Parodies in the Long 1980s .....	38
Primetime Serials: Women’s Stories in Men’s Worlds .....	44
Action, Adventure, and Emotions: Men’s Genres .....	49
Heroes with Hearts and Brains: Casting and Character Development .....	50
The “Cumulative Narrative” and Men’s Evolution .....	60
Men’s Bodies: Subverting the Jiggle Era on Primetime.....	69
Cooperation, Not Competition: Positioning the New Hero .....	75
Money, Class, and Masculinity.....	80
Conclusion: New Directions for Gender and Genre .....	85
III. Television’s “Mr. Moms”: Idealizing the New Man in 1980s Domestic Sitcoms .....	95
Sitcoms and Evolving Images of Family 100	
Participant Fathers: At the Center of the Family Circle .....	110
Domestic Dads: Masculinizing Domestic Labor or Feminizing Men? .....	120
Lead Dads and Helper Dads: Manning the Alternative Family.....	134
“A New Boy in the Neighborhood Lives Downstairs”: Sitcom Sets and Physical Proximity as Indications of Familial Intimacy.....	145
Conclusion: The New Family Values .....	148
IV. “Girlie Men”: Late-Night Comedy, Gender, and Humor Across Ideological Lines .....	158
Competing with Carson .....	162
Cautionary Tales of Women in Comedy .....	171
“If I get drafted, who’s going to be the token black on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> ?”....	178
“Girlie Man”: Challenging Masculinities through Virtuositic Performances.....	189
Cross-Media Strategies: Growing the Late-Night Audience .....	200
Conclusion: Late-Night Clashes with Politics .....	206
V. “For Men Only”: Sports, Video, and Private Viewing .....	218
The VCR and VHS: Television When You Want It.....	222

	From “Porno Chic” in Public to Private Home Video .....	230
	Sports, Liveness, and Access .....	238
	Conclusion: Sports and Video as the Embodiment of Americanism.....	249
VI.	Conclusion: The End of the Long 1980s?.....	264
	Trump TV: The Performativity and Fragility of Masculinity.....	269
	Reviving and Rebooting the Long 1980s.....	272
	<i>Fuller House</i> : A Case Study in Nostalgia for the Long 1980s .....	274
	Conclusion: The Legacy of the Long 1980s .....	277
VII.	References.....	281
VIII.	Appendix: List of Films and Television Series.....	305
IX.	Curriculum Vitae .....	312

## LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 Reagan’s 1984 “Morning in America” campaign ad.....	3
1.2 Jimmy Carter as <i>Time</i> ’s 1977 Man of the Year .....	10
1.3 Burt Reynolds in <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , 1972.....	20
1.4 Arnold Schwarznegger in <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , 1977 .....	21
2.1 Peter Campbell (Robert Urich) is seen in a post-coital nap.....	42
2.2 Cover of <i>Soap Opera Digest</i> , February 1978 .....	52
2.3 Opening credits to <i>Mr. T</i> , the animated series .....	59
3.1 Jack (Michael Keaton) and his son are terrorized by the vacuum in <i>Mr. Mom</i> .....	96
3.2 Opening credits to <i>Who’s the Boss</i> .....	99
3.3 Fall 1987 primetime schedule .....	107
3.4 Father and son reconcile their differences as equals on <i>Family Ties</i> .....	113
3.5 Opening credits to <i>Mr. Belvedere</i> .....	128
3.6 <i>TV Guide</i> cover for March 6, 1982 .....	138
3.7 Uncle Jesse (John Stamos) works out on <i>Full House</i> .....	143
3.8 Uncle Jesse works out with baby Michelle (Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen) .....	143
3.9 <i>Three Men and a Baby</i> .....	144
4.1 Video image of the assault on Rodney King .....	160
4.2 Johnny Carson and Burt Reynolds on <i>The Tonight Show</i> .....	163
4.3 A parody of Queen Elizabeth II on <i>The Carol Burnett Show</i> .....	167
4.4 A sketch from the retooled <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	172
4.5 Andrew Dice Clay on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	176



4.6 Eddie Murphy as Mr. Robinson on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	182
4.7 Eddie Murphy on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	184
4.8 “Men on Films” sketch from <i>In Living Color</i> .....	186
4.9 Bill Clinton on <i>The Arsenio Hall Show</i> .....	188
4.10 “Pumping Up with Hanz and Franz” on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	192
4.11 “Sprockets” on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	193
4.12 Publicity photo of Milton Berle in drag.....	194
4.13 Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker on “Church Chat” on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	196
4.14 “It’s Pat” on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	199
4.15 Characters debate Anita Hill’s claims on <i>Designing Women</i> .....	208
4.16 <i>Saturday Night Live</i> lampoons the Thomas/Hill hearings .....	211
5.1 Reggie Jackson in a 1980 Panasonic Omnivision ad.....	222
5.2 A 1978 ad for RCA Selectavision.....	225
5.3 1984 opening to the Playboy Channel’s late-night movie .....	233
5.4 1988 ad for <i>Wide World of Sports</i> .....	243
5.5 President Reagan interviewed during the 1986 Super Bowl pregame show .....	251
5.6 Kathy Ireland on the cover of <i>Sports Illustrated</i> in 1989 .....	253
5.7 <i>The Making of the Sports Illustrated 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Swimsuit Issue</i> .....	255
6.1 Melissa McCarthy as Sean Spicer on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .....	271
6.2 Ladies’ night out on <i>Fuller House</i> .....	275

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Chapter One  
Introduction: Television and Icons of Masculinity in the Long 1980s

During the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, the United States hockey team squared off in the first medal round against the Soviets, who were favored to win. The Soviet team was comprised of professional players who had played internationally; the Soviets had taken the gold medal for ice hockey in several past Olympics, including the 1976 games in Innsbruck, Austria. By contrast, the U.S. team was younger, less experienced, and amateur. The game was tied after the first period, and in the third period the U.S. scored two goals, putting them ahead of the Soviets and earning them the top spot as a medal contender.

Although one of many sporting events on television at the time, the hockey game epitomizes the way national discourses on politics utilized analogies of masculinity and how those discourses played out on television. The unexpected win was dubbed “Miracle on Ice” in the popular press and sports media. While it wasn’t the first time the United States had defeated the Soviet Union at hockey, the game soon took on mythic status, signifying larger political triumphs. *Sports Illustrated* writer E.M. Swift observed nearly twenty years later that the victory had “galvanized the nation.”<sup>1</sup> Conservative news media personality and Republican fundraiser Noelle Nikpour describes the game as the true end of the Cold War, long before the Berlin Wall came down: “The Americans beat the Russians on the ice the same way that freedom won the Cold War” through pluck and fortitude, in contrast to a bigger, more powerful Soviet team and union that was “destined to crumble under its own weight.”<sup>2</sup> In popular imagination, the game foreshadowed the toppling of the Soviet Union at the hands of the fair-playing Americans. The game was not broadcast live for the American audience but instead was shown on a tape delay as part of the primetime Olympic programming block on ABC. Given the gravity of the American

team's win in global politics, the tape delay raised concerns about the necessity of live sports broadcasts, so that the audience would know immediately when world-changing events had happened.

The masculinity exhibited in the U.S. hockey team's defeat of the Soviets – matching might with might – is one form of masculinity that remained prevalent throughout the 1980s. It is a form of masculinity that translated to President Ronald Reagan's policies and to the media image of Reagan himself. In popular culture, the 1980s are often depicted as a period when men were macho: in the White House, Reagan was a cowboy rancher from the West; in film, Bruce Willis and Sylvester Stallone were virile men who defeated the toughest enemies (or nobly tried to, anyway). If the 1970s had been a period during which men became more emotionally expressive, the 1980s were about reclaiming machismo.

And yet research into the lives of American men and the television they watched reveals this to be only part of the story. The ethos of the 1970s did not disappear on January 1, 1980 (or January 20, 1981, the day Reagan was inaugurated). Instead, conflicting images of masculinity continued to examine what the role of men ought to be. At the same time, the shadow of Reagan and Reaganesque machismo remained a pervasive influence after he left office in 1989 – and arguably continues to remain a central image of American masculinity in popular culture.

It is for this reason that this project is not a study of the 1980s as a particular a decade but a study of a cultural period I am calling the “long 1980s.” Drawing upon Frederic Jameson's periodizing of the 1960s, I do not define the long 1980s based on calendrical dates or “omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting” but a “whole range of varied responses and creative innovations” around a “common objective situation.”<sup>3</sup> There are many ways to demarcate this period. If the long 1980s are characterized by a maturing cynicism

about the role of the U.S. on a global stage, the long 1980s could begin with the fall of Saigon in 1974 and the news coverage of the subsequent evacuation of the U.S. embassy. Iran's taking of Americans as hostages in 1979 or Reagan's battle for the presidency, pledging a new "morning in America," might similarly serve as starting points [Figure 1.1]. Since this is a project about television and masculinity, I have demarcated the loose beginning as the declaration of Jimmy Carter as *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1977, the same year that a new style of sitcom parodying soap operas began to encourage men to laugh at but ultimately become swept up in melodrama.<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 1.1. The longest segment in Reagan's 1984 "Morning in America" campaign ad depicts a wedding, thus prefiguring Reagan's America as a heteronormative one.*

Although Reagan left office in 1989, his successor George H.W. Bush promising a "kinder and gentler nation," Reagan's influence on politics and culture persisted.<sup>5</sup> I have therefore marked the end of the long 1980s as *Time* magazine's proclamation that Bill Clinton was "overturning the Reagan era" in 1993.<sup>6</sup> Around the same time, many of the provocative images of masculinity within domestic sitcoms left primetime, Johnny Carson ceased to be the

face of late-night television, and Fox expanded its programming to seven nights a week in a legitimate challenge to the “big three” networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS).

Previous histories of this period have sought to unpack how television embodied or challenged Reaganism. For Jane Feuer, the pervasive themes of materialism on series like *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-89) and *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-89) demonstrate television’s response to Reagan-era values.<sup>7</sup> Studies of 1970s television, such as Elana Levine’s, have emphasized its increasing trend toward explicit sex and sexuality as American culture became more sexually permissive.<sup>8</sup> In many ways, the Reagan 1980s exhibited a significant conservative backlash to 1970s permissiveness. But, as Ron Becker demonstrates his study of the 1990s, television would be teeming with stories, themes, and images of homosexuality only a few years later.<sup>9</sup> How then, if the 1980s were so socially and politically conservative, could television have made the leap from the 1970s to the 1990s?

This study aims to answer that question by demonstrating how the 1980s were not just a period in which Ronald Reagan dominated the news and Reagan-style programming filled the television grid. Instead, as the following chapters will reveal, the period I define as the long 1980s is better described as one in which Carter’s image persisted in a state of tension with Reagan’s. Seemingly dichotomous images of masculinity were present on American television, and this invited new kinds of audiences to watch. By examining the ways American masculinity was evolving both on screen and off, I hope to offer a new way of understanding Reagan era television not as a rupture from the sexually liberated 1970s and 1990s but as a period that directly laid the seeds for television of the 1990s and beyond. The aim of this project is to demonstrate the various strategies the television industry employed to attract audiences of men, such as generic tone shifts, storytelling innovations, and the formation of new cable networks for



men. Ultimately, this effort on the part of the television industry succeeded at challenging expectations for men and masculinities in a way that, by the early 1990s, began to encourage a kind of queer domestic viewing.

### Technological, Industrial, and Audience Changes

The long 1980s were a period of swift change for television in terms of programming, the launch of new networks, and technological advances like the VCR. All of these developments had important repercussions on both the representation of masculinities on screen and on the male audiences being courted by particular programs and networks. As television and advertising executives began to recognize the growing demographic of working women with disposable incomes, programming began to target this demographic as its new “quality audience.” In her comprehensive examination of *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1981-88), a primetime drama with two women police detectives, Julie D’Acci accounts for the ways promotion, script writing, and audience research were concerned with cultivating the quality audience of women.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Bonnie Dow’s analysis of feminism on primetime is deeply interested in how women characters and women-centered narratives appeal to audiences of women.<sup>11</sup>

Technological innovations signaled the advent of postmodern television. As new editing suites and other technologies became more expensive, they were less accessible to artists and independent media producers. Meanwhile, television broadcast networks and other mass media companies saw aesthetic innovations as one way to compete with the novelty of cable. This resulted in what John T. Caldwell describes as “televisuality” or “stylistic excess,” aesthetics of the avant-garde that now appeared on primetime.<sup>12</sup> For Caldwell, these aesthetic innovations

demonstrated that television was not an inherently feminine medium and that watching television did not inherently rely upon a distracted glance, as had been proposed by John Ellis.<sup>13</sup> Citing the stylistic tendencies of series like *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-87) and *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-90), Caldwell argues that there are “a number of hypermasculinist televisual tendencies” that require deep engagement with a series, which is part of the pleasure of watching.<sup>14</sup>

During the Reagan and Bush 1980s, images of potent masculinity were pervasive in media. Although the popular press predicted that the 1970s new man would be the hero of the 1980s, in fact the film industry saw a spike in action movies featuring muscular men. Following the success of the first *Rocky* film in 1976 (directed by John Avildsen), Sylvester Stallone spent much of the 1980s toggling between *Rocky* sequels and a series of movies in which he played Rambo, a former Green Beret. Stallone emerged from the 1980s as an actor who “incarnates unquestioned virility, unassailable heterosexuality, and a US might and right.”<sup>15</sup> His hypermuscular performances lead Chris Holmlund to describe the portrayal of gender in his action films as a “masquerade of masculinity” that Holmlund sees echoed in other action films of the decade.<sup>16</sup> Another central figure to emerge was Schwarzenegger, whose acting career picked up after small roles with the lead in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982, directed by John Milius) and whose popularity exploded after James Cameron’s 1984 blockbuster *Terminator*.

In her study of Hollywood films from the 1980s to the election of Clinton, Susan Jeffords characterizes the Reagan era as “an era of bodies.”<sup>17</sup> Jeffords sees the Rambo films and other action movies of the decade as allegorizing the national discourses of the Reagan administration, from its macho diplomacy style to its insistence on loyalty and lack of tolerance for crimes. For this reason, Jeffords sees these action films as depicting a radical shift away from the concerns of the Carter administration and the 1970s. As part of the “Reagan imaginary,” action films of the

1980s “offered the public a cohesive image of national strengths, accomplishments, and possibilities.”<sup>18</sup> Among these, Jeffords claims, the hard-bodied man emerges as the emblem. Writing in 1994, Jeffords concludes her study with the election of Bill Clinton, which she sees as a shift in the American voting public’s concern from national defense and might to domestic matters. She predicts that as the new national figurehead for masculinity, Clinton would “contribute to yet another redefinition of the masculine, which [would] be seen in Hollywood films of the next few years” as Clinton and his administration “propose yet another phase in the extended narrative of ‘American identity.’”<sup>19</sup> Jeffords thus brackets the end of her study of the Reagan era with the election of Clinton, not the election of George H.W. Bush and the end of Reagan’s presidency in 1988, since Reagan’s image overshadowed his successor’s.

Like Caldwell, my goal is to shed light on aspects of television’s masculine appeal that have received far less attention in the field of television studies. The central thesis of this project is that in the long 1980s television depicted new forms of masculinity, beyond just a simplistic turn away from femininity and toward the hypermasculinity seen in the Hollywood films the period became known for. While Jeffords finds Reagan the dominant figure in Hollywood cinema during the 1980s, I argue that television in many ways resisted the Reagan imaginary through the persistence of Carter’s legacy in images of the new man and in its attention to the new man as a potential viewer. Representations on screen challenged Reagan-era notions of masculinity and constructions of audience; meanwhile, late-night programming and home video technologies encouraged audiences to find the domestic space as a site of recreation. This link between masculinity and domesticity in turn meant new possibilities for queering notions of American masculinity.

## The American President as a Symbol of Masculinity

In the United States, the president is arguably the most visible symbol of masculinity. As historians have noted, policy is often shaped by the president's (or his advisors') desire to project an image of strength and virility. For instance, John F. Kennedy's attitudes toward the spread of communism were a part of what Robert Dean calls an "ideology of masculinity," in which fears that the American man had grown soft were entangled with concerns that the United States itself was weakening as an international power.<sup>20</sup> Kennedy combatted these fears with his public persona of youth and vigor, as well as aggressive approaches to Vietnam and Latin America that were "filtered through cultural systems of meaning, including ideologies of gender."<sup>21</sup> More recently, Barack Obama's image as a "nicer" or "softer" man has been complicated by his frequent appearances on the basketball court, where his athletic skills reiterate the strength and power he embodies as president.<sup>22</sup>

During the long 1980s, the United States saw the election of four different presidents: Jimmy Carter in 1976, Ronald Reagan in 1980 and again in 1984, George H.W. Bush in 1988, and finally Bill Clinton in 1992. As I explain in this chapter, the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 marked, in the popular press at least, the end of the long 1980s and signaled a return to the ethos of American culture that had rendered feasible Carter's election. Thus, the long 1980s are bookended with two prevalent images of American masculinity as Southern, Christian, and white, but also sensitive toward the role of women and people of color in society, and rhetorically less bellicose and more contemplative than Reagan and, to a lesser extent, Bush. This is not to say that the American presidency, or American masculinity, merely switched from sensitivity to aggression and back again. As I demonstrate throughout this project, the specter of

Carter would persist in American culture, particularly on television, long after Carter had left office and history had written his presidency as a failure.

As president, Carter laid the seeds for a changed relationship between the president and the television industry. In the same year that Carter was inaugurated, 1977, David Frost's interviews with former president Richard Nixon were broadcast, and this contributed to a changed image of presidency for many Americans. In order to lift the veil of secrecy cast over the White House under Nixon, Carter allowed the press greater access to his administration and appeared on television more frequently than presidents in the past had. His inauguration was the cover story on *TV Guide* the week of January 15, 1977, with an article describing how the parade would be shot by cameras mounted to the motorcade for closer access, as well as longer coverage on television in fulfillment to Carter's campaign promise to return the government to the people.<sup>23</sup> Within a month, the White House announced plans to bring back the "fireside chat" once popularized by Franklin D. Roosevelt, only through television instead of radio.<sup>24</sup> Another plan was to allow Americans to phone in with questions Carter would answer on camera.<sup>25</sup> A year into Carter's presidency, his appearances had been so frequent that late-night comedian Johnny Carson observed Carter had "been on television more than the Pillsbury doughboy," a highly popular animated character within Pillsbury's ubiquitous commercials.<sup>26</sup>

For some critics, this greater access to the president only called attention to his shortcomings. *TV Guide*'s John Roche described Carter as a "charmer; a man without any ideological convictions and a great supporter of freedom in the abstract" whose only plan was to keep smiling.<sup>27</sup> For others, the problem with Carter's gentle, smiling demeanor was not that it masked policy inadequacies. In his comparative study of Carter and Reagan, John Orman argues that being macho is part of "mythic American masculinity" and so Carter's real failure was less

about policy decisions than failing to live up to the macho style.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a 1984 article in *Wall Street Journal* accused Carter of “revealing his true spirit” once in office and for this reason dubbed him America’s first “woman” president.<sup>29</sup>

Many presidential scholars and television historians are quick to credit Carter for recognizing the importance of television in American culture, yet many also attribute television to Carter’s failures. By granting greater television access but not performing masculinity in a way that bespoke his authority, Carter became a failed president. But arguments like Orman’s do not take into consideration the possibility that it was not a failure to be macho but a refusal.

Presidents Johnson and Nixon had made strides on social equality while in office, but public perception was that their leadership came from the top down. Legislation for social equality was at odds with the way both men conducted their administrations. Carter, by contrast, “pledged not only to be open and honest. He promised a thoroughly different leadership style.”<sup>30</sup> Carter’s public image was as a “soft-spoken, deeply religious man, who made compassion and concern the apparent cornerstone principles of his domestic and foreign policy.”<sup>31</sup> According to *Time*, who named Carter its “man of the year” in 1977, Carter “gave new pride to the [South] and went far to heal ancient wounds” [Figure 1.2].<sup>32</sup>



*Figure 1.2. Jimmy Carter was noticeably drawn in casual denim, rather than a business suit, for a 1977 Time magazine cover.*

Carter's single term in office was plagued with a recession, troubles in the Middle East, and criticism from the far right and far left that his policies did not accomplish enough and that he was not a strong enough leader. The taking of American hostages by Iranians in 1979, as well as the deaths of servicemen set to rescue them, are often cited as the cause for his loss in the 1980 election.<sup>33</sup> Within minutes of the completion of Reagan's inauguration, the hostages were released. Carter's gentle nature that had, four years earlier, promised to heal the nation was now seen as too weak to defend the nation from threats abroad. In fact, Carter's defeat at a second term in office was a result of numerous factors, among which his low-key personality was a factor. Upon his election, Carter's modesty had seemed like salve for a nation still stinging from Nixon's Watergate scandal and the legacy of Vietnam. As Rodger Streitmatter has found, presidents and candidates who are deemed "gregarious" and "appealing" receive far greater media coverage.<sup>34</sup> Carter's quiet personality clashed with the reality that, as Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore declared, "The living room has become the voting booth."<sup>35</sup> Regardless whether Carter was capable as president, his image as a populist who recognized the importance of social equality resonated on television, where echoes of this idealism were manifest in fictional characters long after Carter had vacated the White House.

As sociologist Michael Kimmel notes, the "essential elements of an American social character" are simultaneously the same traits used to describe compulsive masculinity and Reagan's foreign policy: "violence, aggression, extreme competitiveness, a gnawing insecurity."<sup>36</sup> For Kimmel, the cowboy is the quintessential image of American masculinity and was embodied in Presidents Andrew Jackson and Teddy Roosevelt before Reagan, who came to the White House "riding in from his western ranch."<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to Carter, Reagan's presidency was especially marked by moments of televisual masculine bravado, giving the illusion of a successful presidency. The most shocking of these moments was the televised assassination attempt in 1981 by John Hinckley, Jr. A videotape of the incident aired only fifteen minutes after it occurred. The camera operator is in such close proximity to the President and his entourage that he, too, ducks for coverage; the video gives the viewer the illusion of being under fire. Frank Reynolds of *ABC World News Tonight* introduced the videotape before the full details of Reagan's injuries, which included a bullet to the chest, were known; Reynolds reminds viewers several times that the incident is not live but on videotape.<sup>38</sup> The close proximity of the video to the action, the chaos on scene, and the breaking news that Reagan had been rushed to a hospital for emergency surgery were terrifying to a nation that had seen the death of a president to assassination only twenty years earlier. That Reagan survived the attempt while his press secretary James Brady became paralyzed was written in popular imagination as a sign of his robust strength and virility.<sup>39</sup>

Strength and virility were key components of Reagan's televised speeches. Although Robert Denton finds that none were particularly exemplary, there are many clips and one-liners that established Reagan's televisual persona. During the 1980 primary election cycle, Reagan and George H.W. Bush were invited to participate in a televised debate hosted by the *Nashua Telegraph*. The Federal Elections Commission determined that because other primary candidates were excluded from the debate, it constituted an improper campaign contribution to Reagan and Bush. Reagan's campaign decided to pay for the debate and invited the other primary contenders to participate. The *Telegraph* had only prepared for a two-candidate debate, and when Reagan and five others took the stage, chaos erupted. The debate moderator, the *Telegraph's* editor Jon Green, instructed the sound technician to turn off Reagan's microphone to silence the candidate



and restore order. Recognizing that the microphone was not yet on mute, Reagan angrily declared, “I am paying for this microphone, Mr. Green!” The crowd erupted into applause at Reagan’s insistence on being heard. It did not matter that Reagan got Breen’s name wrong; “I am paying for this microphone” remains one of the well-remembered moments of his campaign.

In 1987 President Reagan traveled to the Brandenburg Gate on the west side of what was at the time a divided Berlin. In a speech at the historic site flanked by the Berlin Wall, Reagan touted the values of the free market for ensuring democracy and liberty. He called upon Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to “tear down this wall,” a line that received thunderous applause from a crowd of West Berliners waving American flags. Although the speech was not immediately shown in the U.S., it received some attention in print. *Washington Post* writer Lou Cannon reported that the line received “a roar of approval” from the crowd of hand-picked Americans and West Berliners who had been given American flags to wave, though the rest of the speech did not receive the kind of response Reagan’s aides had expected.<sup>40</sup> Eventually, though, the speech – and “tear down this wall” in particular – became mythologized as part of Reagan’s legacy at defeating the Soviet Union. The two minutes of his remarks in which Reagan beseeched Gorbachev to take action are usually remembered as a rhetorical stunt with no real follow-through or as a definitive command that, two years later, did indeed lead to the destruction of the Berlin Wall.<sup>41</sup> Cold War scholar James Mann sees both interpretations as missing the “balancing act” of the speech – not a “knockout blow on the Soviet regime” or “mere political theater” but an appeal to the Soviets as well as the American populace to set the terms for the end of the Cold War.<sup>42</sup> Since 1987, the speech has become immortalized on videotape and digital video clips, and “tear down this wall” has become one of the most memorable lines of Reagan’s presidency.

Because of his efficacy at delivering lines like “tear down this wall,” Robert Denton argues that more than any of his predecessors, Reagan was a “primetime president” who knew how to make the most of the intimate relationship between the television media and the office of the president in order to establish a legacy as likeable and effective. Joel Wiggins makes a similar assessment, describing Reagan as an “average actor but a peerless television politician.”<sup>43</sup> When Democratic candidate Walter Mondale lost the 1984 election to Reagan, who had garnered the largest ever percentage of the popular vote, Mondale admitted, “Modern politics requires mastery of television.”<sup>44</sup> Citing his own lack of talent at working for and with the camera, Mondale conceded that television was what had cost him the election. Near the end of Reagan’s second term, Ted Koppel, the anchor for ABC’s late-night news program *Nightline* (1980- ), reflected on how Reagan’s skilled use of television had influenced his favorability among the American public: “Somehow it’s difficult to see folks twenty to thirty years down the road being quite as mesmerized by our president as we have been.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the televisual image of Reagan, rather than any actual policies put forth by his administration, cemented his legacy and set the tone for American masculinity in the 1980s.

By the end of the long 1980s, the brute force model of leadership had lost favor as another Democratic rural Southerner, this time Bill Clinton, was elected to the office of the president. A *Time* magazine cover in August of 1993 interrogated “Overturning the Reagan Era” through Clinton’s proposed federal budget.<sup>46</sup> Like Carter, the image of Clinton was a man who was committed to increasing the role of women in government, with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton serving as policymaker more than White House hostess. Clinton was also the first presidential candidate to be backed by a highly visible gay rights advocacy organization, the

Human Rights Campaign, and his pledge to support gay rights again reiterates his position as a new man.

But also as Carter's presidency had been, Clinton's two terms were plagued with scandals and criticisms. He was the first president in a hundred and thirty years, the second ever, to be impeached. His promises to the LGBT community not only went unfulfilled but were actually overturned through compromises with a Republican-led Congress that resulted in the passing of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which prohibited openly gay or lesbian individuals from serving in the military, and the Defense of Marriage Act, which prohibited federal recognition of same-sex marriage.<sup>47</sup> Although Hillary Rodham Clinton's active role in the West Wing presented a picture of President Clinton as a man respectful of women's abilities, Clinton's second term was plagued by accusations of sexual misconduct and assault. Many economists and scholars also see Clinton as failing to overturn the Reagan era and perpetuating it through neoliberal policies.<sup>48</sup> What Clinton did or did not actually accomplish in office is somewhat immaterial to this study and falls outside the period I am calling the long 1980s. More important to my purpose here is demonstrate the extent to which Clinton's image evoked Carter's without explicitly referencing the less popular former president and signaled an end to the cowboy style of leadership embodied by the more hard-lined Reagan and George H.W. Bush in the 1980s.

As successor presidents, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton each attempted to trade on the most liked qualities of the predecessor from their party while attempting to avoid the pitfalls each president had made in alienating a segment of the voting public. For Bush, this meant advocating a "kinder and gentler nation" than Reagan's hard-lined policies had pushed, but it also meant maintaining many of the same programs and policies set in place by the Reagan administration.<sup>49</sup> For Clinton, echoing Carter's emphasis on equality, especially by allowing the

First Lady to serve as policy adviser, was a key gesture toward social progress. But unlike Carter, Clinton knew how to use youth and sex appeal to energize voters. He appeared on the fledgling network MTV and the syndicated talk show *The Arsenio Hall Show* (1989-1994). As television during the long 1980s began to favor narrowcasting to particular demographics over broadcasting, Clinton demonstrated “mastery of the icon-driven world of narrowcasting” by selecting to appear on programs that favored hip, young audiences over the general viewing public.<sup>50</sup> Clinton’s skillful use of television was more akin to Reagan than his Democratic predecessor. In these two successor presidents, different facets of masculinity coexist, a synthesis of the tension between Carter and Reagan before them.

These dueling images of American masculinity were a central part of television’s investment in new forms of masculinities. The gentle “new man” embodied by Carter thrived on television for much of the 1980s, despite the typical characterization of the 1980s as a “decade in which the dictates of the market became a kind of secular monotheism.”<sup>51</sup> This new man was juxtaposed with images of the greedy capitalist whose position was never fully vindicated but was sometimes portrayed sympathetically. The audiences sought after during the long 1980s were also a reflection of the Carter/Reagan – new man/cowboy – dynamic. Sports network ESPN and the erotic Playboy Channel both launched with the intention of attracting audiences of men, and although sports and pornography might on the surface appeal to a heterosexual male audience, as I demonstrate, these same developments to the television industry also encouraged a connection between the domestic space and masculinity and allowed for the possibility of men to look queerly at other men on screen. The new man and the cowboy, as embodied by Carter and Reagan, were the core archetypes through which television evolved its presentation of and appeal to men.

## The New Man and the Cowboy in Popular Culture

As sociologist Michael Kimmel describes the 1970s, “feminism, black liberation, and gay liberation provided a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood.”<sup>52</sup> Publications like Betty Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* and the creation of the National Organization for Women were followed in the 1970s with radical feminist texts like Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Shulamith Firestone’s *Dialectic of Sex*.<sup>53</sup> The media attention that *Ms.* magazine editor Gloria Steinem received for her glamorous lifestyle as an outspoken single woman resulted in greater awareness for liberal feminism as a movement as well. The Supreme Court decision on *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973 and the ongoing efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment contributed to women’s growing independence from men. Shirley Chisholm’s 1968 election to Congress and 1972 bid for President demonstrated that racial and gender equality were real forces with which white men would have to contend; women’s growing power in the political sphere was further demonstrated by Geraldine Ferraro’s candidacy for the vice-presidency on the ticket with Walter Mondale in 1984. Heterosexual men also had to contend with a more visible gay right movement on the heels of the 1969 Stonewall riots and the subsequent actions by the Gay Liberation Front. Movements for women’s liberation, racial equality, and gay rights threatened the power and privilege of the traditional white heterosexual patriarch.

The “new man” of the 1970s, like Carter, understood that his position in society was not supreme; instead, he had a duty to forfeit a certain amount of privilege and fight for the rights of women and minority groups. In the entertainment industry, the most notable figurehead for the

new man was actor Alan Alda. Although his character Hawkeye Pierce in the sitcom *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972-83) was a fun-loving, tongue-in-cheek womanizer, Alda himself was an outspoken advocate for women's rights who testified on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment before a Senate committee.<sup>54</sup> Whether this was authentic to Alda's personal politics or the strategy of a skillful public relations team, Alda's celebrity image was "predicated on sensitivity, intelligence, and roguish wit as opposed to testosterone-fueled aggression."<sup>55</sup> Alda was dubbed "America's Sweetheart" by the women's magazine *Redbook* in July of 1976; in 1979, *McCall's* magazine called him a man who "really respects women."<sup>56</sup> In a 1977 *TV Guide* profile, Alda explained that feminism taught him about sharing responsibilities and regarding women as whole people: "I decided that men had been trained to appreciate only the superficial qualities of women. The great advantage of the feminist movement was that the male learned to participate in the basic chores of life."<sup>57</sup> Alda also expressed his concerns over playing Hawkeye because of the character's treatment of women but also, Alda astutely noted, because Hawkeye himself became a sex object among fans of *M\*A\*S\*H*.<sup>58</sup> Alongside his casual romantic and sexual relationships with women, the character Hawkeye was also a deeply concerned doctor who cared more about saving lives than political affiliations. In numerous episodes, Hawkeye speaks out against the injustices of the Korean War and its effects on Korean civilians. As Jason Mittell notes, "*M\*A\*S\*H* began as a sitcom set during a war, but began emphasizing emotional realism more commensurate with a melodrama."<sup>59</sup> These generic changes to the series enabled a complex, layered characterization of Hawkeye as his own version of the new man who supported working women (the nurses at the mobile hospital where he was a surgeon), minorities, and even a cross-dressing sergeant; he championed peace and was unafraid to express his frustrations and impotency at stopping the Korean War. Both Hawkeye and Alda were figures who fought to

position white, heterosexual masculinity in accordance with, rather than in opposition to, social change.

Popular publications also proliferated the image of the new man. Several articles in the men's magazine *Esquire* celebrated the "new etiquette" and offered men examples of how they could behave more like Alda and Carter. One how-to guide in 1977 argued that while "being rude has come to stand for being tough," men should turn away from masculine bravado: "Maybe it is time for all of us to button up our shirts and clean up our mouths and learn a few things about civilized behavior."<sup>60</sup> A March 1977 article entitled "Home Economics for Guys" encouraged men's engagement in the traditionally domestic sphere by teaching men how to sew on a button, decorate, and dress themselves in appealing colors.<sup>61</sup> A January 1978 article in that same magazine uncovered the "unexpressed feelings of guilt and anger" men experienced as a result of their wives' or girlfriends' abortions. The article's criticism that "the right to abdicate future motherhood is guaranteed" but "the right to insist on future fatherhood is not" can certainly be read as men's desire to reclaim their control over bodies, but it also attests to their desire to be given the choice to become good, active fathers.<sup>62</sup> In a 1979 survey by the magazine, over two thousand men reaffirmed the importance of fatherhood: men who were fathers tended to report more satisfaction with their lives, and the majority of men reported that one of their most important goals was taking care of loved ones.<sup>63</sup> Items in *Stores* and other trade publications touted the value of the new male consumer of fashion and beauty care products.<sup>64</sup> These, along with countless other examples in print and on television in the mid- to late-1970s, fostered the image of the new man.

While Alan Alda expressed concern over becoming a sex object – seeing this reversal of gender as a continuation of sexism that had haunted women – other men embraced the newly

liberated women's openness toward sexuality. In 1972, Burt Reynolds posed as the first nude centerfold for *Cosmopolitan* magazine; in 1977, Arnold Schwarzenegger became the second. *Cosmopolitan's* editor Helen Gurley Brown called Reynold's centerfold a "victory for women" who had, for too long, been the object of the sexual gaze.<sup>65</sup> Although the photo turns the tables, allowing women to objectify a man, Reynolds remains in control of his image and, therefore, his masculinity. His position atop a bearskin rug and his rugged appearance, including facial and chest hair, reinforce his manliness. His playful smile reminds the viewer it is his choice to become an object of the sexual gaze, and this "victory for women" is only possible because a man has granted it [Figure 1.3].



*Figure 1.3. Burt Reynolds was Cosmopolitan's first male nude centerfold in 1972. Reportedly, the spread inspired the creation of Playgirl magazine.<sup>66</sup>*

Perhaps even more than Reynolds' inaugural centerfold, Arnold Schwarzenegger's follow-up in 1977 reveals the desirability of muscle and machismo.<sup>67</sup> Where Reynolds lounges suggestively on the bearskin rug, Schwarzenegger sits upright, ready to spring to action. What Schwarzenegger lacks in chest and facial hair in comparison to Reynolds is more than made up for by his bulging muscles [Figure 1.4]. Like Reynolds, Schwarzenegger allows his body to be gazed at, but it is a body of conspicuous brawn and power. These two nude centerfolds



demonstrate the contradictory ways masculinity responded to the women's movement: encouraging the female gaze as something permitted by the white heterosexual man.

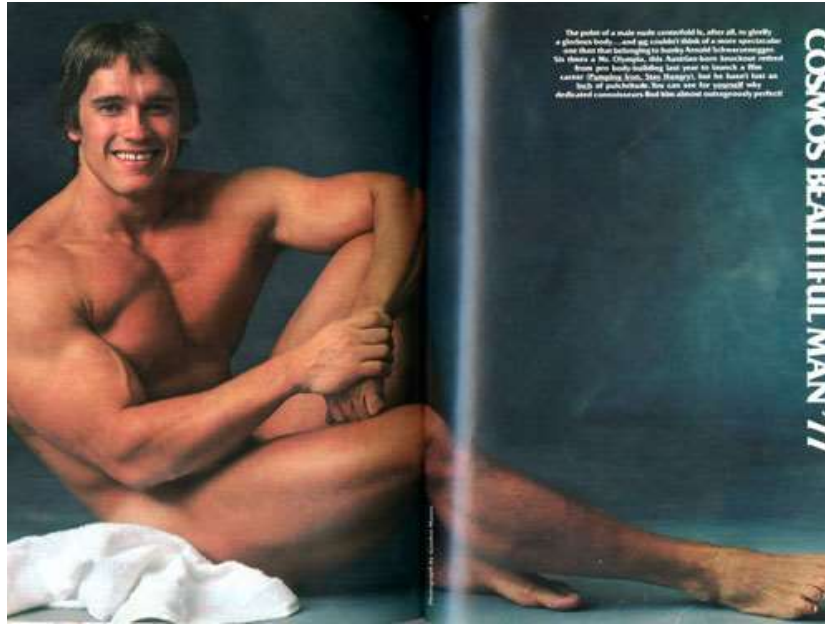


Figure 1.4. In 1977, the same year that Jimmy Carter was inaugurated, Arnold Schwarzenegger posed for his own *Cosmopolitan* centerfold.

The pushback against the new man extended to other facets of cultural life beyond the Hollywood films studied by Holmlund and Jeffords. In 1990, poet Robert Bly published *Iron John*, a book-length interpretation of a Grimms fairy tale and popular myth about a boy who is raised by a wild man in nature.<sup>68</sup> For Bly the story signals the necessity of a return to male initiation rites and of strengthening the bonds between fathers and sons. *Iron John* spent over a year on the *New York Times* bestseller list, propelling Bly to the forefront of a new men's movement. He began hosting men's gatherings, at which he gave lectures, played music, and invited men to talk about their feelings of disenfranchisement. In an interview with Bill Moyers of PBS, Bly explains that men's gatherings are not a consequence of the women's movement; he is careful not to assail feminism. Instead, he targets the Industrial Revolution for casting men out

of the home for work to sustain the families they are forced to neglect.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, the men's movement under Bly did not see gatherings as celebrating the exclusion of women but rather offering a "safe space" for men to express their feelings.

The success of *Iron John* and the popularity of men's gatherings in the early 1990s are a fitting apotheosis to the tensions between forms of masculinity that had played out throughout the long 1980s. On the one hand, Bly insists that men's gatherings enable men to process grief and express their softness, and that this movement is not anti-feminist but seeks harmony with women. In practice, though, men's gatherings were gender-exclusive and critical of radical feminism, which Bly attributed simply to women not having good fathers.<sup>70</sup> The *Iron John* moment captured the worst aspects of the new man and the cowboy, synthesizing them under the guise of liberating men from their woes.

### Changing Masculinities on Television

Understanding these tensions between forms of masculinity in popular culture and the political sphere helps elucidate why television in the long 1980s was changing so rapidly and what kinds of changes occurred within the industry, technology, and television texts themselves. This project investigates those three elements in particular, paying special attention to the ways that each new development can be read as a triumph of the new man while still recognizing the value of the cowboy.

The first half of this project looks at popular series on primetime. Despite the reality that television was actively seeking audiences of women during the long 1980s, audiences of men were still valuable, and the success of a number of men's programs with women viewers

indicates that these new forms of masculinity on screen attracted a variety of audiences. In the first chapter, I look at the central male characters on action series to demonstrate how the “men’s genre” was being redefined as the masculinity of the action hero was becoming more complicated by new man sensibilities. Unlike the Hollywood hard bodies, action stars on television in the long 1980s were men whose masculinity was tempered by values like social justice and cooperation, whose sexuality was not inviolably heterosexual, and whose success did not always come easy – or at all. In series like *Magnum PI* (CBS, 1980-88) and *The A-Team* (NBC, 1983-87) trauma from experiences during the Vietnam War deeply affected the central characters and, by extension, the narrative. The increased use of continuing storylines, which became popular across primetime dramas, had the effect of making male action heroes not immediately successful at their work or love lives as these narrative elements extended across episodes. Through an examination of extra-textual materials, I demonstrate how heroes like Magnum or the title character of *MacGyver* (ABC, 1985-92) were deliberately cast as men whose masculinity was less cowboy, more new man. In total, then, action series of the long 1980s shifted from hypermasculine to a more dialectical balance between elements of the macho and elements of sensitivity.

The second chapter examines primetime domestic sitcoms that feature characters I call “Mr. Moms” who are responsible for the domestic labor and child care within the home. In response to the women’s movement, these “Mr. Mom” sitcoms liberated women from the domestic sphere and enabled men to claim it as their own. Although intended to offer an idealized fantasy for working women and second-wave feminists, some critics and scholars have historically noted the negative repercussions of absent mothers in series like *Who’s the Boss* (ABC, 1984-92) and *Charles in Charge* (NBC, 1984-85; first-run syndication, 1985-90), as well

as the superficiality with which women's work outside the home is treated in series like *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-89). I concentrate instead on the potential impact of the series' foregrounding of men and masculinities as domesticated and potentially queer. The increasingly progressive attitudes toward women's work exhibited by "Mr. Mom" characters, coupled with the ultimate removal of the wife-mother character from the household, result in complex depictions of masculinity that reveal feminist and anti-feminist anxieties about the changing structure of the American family in the 1980s.

The second half of the project shifts focus from primetime to the margins of television programming, where audiences of men were more vigorously courted outside the boundaries of family viewing time and through individuated viewing practices. In this section, I shift focus from readings of particular series to examinations of strategies to entice male viewers to participate in greater media consumption. The third chapter examines late-night comedy series from the birth of *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975- ) to the retirement of Johnny Carson in 1993. I read this history against major news stories like the Los Angeles riots in 1992 and the Congressional hearings on accusations of sexual misconduct on the part of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. During the long 1980s, Johnny Carson, who had hosted *The Tonight Show* (NBC, 1954- ) for thirty years, retired, and this left late-night fractured without a logical patriarch to dominate the competition. At the same time, weekends saw several cycles of birth, death, and rebirth of the sketch comedy series *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975- ). While Carson was supposed to appeal to every demographic, *Saturday Night Live* positioned itself as a program for the young, hip viewer. As I demonstrate, though, this intended viewer is decidedly male. And yet throughout the long 1980s *Saturday Night Live* offered provocative images of masculinity: poking fun at Arnold Schwarzenegger's machismo, celebrating cross-dressing, and

finally erasing the boundaries between genders. While *Saturday Night Live* enticed men to watch this gender play, it also offered seductive accounts for how flexible masculinity could be. This was simultaneous to the program's larger rejection of women as producers and its tokenism toward performers of color, along with the birth of syndicated programs and the network Fox that targeted audiences of color more explicitly; thus, the gender non-fixity seen in some of *Saturday Night Live*'s sketches was performed by and intended for a mostly white, heterosexual audience.

In the final chapter, I examine the tandem rise of cable sports programming network ESPN and home video technologies as two developments that allowed the viewer to look at bodies from the privacy of home. Launched in 1977, ESP-TV, now ESPN, grew exponentially during the long 1980s as it offered sports programming men wanted to watch as well as ancillary programs that built up their hunger for more programming to consume. At the same time, Betamax and VHS increased their sales across the U.S., allowing more consumers to "time-shift" their favorite television programs by recording them for later viewing as well as watch feature films from the comfort of home. Collectively, then, cable sports and home video technologies meant less of a need to go out for entertainment. As the Moral Majority and rising conservative attitudes pushed pornography out of the mainstream and back to the margins of popular culture, the sale of video tapes meant it could be consumed in private. This further meant different kinds of pornography could be consumed, an availability of bodily spectacle that ESPN similarly granted. This concurrent timing with cable programming like the Playboy channel, with its explicit sex, and ESPN, with the implicit homoeroticism of athletics, laid the conditions for private queer viewing.

Television in the long 1980s reminds us that masculinity and domesticity are not, and have never been, mutually exclusive concepts. This project seeks to unpack that connection by looking at images of men working in the home and at constructions of audiences watching television at home. As an important development in television history, the long 1980s are a moment at which economic, technological, and industrial changes within television collided with social and political upheaval. The result was programming about men and for men, but the masculinity within this programming and presumed outside it in its viewers was a masculinity that existed in counterpoint to dominant Reagan-era identity.

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<sup>1</sup> E.M. Swift, "The Original Miracle on Ice," *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Noelle Nikpour, "The Cold War Thaw: How Hockey Was the Beginning of the End," *Sun-Sentinel*, February 28, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984), 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Time*, January 3, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase "kinder and gentler nation" was part of the speech George H.W. Bush gave in acceptance of the presidential nomination on August 18, 1988, at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans. This was the same speech from which his "thousand points of light" idea came, as well as the phrase "read my lips: no new taxes," which many attribute to his defeat by Clinton in 1992. For more on the significance of the phrase and Bush's intentions, see Jon Meacham, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York: Random House, 2015). I would be remiss not to acknowledge cynical responses to these phrases in popular culture, most notably Neil Young's 1989 song "Keep on Rockin' in the Free World," which proclaims "we got a thousand points of light / for the homeless man / we got a kinder, gentler machine gun hand."

<sup>6</sup> *Time*, August 16, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Feuer, *Seeing through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), viii.

<sup>13</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 160-172.

<sup>14</sup> Caldwell, *Televisuality*, 27.

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- <sup>15</sup> Chris Holmlund, "Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade," in *Screening the Male*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 1993), 214.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-229.
- <sup>17</sup> Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 24.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>20</sup> Robert D. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (1998), 30.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Aaron J. Moore and David Dewberry, "The Masculine Image of Presidents as Sporting Figures: A Public Relations Perspective," *SAGE Open* 2, no. 3 (2012): 1-11.
- <sup>23</sup> "The Inauguration of Jimmy Carter," *TV Guide*, January 15, 1977, 4-6.
- <sup>24</sup> John Weisman, "Washington Report," *TV Guide*, February 12, 1977, A3.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *The Tonight Show*, "Episode 16.79," NBC, February 1, 1978.
- <sup>27</sup> John D. Roche, "Jimmy Carter: The Massage Is the Message," *TV Guide*, June 18, 1977, A4.
- <sup>28</sup> John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).
- <sup>29</sup> John Mihalic, "Hair on the President's Chest," *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 1984, 30.
- <sup>30</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 123.
- <sup>31</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 195.
- <sup>32</sup> "I'm Jimmy Carter, and...", *Time*, January 3, 1977, 13.
- <sup>33</sup> Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah* (New York: Grove Press, 2006); Douglas G. Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency* (New York: Viking Adult, 1998).
- <sup>34</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, "The Impact of Presidential Personality on News Coverage in Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (1985): 66-73.
- <sup>35</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 22.
- <sup>36</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "The Cult of Masculinity: American Social Character and the Legacy of the Cowboy," in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*, ed. Michael Kaufman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 237.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.
- <sup>38</sup> *ABC World News*, ABC, March 30, 1981.
- <sup>39</sup> James Brady died in 2014 as a result of permanent injuries from the gunshot wound. At that point, his death was ruled a homicide. For an account of Reagan's recovery as a heroic testament to his masculinity, see Del Quentin Wilber, *Rawhide Down: The Near Assassination of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Picador, 2012).
- <sup>40</sup> Lou Cannon, "Reagan Challenges Soviets to Dismantle Berlin Wall," *Washington Post*, June 13, 1987, A1, A19.
- <sup>41</sup> James Mann, "Tear Down That Myth," *New York Times*, June 10, 2007, 103.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> D. Joel Wiggins, "Ronald Reagan," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 3, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1350.

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- <sup>44</sup> As quoted in Dudley Clendinen, "The Medium and Mondale," *New York Times*, November 8, 1984.
- <sup>45</sup> "Jennings-Koppel Report: Memo to the Future," *ABC News*, April 23, 1987, transcript p. 13.
- <sup>46</sup> *Time*, August 18, 1993.
- <sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the next Democrat in office, Barack Obama, would overturn both laws.
- <sup>48</sup> See, among others, Michael Meeropol, *Surrender: How the Clinton Administration Completed the Reagan Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
- <sup>49</sup> Michael Duffy and Dan Goodgame, *Marching in Place: The Status Quo Presidency of George Bush* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
- <sup>50</sup> Caldwell, *Televisuality*, 256; Sydney Blumenthal, "The Syndicated Presidency," *The New Yorker*, April 5, 1993, 42-43.
- <sup>51</sup> Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodern, or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3.
- <sup>52</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 202.
- <sup>53</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1963); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1969); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1970).
- <sup>54</sup> David Scott Diffrient, "Alan Alda," in *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 1 eds. Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2004), 19.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Susan Edmiston, "Alan Alda: 'America's Sweetheart,'" *Redbook*, July 1976, 88; Susan Edmiston, "Alan Alda: A Man Who Really Respects Women," *McCall's*, October 1979, 74-80.
- <sup>57</sup> As quoted in Dwight Whitney, "Being a Star Is a Nuisance," *TV Guide*, June 4, 1977, 30.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 56.
- <sup>60</sup> "The New Etiquette," *Esquire*, December 1977, 129.
- <sup>61</sup> "Home Economics for Guys," *Esquire*, March 1977, 125-143.
- <sup>62</sup> Linda Bird Francke, "Abortion and Men," *Esquire*, January 1978, 58-60.
- <sup>63</sup> Gail Sheehy, "Introducing the Postponing Generation," *Esquire*, October 1979, 25-33.
- <sup>64</sup> "New Male Market," *Stores*, July 1977, 7-9; Richard Natale, "Off the Record: Wilkes Bashford," *Stores*, October 1977, 27-29.
- <sup>65</sup> As quoted in "Burt Reynolds Nude: 10 Facts about the *Cosmo* Centrefold," *BBC News*, April 30, 2012.
- <sup>66</sup> David Mansour, *From Abba to Zoom: A Pop Culture Encyclopedia of the Late Twentieth Century* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel, 2005).
- <sup>67</sup> Though a native-born Austrian, Schwarzenegger's appearance in an American magazine for a predominantly American readership demonstrates what was considered ideal American masculinity.
- <sup>68</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990).
- <sup>69</sup> *A Gathering of Men with Robert Bly*, VHS (New York: Mystic Fire Video, 1990).
- <sup>70</sup> Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case for Cagney and Lacey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).



## Chapter Two Pitying Fools: Gender and Genre in 1980s Drama Series

One of the most remembered developments in television of the long 1980s was the advent of serialized storytelling on primetime. Counter to the philosophy that episodic, or closed, narrative styles lent themselves better to rerun syndication, so that episodes could be aired in any order, the primetime serial attempted to tap into what had made soap operas popular among women: sustaining plots and conflict across episodes. CBS attempted to recapture the daytime audience during primetime with the creation of dramas like *Dallas* (CBS, 1978-91) and its spinoff *Knots Landing* (CBS, 1979-93). *Dallas* became a top ten primetime hit within two seasons and remained there for most of its fourteen-season run. Other networks, seeing the success of the primetime serial model, developed their own versions with similar premises: *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-89) is about an oil magnate in Denver, its spinoff *The Colbys* (CBS, 1985-87) featured characters introduced on *Dynasty*, and *Falcon Crest* (CBS, 1981-90) was similarly a series about a wealthy family in wine country.

In addition to these serial melodramas, the long 1980s were also a time in which episodic, or closed narrative, action series populated the primetime grid. Many of these series were about crime fighters living on the fringes of society, social and economic polar opposites from the affluent elite depicted in series like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. These series featured male protagonists nearly exclusively, yet had crossover appeal to audiences of men, women, and children; lucrative syndication deals leading to decades of reruns; made-for-TV movies; and contemporary reboots as television series and feature films.<sup>1</sup> Despite these clear signs of popularity and financial success, television scholars have paid action and crime dramas far less attention than primetime

serials like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, likely for the reason that they seem less revolutionary by comparison.

As I demonstrate in this chapter, action series of the long 1980s are worth studying precisely because they are *not* primetime serial melodramas. Eschewing continuous storytelling for more traditional episodic plot structures, these series still allowed the lead characters flexibility in their performances of masculinities and, across seasons, sincere character development. As such, they serve as rich examples of evolving representations of masculinities on primetime within the long 1980s. Among three of the series central to my study here – *Magnum*, *The A-Team* (NBC, 1983-87) and *MacGyver* (ABC, 1985-1992) – only the first has received much scholarly attention for the ways in which the narrative opens up the possibility of Magnum’s personal growth, thus linking narrative and gender. This chapter expands on that idea, but rather than seeing *Magnum PI* as a unique case study, I find that other action series similarly manage to enable character development through emphasis on masculine hierarchies, Vietnam survivor trauma, and successes and failures at work.

The wide-ranging appeal of action series demonstrates the ways broadcast networks attempted to keep hold of audiences in a widening television market. They were broadcast on three different networks – ABC (*MacGyver*), NBC (*The A-Team*), and CBS (*Magnum PI*). *Magnum* and *The A-Team* were top rated shows for much of their original broadcasts. *MacGyver*, by contrast, struggled as a “sleeper hit,” yet managed to stay on the air for seven seasons and two TV movies.<sup>2</sup> Casting lead actors who challenged the brainless hunk stereotype of the action genre and instead were sensitive and thoughtful was one way to do this. Another was to exploit

the bodies of these sensitive leading actors for their sex appeal, reversing the gender of sexual displays from television's notorious "jiggle" era of the 1970s.

Finally, storylines that questioned aspects of male gender roles that are often taken for granted operated discursively with contemporary political and social themes of the Reagan era. Although the organization of *The A-Team* around a central male authority figure and the series' embracing of big action sequences distinguishes it from the more contemplative *Magnum PI*, its themes of cooperation, abandoning of capitalist principles, and Vietnam survivor trauma all contribute to its depictions of complex masculinities. *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-90), which is often remembered in popular history for its postmodern aesthetics and influence on men's fashion, is seldom remembered for its portrayals of the inability of its two lead detectives to solve crimes and preserve justice – a theme of failure that paralleled men's declining role in the American home as hero-breadwinner.<sup>3</sup>

Television in the 1980s on the whole is typically examined for its ideological connections to Reagan-era conservatism and yuppie values, something *Dallas* and *Dynasty* make explicit, and for its technological and aesthetic developments, of which series like *Miami Vice* and *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-87) serve as prime examples. The shift within the industry from broadcasting to entire households (by presenting the "Least Objectionable Programming") toward narrowcasting meant broadcasters could "value smaller audiences if the incoming-earning potential and purchasing power of those audiences were high enough to offset their limited numbers."<sup>4</sup> This new approach to audience has led to the study of many critically acclaimed series like *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987-91) that attracted lucrative audiences but were, by the old measurements, ratings failures. Popular action series have not received much scholarly attention; when they are written about, it is usually to demonstrate their most basic qualities. John Fiske,

for instance, uses *The A-Team* as an exemplar of formulaic dramas that are “gendered masculine.”<sup>5</sup> But by the end of the long 1980s, many drama series “had begun to emphasize characters’ emotional developments over action” and made this shift palatable, even appealing, in men’s genres.<sup>6</sup> As such, action series, including those that are not ordinarily regarded as “quality television,” are crucial to understanding television’s engagement with masculinities in the long 1980s. This chapter traces the lineage from the primetime serial to serial parody sitcoms to action series in order to demonstrate how gender and genre became inverted and intermixed.

### Serialized Storytelling on Primetime

Action series that had traditionally been invested in audiences of men found themselves, in the long 1980s, suddenly competing for their shares of the lucrative new “quality” audience of working women. The result was a variety of action heroes who were visibly on display for the women’s appreciation of their bodies and whose performance of masculinity challenged conventions in popular discourse and other media, like the Hollywood film. Among the murder mysteries, cop series, and action adventure series, male heroes on primetime became more interested in fashion, in expressing their emotions, and in working cooperatively within intimate friendships and partnerships. These heroes also began to fail at traditional male provinces, such as crime-solving, in ways that suggested the fallibility of masculine authority. While calling this a “feminization” of action series may be an overstatement, it was a shift in the masculine presentation and masculine address of these dramas. The reworking of masculinity on action dramas demonstrated the complexity of television’s masculinities – here signaled by the ability of masculinity on screen to morph and evolve to suit the needs of a changing television audience.

In order to understand the “demasculinization” of these action series, it is necessary to understand how the advent of serial storytelling on primetime had shaped portrayals of men and masculinities in counterpoint. Before the major hits like *Dallas* popularized continuing narratives within drama series, sitcoms that combined sincere melodrama with parodies of it featured continuing storylines that accentuated a feminization of men’s gender roles within the family. Subsequently, primetime serial melodramas, though drawing upon the women’s genre of the daytime soap, “defeminized” themselves for a wider audience by foregrounding stories of men’s successes and failures in big business. Action series were a correlating part of television’s transformation during the long 1980s. As serial melodramas began to defeminize, action series demasculinized in turn.

Serial storytelling enabled primetime melodramas to utilize sustained conflicts and “cliffhanger” endings to boost ratings. The most famous of these cliffhangers – which influenced a subsequent generation of television season finale writing – was the March 1980 *Dallas* season three finale.<sup>7</sup> In the final seconds of the episode, J.R. Ewing (Larry Hagman) was shot by an unseen assailant, leading to months of promos that asked “Who shot J.R.?” to generate excitement for the coming season. The answer to the question was not resolved until the fourth episode of the following season when it was revealed that Kristin (Mary Crosby), J.R.’s mistress and his wife’s sister, had pulled the trigger.<sup>8</sup> This eventual discovery may have been less important than the open question, since, as Christine Geraghty notes, the real function of cliffhangers is to “ensure that the audience is more concerned with continuance than resolution.”<sup>9</sup> Once Kristin was determined to be assailant, new narrative complications emerged: her claim of being pregnant with J.R.’s child brings a potential new scandal to the family and prevents a public trial.

“Who shot J.R.?” became a question that provoked the nation’s television viewers, some 76% of which had watched the cliffhanger episode, “A House Divided.”<sup>10</sup> The success of this storyline and the subsequent marketing campaign for *Dallas*’ fourth season premiere had a deep effect on television writing. *Dallas* was not the first or only series at the time to utilize a cliffhanger ending, but, as Richard Corliss claims, because of its ratings success, Dallas “paved the way for storylines that stretched across the TV season like Interstate 20 across the state of Texas.”<sup>11</sup> The sustained storylines and conflict that led up to J.R.’s shooting served as a model for later series in the 1980s that similarly challenged audiences with myriad central characters and interweaving plots.

Open, or serial, narratives had long existed on television prior to *Dallas*, but they were generally a technique of daytime soap operas, whose ongoing storylines ensured that viewers would tune in each day to see the plot advance slowly. Tania Modleski has famously described soap operas as adapting to the “rhythms of women’s lives.”<sup>12</sup> Modleski sees this achieved through particular kinds of narratives emphasizing familial discord but also through narrative conventions like repeated storylines, brief plot summaries told from one character to another, and frequent use of characters’ names in dialogue that enable the housewife to keep up with the narrative while she attends to her domestic chores. Jason Mittell similarly describes soap opera storytelling as “diegetic retelling” that “both facilitates viewer recall and provides the pleasures of watching characters react to past events.”<sup>13</sup>

Primetime television could not succeed with serial narratives, it was commonly believed, for both aesthetic and practical reasons. A one-hour drama represented two half-hour units of programming that could be a liability if unsuccessful with audiences.<sup>14</sup> Philip Sewell notes that initial syndication sales for *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were weaker than expected, partly because of the

fear of losing an audience that drove some in the syndicated market to prefer sitcoms instead.<sup>15</sup> As Jason Mittell puts it, “[t]raditional industry logic dictated that audiences lacked the weekly consistency to allow for serialized narratives, and the pressures of syndication favored interchangeable episodes conventional sitcoms and procedural dramas.”<sup>16</sup> Without the same diegetic retelling and daily, rather than weekly installments, that characterized daytime soaps, how would viewers remember a storyline well enough to follow what was happening? When – if – a series was sold for syndication, it would be too complicated to guarantee the episodes would be rerun in sequence, but if the episodes were rerun out of their original broadcast order, then the narrative would not make sense, and viewers would tune out.<sup>17</sup> Allan Burns, a producer and writer for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-77) and *Lou Grant* (CBS, 1977-82), shows which preceded *Dallas*, explains that episodic storytelling was not usually the choice of creative teams but a response to pressure from network executives concerned with maintaining audience shares: “The network didn’t like us doing [continued stories]. I think the main reason was that they wanted to run or rerun the show’s episodes in any way they wanted to. They couldn’t do that if one episode led up to another.”<sup>18</sup>

There are many flaws with these presumptions, the most obvious of which is that audiences are neither stupid nor forgetful. Additionally, primetime had already had made use of ongoing stories in its first three decades. Jeffrey Sconce notes that Lucy’s pregnancy on *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-57) was an early example of an ongoing storyline in an otherwise episodic comedy.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the birth and growth of Little Ricky was one of several continuing stories the series told; the Ricardos spent nearly an entire season in Hollywood and another touring Europe.

From 1964 to 1969, prior to the “*Dallas* phenomenon,” American primetime experimented with primetime serial dramas. *Peyton Place* (ABC, 196-69), which aired in two

half-hour installments per week, was ABC's attempt to capture a nighttime soap audience, as the British network ITV had done with *Coronation Street* (1960- ).<sup>20</sup> With initially successful ratings, ABC decided to increase airing to three times a week, but a decline in ratings led to several moves to different time slots. A floating position on the schedule, along with content that challenged acceptable sexual and social mores from primetime, eventually led to its cancellation.<sup>21</sup> For many television executives, *Peyton Place* was a prime example warning of the perils of broadcasting continuous narratives on primetime, despite more complex social forces leading to its cancellation.<sup>22</sup>

As Elana Levine chronicles, the television industry's impetus to serialize primetime nonetheless did not vanish with *Peyton Place*'s initial failure. A number of efforts, including a daytime revival entitled *Return to Peyton Place* (NBC, 1972-74), were either in development or broadcast in the late 1960s and 1970s. By the beginning of the long 1980s, broadcast networks were fiercely competing with a loss of audiences to cable. "Primetime" became less rigid in its scheduling, with trials of new series in the summer (when other series would be in reruns).<sup>23</sup>

These efforts emblemized a change in the industry, and their impact could be felt deeply upon narrative and character development. Writing in 1974, before serial storytelling began to take hold over primetime, television scholar Horace Newcomb argued that "the regular and repeated appearance of a continuing group of characters is one of [television's] strongest techniques for the development of rich and textured dramatic presentations."<sup>24</sup> Newcomb found it compelling that primetime series had yet to realize what an emotional hold daytime soap opera's continuous narratives had on audiences. Only a few years later, on the heels of the *Dallas* "Who Shot J.R.?" cliffhanger, *Broadcasting* magazine announced that the 1980-81 television season would be full of primetime soaps.<sup>25</sup> By 1984 Jane Feuer observed the "pervasive



influence of serial form and multiple plot structure upon all of American television,” not just primetime soaps.<sup>26</sup> This development marked a shift in the traditional Aristotelian conflict-climax-resolution of primetime since “any ultimate resolution – for good or for ill – goes against the only moral imperative of the continuing serial form: the plot must go on.”<sup>27</sup>

As plots continue, rather than reset in the structure of episodic dramas and sitcoms, characters are granted the capacity to remember their grievances with each other. J.R.’s shooting, for instance, was the result of season-long scheming against his business associates and mistreatment of his mistress, conflict that brewed throughout the season until the explosive season finale. Many characters were also able to grow as a result of ongoing stories. J.R.’s wife Sue Ellen (Linda Gray) evolved from an alcoholic housewife to mother to savvy businesswoman during *Dallas*’ run. Sue Ellen’s ability to cope with her addiction fluctuated throughout the series as she experienced other emotional trials and conflicts, much as an addict in real life is never fully cured of the addiction.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the possibility for emotional growth through sustained storylines, the patriarchs on primetime serials did not evolve – only perhaps ossify. While J.R.’s particular tactics and ambitions changed throughout *Dallas*’ long run, at heart J.R. remained a character who valued business success over everything else. Likewise, Blake Carrington (John Forsythe), the patriarch at the center of the serial *Dynasty*, ran his business and his family with equal severity.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, both series bring the corporation into domestic terms by having it run by the family, but both also construct familial relationships as economic or transactional in turn.<sup>30</sup> The inflexibility of these central male characters contributed to a depiction of unchanging, unflagging masculinity, despite the fact that in American society at the time men were experiencing significant changes and challenges to their positions as a result of the feminist, civil rights, and gay rights movements.

The static nature of these patriarchs was in contrast to the emotional development of characters on crime and action dramas, both those with serial storylines like *Hill Street Blues* and more episodic series like *Magnum PI*. One of the first to write about the “messy” aesthetic of the urban-set *Hill Street Blues*, Todd Gitlin explains that an individual episode may set up multiple stories, some of which remain unresolved at the episode’s conclusion. This, Gitlin explains, means that the “density of scripts...matches the actual density and convolution of city life.”<sup>31</sup> Thomas Schatz similarly finds the “interplay of professional and personal conflicts – and of episodic and serial plot lines” as “crucial to *Hill Street*’s basic narrative strategy.”<sup>32</sup>

Although a detective series in which cases were mostly solved at the end of each episode, *Magnum PI* “moved far beyond the simple demands of stock characters solving the crime of the week” and “created complex characterizations” by allowing certain narrative threads to continue across episodes.<sup>33</sup> Horace Newcomb proposes the term “cumulative narrative” to describe how the series extends the narrative development of the title character.<sup>34</sup> Given the primetime serial’s target audience of women and the crime dramas’ general attention to male audiences, the emotional development of characters like Thomas Magnum or *Hill Street Blues*’ Captain Frank Furillo (Daniel J. Travanti) had important repercussions on both genre and gender conventions.

### Combining Melodrama and Masculinity: Parodies in the Long 1980s

The ability of episodic action and crime series to depict changing, complex male characters is owed in part to the success of primetime soap opera parodies, which combined comedy with serial narratives and melodramatic plots. Norman Lear’s *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (first-run syndication, 1976-77) and Susan Harris and Paul Junger Witt’s *Soap* (ABC,

1977-81) used melodrama for the sake of humor and demonstrated the viability of serial narratives on primetime as well as the capacity for character growth, especially the evolution of male characters. Beginning at the start of the long 1980s, soap opera parodies demonstrated the television industry's desperate move to find "something new" while drawing upon familiar material from television's origins (the soap opera). Soap opera parodies established a legacy for sensitive male characters and the primetime serial.

Norman Lear's *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* was broadcast in first-run syndication every day, like a daytime soap, while Susan Harris and Paul Junger Witt's *Soap* aired on ABC primetime once a week, like a traditional sitcom. Unlike *Peyton Place* or *Dallas*, these two series used melodrama for the sake of humor. *Mary Hartman* "followed the soap opera form of several rotating and suspended plot lines" while "exploiting the humor of ludicrous circumstances."<sup>35</sup> *Soap* was what Jason Mittell terms a "genre-mixed" series: it had many of the characteristics of a domestic sitcom and indeed was packaged as a comedy for ABC, but it employed a serial narrative with melodramatic plots typical of soap operas.<sup>36</sup> Because of its position in the primetime lineup and its longer run, as well as its rich ensemble cast of men, *Soap* in particular deserves further attention, especially in consideration of the relationship between serial storytelling and complex masculinities.

During Fred Silverman's brief tenure as president of programming at ABC from 1975 to 1978, ABC capitalized on the pervasiveness of sex in American culture to achieve top ratings. As Elana Levine has demonstrated, television on the whole became more sexually explicit in the 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Silverman had worked at CBS during its shift from rural-themed sitcoms to "socially relevant" material like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-77) and *All in the Family* (1971-79).<sup>38</sup> Upon his move to ABC, however, Silverman determined that escapist, sexy programming, rather

than heavy-hitting social commentary, would enable the network to move ahead of its competitor CBS. Under Silverman, series like *Three's Company* (1977-84), an innuendo-laden sitcom about two single women living with a man they believed to be gay, began to dominate ABC's schedule.

*Soap* combined the titillation of successful series like *Three's Company* with the social relevance that had made sitcoms like *All in the Family* so popular. Dubbed a "sexcom" by Silverman, *Soap* featured a laugh track and plenty of physical humor, but much of its comedy "relied upon the clash between the characters' promiscuous behavior and their attempts to conform to conventional morality."<sup>39</sup> The series' narrative centered on two sisters, Jessica Tate (Katherine Helmond) and Mary Campbell (Cathryn Damon), and their dysfunctional families. Storylines included multiple cases of marital infidelity, the seduction of a Catholic priest (and consequent Satanic possession of his child), and interracial dating. Soap operas "contain more references to social problems than do most other forms of mass entertainment," but that drama usually plays out in the domestic sphere.<sup>40</sup> In "socially relevant" sitcoms like *All in the Family*, those same social issues also become domestic problems as the family members take political and ideological stances. While an issue may not be resolved in thirty minutes, the closed narrative structure means the family is done talking about it, and the following week they encounter a different social problem. Because *Soap* was written with a serial narrative, characters were given multiple episodes to discuss and respond to social issues. Given the series' emphasis on sexuality, issues addressed in various plots had to do with the limitations placed on women regarding their sexual desires, acceptance for homosexuality, men's impotence, and men's inability to remain monogamous as threatening to both home and business. Because nearly every

conflict, personal or business-related, boiled down to sex, *Soap* conflated social problems with sexual problems.

Despite the emphasis on laughing about sex, *Soap* has moments of emotional poignancy, and it is through these moments that its serial narrative allows for character evolution. For example, a continuing storyline featured Burt Campbell (Richard Mulligan) nearing an emotional breakdown. To cope with stress, Burt believes he can render himself invisible by snapping his fingers – though, of course, he is still quite visible to the other characters and the audience. Burt’s tactic is played for laughs until a scene in which he and his wife Mary sit in the bathtub together and talk candidly about how Burt’s perceived failures as a breadwinner are threatening his emotional stability.<sup>41</sup> The scene is intimate and played for sincerity. Mary’s unconditional love for her husband and Richard Mulligan’s skillful switch from facetious comedy to heart-wrenching drama encourage the audience to empathize with Burt’s pain. Moments of emotional earnestness like this, as well as the love and affection shared among the characters, speak to the ways in which the series is not always parodying melodrama; it is also enacting it. As Jason Mittell confesses, “it is difficult to serially watch the show and not experience sincere melodramatic engagement.”<sup>42</sup>

Yet this emotional poignancy is always in counterpoint to sex and sex farce. The use of sex, especially the sexuality of women characters, was common in the 1970s, which was known as the “jiggle” or “T&A” era of television. As a series at the dawn of the long 1980s, *Soap* marks the transition from the objectification of women’s bodies in the jiggle era – objectification for male audiences – to the increased display of men’s bodies in the 1980s as networks courted audiences of women who, they believed, would like to ogle at “beefcakes” like Tom Selleck on *Magnum*. Positioned neatly in between these two moments, *Soap* equally exploited women’s and

men's bodies and sexualities. Responding to outcries from ABC affiliates and religious organizations about the "sexcom" before it had even aired, Fred Silverman pledged that "no character in *Soap* [would] ever be rewarded for immoral behavior."<sup>43</sup> When affiliates began to insist they would not carry the series, certain scenes were revised. Notably, a scene of Jessica Tate in bed with a lover was altered so that Jessica was only seen lacing up her sneakers while fully dressed. With Jessica removed from the bed and fully clothed, the audience is left to gaze at the male body on display. Her lover (played by Robert Urich) remained in bed, bare-chested and on display for the female gaze; he looks strikingly like Burt Reynolds' 1972 *Cosmopolitan* centerfold, the first mainstream male nude centerfold for the female gaze [Figure 2.1].<sup>44</sup>



*Figure 2.1. Peter Campbell (Robert Urich) is seen in a post-coital nap.*

In total, twelve men rotated in and out of the Tate and Campbell households during *Soap*'s four seasons. The four who had the most screen time – Chester Tate (Robert Mandan),

Danny Dallas (Ted Wass), Burt Campbell (Richard Mulligan), and Jodie Dallas (Billy Crystal) – serve either as models for Reaganesque machismo of characters on primetime serials (Chester) or for the “new man” who would persist on the domestic sitcoms I study in the next chapter. Their legacy would also continue in the softening of heroes in the 1980s as elements of this melodramatic sincerity would begin to infiltrate action-adventure series. Through serial storytelling, the men on *Soap* had the capacity to grow and change week to week. In the case of Burt and Danny especially, that growth is toward a more ideal new man. While *Soap* never featured a perfect example of the new man, the story arcs of these four characters reward those who try to embrace the new social order.

In the pilot, Burt Campbell is introduced as intolerant and potentially violent: he and stepson Danny threaten to kill each other, and he hates that his other stepson Jodie is gay. Quickly into the series, though, his character softens. He is repeatedly shown as a devoted husband to Mary. He struggles with her decision to go to college and finds himself jealous of her intellectual growth, but he does not forbid her from attending. His relationships with Danny and Jodie improve over the course of the series as well. Danny and Burt become close friends and colleagues, first in Burt’s construction business (which he renames “Campbell and Son”) and later as sheriff and deputy.<sup>45</sup> Although Burt experiences remarkable growth, he still struggles to accept certain changes in American society. It is precisely through his emotional battles that *Soap* demonstrates how the heterosexual white patriarch can learn to appreciate diversity, particularly with regard to women’s rights, race relations, and the open expression of homosexuality. Burt’s character arc stands, therefore, as a blueprint for the male viewer and as a fantasy for the female viewer who may wish her own husband were more like Burt.

In contrast to Burt, Chester Tate does not change much over the series. He neglects his wife and children for work and affairs with younger women, and he regards those of lower economic status as beneath him. At times Chester pledges his renewed fidelity to his wife Jessica, only to immediately cheat on her again. Any attempts Chester makes to change are failures; the one change he experiences during the course of the series is a dramatic decrease in wealth, but this does not change his imperious attitude. Like Burt, Chester is beleaguered with problems – blackmail, imprisonment, amnesia – but these difficulties are played for comedy. *Soap* encourages us to laugh at Chester for clinging to his status as patriarch, even as his privilege and power are obviously waning.

*Soap* positions Burt and Chester as opposite models of masculinity that continued to play out in 1980s drama series: flexible vs. fixed understandings of men's role in society, emotionally expressive vs. emotionally repressed, valuing family and friends over material wealth vs. competitive, capitalist drive to succeed. *Soap*'s continuous narrative allows Burt to develop emotionally; in heartfelt moments of drama and melodrama, the series encourages viewer empathy with Burt. By barraging Chester with setbacks and encouraging us to laugh at him, *Soap* critiques the culture of materialism that pervaded the Reagan era, as well as the traditional patriarchal family order. In doing so, the series serves as an example of how television was transitioning into representations of masculinities that challenged traditional hegemonic gender roles and as a forerunner to the gender-inverted defeminized serial melodramas and demasculinized men's genres.



*Dallas*, which premiered as a five-episode miniseries during the end of *Soap*'s first season, utilized many of the narrative structures, plot contrivances, and characterizations of daytime soaps, but presented them with drama instead of humor. Detailing the complicated plots to the second season, for instance, Ien Ang notes that "this ever continuing story may sound ridiculous and terribly exaggerated" but "it is treated in an entirely serious manner...without any humorous distancing devices."<sup>46</sup> Because *Dallas* does not ask or allow the viewer to laugh at J.R. Ewing's rigid understanding of himself as patriarch, the series in many ways reaffirms conventional gender roles.

Building upon conventions of melodrama and daytime soap opera, the plots of primetime serials center on interfamilial conflict, usually between the patriarchal authority figure and family members who stand in the way of the patriarch's attempts to earn profit. Business problems often result in tension within the family, and family troubles are often brought into the office. In short, *Dallas* and *Dynasty* depict women's stories in men's worlds, leading Christine Geraghty to label them "patriarchal soaps."<sup>47</sup> Actress Linda Gray took the label a step further, calling *Dallas* chauvinistic because "the prime role of the women characters was to be reactors to the men."<sup>48</sup> While *Dallas* and *Dynasty* expend the most narrative energy on the domestic sphere, they also "encompass the world of business and power (designed to appeal to the greater number of males in the evening viewing audience)."<sup>49</sup>

Although the capitalist head of business and family serves to draw in a broader audience for primetime (specifically, an audience of men), *Dallas* and *Dynasty* still offer plenty of pleasure to the female viewer. Like Chester Tate on *Soap*, J.R. Ewing and Blake Carrington continually see their position threatened by rival businessmen, wayward wives, and other family members. Women characters, notably Pamela Barnes Ewing (Victoria Principal) of *Dallas* and

Alexis Carrington (Joan Collins) of *Dynasty*, serve as antagonists to the men. Often their actions are made transparent to the audience but not the male characters, leaving the men unable to understand women's competence, especially in personal and familial matters.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, although Geraghty calls primetime serials patriarchal, she concedes that within the narrative, "patriarchal power is continually challenged, making it difficult for the male hero to hang on to what he believes is his rightful role."<sup>51</sup> Because of the nature of serial storytelling, in which "the plot must go on," once one threat has been thwarted, a new one always emerges.<sup>52</sup> As sociologist Mike Donaldson explains, a key facet of hegemonic masculinity is that competition is institutionalized, especially in business, and the "enterprise of winning is life-consuming."<sup>53</sup> Men prove their masculinity by winning competition, but each proof is temporary, met immediately with additional challenges.<sup>54</sup> The constant threat to the patriarchy, while never fully successful, is one of the ongoing sources of pleasure for women viewers.<sup>55</sup>

Although set in male-dominated worlds, *Dallas* and *Dynasty* both utilized "outsider women" to serve as the audience's entry into the story worlds of the supremely rich. On *Dallas*, Pamela is at first a nice girl who happens to fall in love with the youngest Ewing son, Bobby (Patrick Duffy), and serves as a constant voice of opposition to J.R.'s pursuit of money at the expense of people. On *Dynasty*, meek, sweet Krystle (Linda Evans), a secretary, has the misfortune of falling in love with the excessively wealthy and ruthless Blake, who will, she soon learns, turn on anyone suspected of betraying his loyalty. The introduction of Alexis further cemented Krystle as the "normal" person in a world of excessive wealth and amorality. Haralovich notes that through Pamela and Krystle, the audience's own "objections about the abuse of capital [became] firmly grounded within the morality of an 'ordinary' person."<sup>56</sup> The

two characters voice many of the audience's own moral misgivings about how the supremely rich maintain their wealth.

What Haralovich does not develop, and what I think is important to the structure of these primetime serials, is that it is outsider women especially who voice these misgivings. The first season of *Dynasty* depicted a middle-class family struggling under the yoke of Blake's giant company. Matthew (Bo Hopkins), the head of this family, was an antagonist and would-be business rival to Blake; his power within his family was threatened by his lack of economic and political power. When the series was retooled for its second season, it was Alexis who became Blake's primary rival, and Matthew quietly disappeared.<sup>57</sup> As an entry into the series for lower and middle income viewers, Matthew faced many of the challenges men in the long 1980s faced: stagnant wages, an inability to get ahead due to powerful conglomerations, and a loss of blind obedience from children and wives. The switch in antagonist from Matthew to Alexis, from ordinary, outsider man to fabulously costumed, insider woman, perhaps struck a chord with audiences of men, encouraging them to see ambitious women as the genuine threat to their positions.

The conflation of business and family creates a complicated relationship between masculinity and family. According to Modleski, it is domestic turmoil, not domestic harmony, that reiterates the primacy of family on daytime soaps, and this is certainly true of primetime serials as well.<sup>58</sup> For Geraghty, domestic turmoil serves as a source of pleasure for the female viewer, who sees the patriarchal characters baffled and challenged by women and their choices.<sup>59</sup> Feuer contends these series offer "an especially active role for the spectator," who may find pleasure in reading through the "multiplication of social contradictions" expressed within the narrative with regards to gender, sexuality, and economics.<sup>60</sup> Both Geraghty's and Feuer's

principal concern, like that of so many other feminist television scholars, is the appeal of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* to audiences of women, given the series' defeminization for a wider primetime audience.

I am not prepared to argue that the central position of J.R. Ewing or Blake Carrington means *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were fully "masculinized." Certainly the series' narratives emphasized women's lives, and producers and network executives actively cultivated audiences of women. I do contend that this defeminization was one characteristic of television in the long 1980s. Research at this time indicated men were among those who watched daytime soaps; those who worked tuned in when schedules permitted them to go home for lunch or used home recording technologies like the VCR to record the program and watch after work.<sup>61</sup> But certainly the scheduling of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* during primetime, after traditional business hours, meant more men were able to watch. The series' placement in the primetime lineup also gave them cultural permission to watch, since primetime – unlike daytime – is the domain of men and women alike. Anticipating and capitalizing on this, these series offered stories with central male characters, stories set in men's worlds. Primetime serials thus took a traditionally women's genre and rendered it not only palatable but exciting for men through new generic contrivances – the tying up of masculinity and melodrama.

The defeminization of primetime serials that began in the long 1980s would prove to have long-lasting consequences. Drama series lauded as "quality TV" or part of television's "Third Golden Age" are nearly exclusively male-oriented melodramas about troubled men.<sup>62</sup> The popular press has hailed series like *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) for their complex serial narratives and single-camera production aesthetics that look "cinematic." Yet the origins

for this shift in storytelling took its roots from the often maligned daytime soap opera, and many of the production techniques, such as hand-held production, overlapping dialogue, and bleak tones, can be traced to the innovations of series like *Hill Street Blues* in the long 1980s. Michael Newman and Elana Levine find that the proclamation of these contemporary serial melodramas as “quality” at the cost of denigrating daytime soaps reiterates “fundamentally gendered ways of imagining and validating television narratives,” with series about men and largely for men rising to the top of the hierarchy and traditional women’s genres at the bottom.<sup>63</sup> Jason Mittell finds this distinction somewhat troubling, since “men’s genres” and “women’s genres” are flexible categories, as are “masculine” and “feminine” narratives.<sup>64</sup> Mittell’s concern offers a critique of contemporary television that echoes my argument here. In addition to production and narrative techniques the “Third Golden Age” can be traced to the long 1980s when the very nature of “masculine” and “feminine” narrative and genres began to morph.

#### Action, Adventure, and Emotions: Men’s Genres

What makes viewers understand a series as “masculine” or “feminine” is different from the male or female audience producers intend to target with the series. Shifting depictions of masculinities in episodic dramas spoke to larger social concerns in the 1980s, especially the way in which American masculinity continued to remain in a state of tension between Carter-era “new man” ideology and the Reaganesque cowboy ethos. These shifts were intended to appeal to women, to capture some of the viewers who might otherwise be watching primetime serials, but they also offered the men who comprised a bulk of the audience new ways of understanding their role in society.

While many primetime dramas responded to concerns about the evolving role of the American man, and indeed I reference them throughout the remainder of this chapter, I have chosen to concentrate my arguments mostly on *Magnum PI*, *MacGyver*, and *The A-Team*. These three series represent three overlapping genres traditionally associated with audiences of men: the detective story, the spy thriller, the action series. They were on different networks and so individually speak to the unique concerns of each network and its executives while collectively demonstrating a larger trend across broadcast television. While *MacGyver* was not the ratings success that *Magnum* and *The A-Team* were, star Richard Dean Anderson had his own devoted following of fans, as did *Magnum*'s Tom Selleck. Along with *The A-Team*'s Mr. T, these stars contributed to the revamping of the male action star. Additionally, the three series all comment upon post-Vietnam trauma as a large force responsible for the changing – or, more precisely, the softening – of masculinity, in contrast to the image of Reagan generated by his hard-line foreign and domestic policies. Finally, the characters on these series each respond to rising consumerism and materialism by validating yuppie aspirations while failing to live up to them. Since breadwinning has traditionally been a mainstay of masculine identity, these characters' financial precarity indicates yet another way in which masculinity in action series challenged real-life goals among American men. All of these characteristics of the series happen within a narrative structure that speaks to the evolution of television alongside masculinity – a closed narrative form that still enabled character growth and development, in contrast to the open narrative and limited character growth within the primetime serial.

#### Heroes with Hearts and Brains: Casting and Character Development

The casting of the stars of action series in the long 1980s demonstrates how attuned producers were to the desirability of male heroes who were emotionally expressive and whose masculine aggression was tempered. Executive producers John Rich and Henry Winkler conceived of the character Angus MacGyver as someone who used brains, not brawn, to survive international espionage, the antithesis to what they saw as testosterone-laden Hollywood action films.<sup>65</sup> As Rich explains in his memoir, the success of an action series that did not hinge upon testosterone depended on casting the perfect actor in the title role, but “every audition seemed to produce hulking actors who sported, in Winkler’s observation, ‘huge belt buckles’ along with their Western accents.”<sup>66</sup> The process by which Richard Dean Anderson was chosen has become something of a legend among *MacGyver* fans and is recounted in numerous memoirs, fan blogs, and unauthorized series monographs. When Anderson asked to wear his glasses to read the script more carefully, Rich and Winkler interpreted the request as an acknowledgment of his vulnerabilities and determined he was the right fit for their vision of the lead character.<sup>67</sup>

Anderson’s personal qualities are often cited as reasons for *MacGyver*’s success. Although he had been in two short-lived television series and a made-for-TV movie, his longest acting job up to that point was playing a doctor on *General Hospital* from 1976-1981. His portrayal of MacGyver certainly borrowed some of the emotive expression necessary for soap acting.<sup>68</sup> Rich says Anderson “added significant humanity to every scene” over *MacGyver*’s eight seasons.<sup>69</sup> Anderson revealed in a 1990 interview that although he performed many of his own stunts for the series, what he enjoyed most about *MacGyver* was that the stories and character were intellectually stimulating.<sup>70</sup> In an interview with *Boy’s Life* magazine, Anderson emphasized the character’s commitment to using brainpower, rather than guns, to solve problems, and noted that he and the character were both Boy Scouts, a background that led to

MacGyver “just being a good person.”<sup>71</sup> Fans of the series similarly appreciated the combination of action-adventure with the title character’s quiet sense of ethics and duty. Amateur television critic and *MacGyver* fan Mila Hasan writes that the abhorrence for violence expressed by both MacGyver and Richard Dean Anderson was one of the things that made the show so appealing.<sup>72</sup>

While these accounts credit the success of *MacGyver* to Anderson’s acting and character traits, Anderson’s physical appearance was also appealing to many viewers. During his stint on *General Hospital*, Anderson was repeatedly named one of the “sexiest stars of daytime” [Figure 2.2]. ABC had wanted the series *MacGyver* to appeal to men 18-49 and even expected the World Series to serve as a lead-in that would grow this audience.<sup>73</sup> But early network tests revealed the series appealed to women as well, in part due to Anderson’s good looks and affability. What networks did not test, however, was whether Anderson’s handsome appearance appealed to those besides heterosexual women. By watching the series’ many close-ups on Anderson’s plush lips and feathery hair, men were also engaging in the practice of gazing at the male body for visual pleasure. This is one example of how queerness and the action series were implicitly connected.



Figure 2.2. Richard Dean Anderson as a sex symbol on the cover of *Soap Opera Digest*, February 1978.

Far more than Richard Dean Anderson, Tom Selleck, the title character in *Magnum, PI*,



was on display for the male and female gaze. Interestingly, while Anderson's appearance was sometimes feminized, Selleck's body was displayed to emphasize its very masculine qualities: hairy chest, hairy legs, and a mustache, what Sandy Flitterman has termed "thighs and whiskers."<sup>74</sup> The differences here demonstrate the appeal of the male body in a variety of forms.

As with Anderson's MacGyver, Selleck's Magnum received critical attention for his less macho qualities. Critics, television scholars, and fans also cite Magnum's emotional vulnerability as a distinguishing characteristic of the series. In her examination of *Magnum PI*'s popular appeal, Sandy Flitterman notes the synergy between "Selleck's casual off-hand acting style" and the character Magnum "whose very vulnerability makes him something of an accessible ideal."<sup>75</sup>

Creator Glen Larson's original script did not capture that alluring vulnerability and instead imagined Magnum as a James Bond-style hero with a string of women on his arm. *Magnum*, which was a replacement for *Hawaii Five-O* (CBS, 1968-80) that even utilized the same production facilities, was originally designed as a series about an "extremely macho hero whose apprehension of the bad guys would involve shootouts and screeching tires" and whose "personal life would include an unending stream of beautiful women."<sup>76</sup> The pilot was reworked at the request of Tom Selleck, who was under contract with and had done several failed pilots for Universal. Selleck advocated for more depth in the lead character. In a 1986 interview in the *New York Times*, Selleck said that if *Magnum PI* had been sold to the network as a series with emphasis on action over character, he would not have been interested in starring in it.<sup>77</sup> Universal executives had enough faith in Selleck's potential star quality and the potential success of a detective drama with a more sensitive lead that they replaced Larson with Donald P. Bellisario, who had worked as a writer on Larson's *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978-79) and Stephen J. Cannell's *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (NBC, 1976-78).<sup>78</sup> Although Larson had something of a

“reputation as a schlockmeister,” Bellisario was able to reimagine the Magnum concept into a “post-Vietnam reexamination of the ‘trouble in paradise’ myth.”<sup>79</sup> Loosely drawing on his own experiences in the Marines in the late 1950s, Bellisario rewrote the Magnum character into a former U.S. Navy officer who had served in Vietnam and still carried trauma from the war. These changes in the character appealed to Selleck – and, apparently, to viewers, as *Magnum PI* landed in the top twenty in its first season.

During Magnum’s eight-season run, Selleck further established himself as a sensitive new man with other projects, though in interviews he expressed more interest in playing in Westerns and Ayn Rand than sensitive dramas.<sup>80</sup> He starred in *Three Men and a Baby* (1987, director Leonard Nimoy), a comedy in which he played a bachelor who, along with his friends, unexpectedly becomes responsible for an infant. Selleck accepted this role though he had turned down the part of Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, director Steven Spielberg). This decision was based on his *Magnum PI* shooting schedule, but it nonetheless reiterates his star persona as an actor who prefers character development over fast action. Tania Modleski is critical of *Three Men and a Baby* for its regressive message that “it is possible...for men to respond to the feminist demand for their increased participation in childrearing in such a way as to make women more marginal than ever.”<sup>81</sup> For Selleck, starring in the film was less about its social implications and more about demonstrating his range as an actor in a comedy. He cited Westerns and romantic comedies as two other genres he wanted to try after *Magnum*’s run.<sup>82</sup> But already within the series, Selleck had demonstrated his proficiency with action-adventure, thriller and mystery, comedy, and, in the series’ conclusion that paralleled *Three Men and a Baby* in its absent-mother trope, fatherhood.

Selleck's physical appearance also contributes to the polysemous readings of himself and the character Magnum. Selleck's physique was exploited throughout the series in shots of him swimming and sunbathing, his burly chest on visual display as a marker of his manliness. Early in the series, executives became more aware of Selleck's female fan base, the wardrobe department substituted Selleck's pants for shorts of decreasing length.<sup>83</sup> But this was also the look of a "gay clone" or "Castro clone," a gay male identity popular between the 1969 Stonewall riots (which arguably launched the modern LGBT pride movement) and the AIDS epidemic (which put an end to much of the free sex that had been such a vital part of the gay community). As gay men attempted to cast off labels like "sissy" and "fag," a style of macho appearance that imitated many heterosexual conventions (hence "clone") became widespread.<sup>84</sup> Magnum's physical appearance followed many clone conventions, such as the mustache and tight clothing, and this code would have been recognizable to a gay male audience. As clones aped heterosexual machismo, so did Magnum ape homosexual machismo as much as he expressed his own heterosexuality. Thus, Magnum's physical appeal was not only to audiences of (heterosexual) women but also gay men. In fact, Selleck was featured in a 1991 parody poster of an Absolut Vodka ad that pictured several celebrities next to the headline "absolute queer."<sup>85</sup> A story about the rogue poster ran in the tabloid *Globe*, heightening speculation about Selleck's sexuality. Selleck successfully sued *Globe*, which printed a retraction.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, rumors about Selleck's homosexuality continue to persist – in part due to the combination of clone appearance and emotional expressiveness he portrayed in characters like Magnum.

Just as Richard Dean Anderson's performance as MacGyver can be read as a combination of the soap opera star's physical beauty with the action star's intelligence, Tom Selleck as Magnum can be read as an extreme expression of heterosexuality and, at the same

time, as an example of how men's genres in the 1980s lent themselves to queer readings and queer potentialities. Anderson's/MacGyver's lengthening, layered hair over the course of the series, his pouty lips, Selleck/Magnum's role as father-mother in the film *Three Men and a Baby*, his wardrobe reminiscent of a Castro clone all demonstrate that the action star and action hero were capable of being read in a multitude of ways, not the least of which evoked queerness.

Mr. T as B.A. Baracus on *The A-Team*, further highlights the range of complexities to masculinity, here through race instead of sexuality. The brainchild of Stephen J. Cannell and his writing partner Frank Lupo, *The A-Team* further tapped into popular reexamination of Vietnam by focusing on how bureaucracy interfered with heroism and led to psychological scars. David Marc and Robert J. Thompson to credit Cannell for helping to "initiate a historical revision of the Vietnam Era that would become a central theme of American popular culture during the 1980s."<sup>87</sup> The series was envisioned by Cannell and Lupo, in collaboration with NBC president Brandon Tartikoff, as a cross between the ethos of popular action and Western films with the messy morality of crime narratives on *Hill Street Blues*, "with Mr. T driving the car."<sup>88</sup> Tartikoff says that phrase, which has become associated with the concept of *The A-Team*, is a myth and instead cites Westerns like *The Magnificent Seven* (1960, dir. Antoine Fuqua) as an inspiration for the series' emphasis on the team and *Hill Street Blues*' secondary characters as inspiration for the oddball cast.<sup>89</sup> While Tartikoff was reportedly open to Cannell and Lupo's ideas, his one concrete demand for the series – starring Mr. T – is where *The A-Team*'s most complicated vision of masculinity lies.

Mr. T had garnered attention for his role as heavyweight contender Clubber Lang in the popular boxing film *Rocky III* (1982, director Sylvester Stallone). Unlike Richard Dean Anderson and Tom Selleck, both of whom expressly brought a certain vulnerability to their roles,

Mr. T had become famous by performing a “mean, ugly, crude” character who was “not redeemed at the end of the movie.”<sup>90</sup> Mr. T brought real-life experience as “tough guy,” having worked as a bodyguard and club bouncer, in contrast to his cast mates’ experience acting in a range of genres from romantic comedy to fiction. By the time George Peppard was cast as Colonel Hannibal Smith in *The A-Team*, he was known for his twenty-year film career, including playing opposite Audrey Hepburn as a kept man in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961, director Blake Edwards). Peppard had most recently been cast in the role of Blake Carrington on *Dynasty*, though he was fired and replaced by John Forsythe after clashes with creator-producers Richard and Esther Shapiro.<sup>91</sup> NBC president Brandon Tartikoff knew Peppard was “damaged goods” at a “kind of career crossroads” after being fired from *Dynasty*, but this resulted in him being the “hardest-working actor [he] ever saw at an audition.”<sup>92</sup> Unknown actors, Tim Dunigan and Dwight Schultz, were cast as Templeton “Face” Peck and “Howling Mad” Murdock, but after the pilot Dunigan was replaced by Dirk Benedict, who had starred in Glen Larson’s short-lived sci-fi series *Battlestar Galactica*. Among the cast, Mr. T stood apart, as the only African-American cast member but also as someone whose fame was positioned entirely around his macho toughness.

While *Magnum PI* also starred an African-American actor (Roger E. Mosley in the role of Magnum’s friend T.C.), Mr. T’s role as B.A. Baracus is intriguing for its framing of black masculinity in ways that *Magnum* often avoided. As Jimmie Reeves explains, Mr. T/B.A. is “not a convert to the values of middle-class America,” but he “has not been licked by us, either.”<sup>93</sup> For Tartikoff, Mr. T was someone “perfectly at ease with the attention...who’d been born to the spotlight.”<sup>94</sup> In interviews and publicity materials, Mr. T expresses a deep respect for his African heritage, the reason for which he wore abundant gold jewelry and a spiked hairdo in the style of

the Mandinka tribe.<sup>95</sup> As Clubber Lang in *Rocky III*, Mr. T popularized the catchphrase “I pity the fool.” (His exact line, spoken to a reporter interviewing him about a fight with Sylvester Stallone’s character Rocky Balboa was, “No, I don’t hate Balboa, but I pity the fool, and I will destroy any man who tries to take what I got.”) “I pity the fool” established Mr. T’s star persona as someone more interested in competition and destruction than cooperation and creation. Although B.A. Baracus never said, “I pity the fool” on *The A-Team*, the catchphrase continued to circulate in American popular culture, including on *A-Team* related merchandise with Mr. T’s image.<sup>96</sup>

Mr. T’s celebration of his African heritage, as well as his tough demeanor, stand in contrast with the more assimilated aspects of his star personality and the character B.A. (which he says in the pilot stands for “Bad Attitude”). For instance, one of the defining characteristics of B.A. throughout *The A-Team* is his love for children. He coaches them in sports and teaches them practical skills like auto repair. His real-life counterpart, Mr. T, starred in his own Saturday morning cartoon series on NBC from 1983-85 [Figure 2.3]. In 1984, Mr. T played Santa Claus at the White House, and Nancy Reagan sat on his lap for a photo opportunity, an image that was a celebration of (and participation in) the conservative Reagan White House as much as an example of Mr. T’s “softer” side.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, the character B.A. is a highly skilled engineer who crafts weapons and defense systems for the A-team each week. Montages of the team at work in each episode include scenes of him welding and fashioning shields and weapons from unexpected raw materials, like MacGyver. Although it is possible to read B.A. as a workhorse for the team, it is important to note how the team relies on his technical proficiencies and ingenuity.



*Figure 2.3. In the opening credits to his animated series, Mr.T appears beside a white child who has adopted T's fashion style. This shows the child's adoration, and as T affectionately places his hand on the child's shoulder, it shows his benevolence toward children.*

Within the context of *The A-Team* and extratextually, Mr. T/B.A. embodies contradictory qualities: he is sensitive and gruff, gentle and tough, an intelligent self-starter and an obedient follower. John Fiske describes Mr. T/B.A. as fulfilling a “young boy’s fantasy of masculinity as physical strength (including its mechanical extension into guns, cars, and machinery).”<sup>98</sup> As the lone person of color on the A-team, B.A. can also be read as having a slave-master relationship with Hannibal, whose orders he follows regardless of whether he likes them. B.A. is afraid of flying, a problem Hannibal solves in nearly every episode by drugging him. The moment at which B.A. becomes the most anxious and intractable about getting on an airplane, Hannibal jabs him with a needle full of sedative. B.A. collapses, often mid-protest, in what is usually intended as a comedic moment. But the silencing and felling of tall, heavysset B.A. is also an individual representation of larger social anxieties about neutralizing the imagined threat posed by black men. When not drugged, B.A. has a quick temper that Hannibal must constantly keep in check.

While Fiske sees these qualities as signs of B.A.’s relative immaturity, they are also conspicuously stereotypical depictions of race. Herman Gray finds that images of blackness

during the Reagan era were “constructed along a continuum ranging from menace on one end to immorality on the other, with irresponsibility located somewhere in the middle.”<sup>99</sup> This continuum was rhetoricized in Reagan’s first campaign, during which he denounced the mythical black “welfare queen,” and was taken up in policies toward welfare reform, tougher drug and crime laws, and campaigns against single motherhood. By visiting Reagan’s White House, Mr. T tacitly affirmed this rhetoric while his star persona and success actively disproved it. Mr. T can be read as performing the racial stereotype of the black buffoon as B.A. Baracus while at the same time his popularity can be read as a sign of “a major shift in cultural attitudes” and a testament to how Mr. T’s star persona has “legitimated a once threatening ethnic type,” thus “repairing a racial gap in the ‘real’ world.”<sup>100</sup> The coexistence of both readings of Mr. T/B.A. challenges the possibilities for black masculinities on television, particularly given the relative absence of black characters across drama series in the long 1980s.

### The “Cumulative Narrative” and Men’s Evolution

Part of what enabled men’s genre series to develop central characters and represent complex constructions of masculinity was the unfolding of continued story elements. Though *The A-Team* and *MacGyver* are best described as episodic action series, the narratives leave open threads in which the characters are able to evolve. *Magnum PI* is perhaps the paradigmatic example, prompting Horace Newcomb to describe the series as employing a “cumulative narrative” and Jason Mittell to identify it as an antecedent to contemporary “narrative complexity.”<sup>101</sup> In addition to the structure of its stories, *Magnum* also borrows themes and tropes from melodrama (long-lost lovers, unresolved psychological conflict, personal and



domestic storylines of equal weight with professional ones). Broadcast at the same time as the serial melodrama was gaining popularity on primetime, *Magnum*, *MacGyver*, and *The A-Team* are three examples of how episodic action series began to borrow storytelling techniques from traditional women's genres to allow for character growth and the exploitation of men's emotional struggles.

At first glance, *The A-Team* is a simplistic action series in which the team triumphs week after week in their mission to help the oppressed and less capable. They accomplish their missions through skills learned in the military and a sense of teamwork that unites them as buddy-heroes. This tidy narrative summary positions the members of the A-team as masculine saviors whose sense of duty (and appreciation for the fees clients pay) inspires them to noble, often dangerous acts. But this description neglects the series' ongoing premise that the A-team have escaped from a military prison and are on the run from the military police. Although individual missions are completed – always successfully – the final seconds of episodes often depict the military police on the team's trail. Other episodes begin in the middle of a chase, with the team scrambling to evade capture once again. This ongoing fugitive storyline is quite different than the emotional turmoil that extends across episodes of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, but it suggests a physical vulnerability in otherwise invincible men.

In the final season, the team began to work for one of the generals who had been pursuing them. General Stockwell (Robert Vaughn) offered to secure the team presidential pardons if they completed top-secret missions for him (not unlike *MacGyver's* work). Declining ratings and a suspicion that the audience was fatigued with the formula for the series after four seasons led to this change in premise, which also put the team in a safe house in Virginia instead of spread across southern California. The team remained vulnerable, however, as Stockwell's motives

were not clear, and the question of whether the pardons would truly be granted pervaded the team's confidence in their missions.

The shadow motives of the general and incompetence of the military police for the seasons preceding lent a dark look at the military. Furthermore, the team's experiences in Vietnam have led to psychological trauma for at least one member of the team, Murdock. Murdock is either mentally insane or posturing as insane as a result of fighting with the Army Special Forces in Vietnam. (The series lends credence to both interpretations.) Murdock is both a hero (through his work with the A-team) and a victim (through his psychological scars). Even if Murdock is "faking it," his desire to live as a mentally ill person within the safe but rigid confines of a veterans' psychiatric hospital speaks to his fragility. His ability to escape that ward when the A-team needs him, like the team's continued escaping from the military police, calls attention to the army's own vulnerability in the form of inefficient bureaucracy. While *The A-Team* is best characterized as an episodic drama, episodes of which can be screened in any order and require little background information, the continued cat-and-mouse game between the team and the military officials, highlighted by Murdock's insanity, attests to the mental, political, and physical fragilities of men.

It is not coincidental that the continued story element of *Magnum PI* also pertains psychological trauma from military service. As Daniel Miller has demonstrated, the 1980s were a period during which film and television proliferated with Vietnam narratives, partly in response to Reagan's military expansion and partly due to the growth of lobbying for and attention paid to veterans.<sup>102</sup> In the case of *Magnum*, the ongoing narrative reiterates emotional and psychological scars the hero suffered while in Vietnam, where he married a woman, Michelle (Marta DuBois), who later disappeared and is presumed dead at the start of the series. Viewers first learn of this

history through flashbacks when Michelle resurfaces, very much alive, in Hawaii, prompting Magnum to reflect on his time in Vietnam, their whirlwind wedding, and the pain he still carries from losing her.<sup>103</sup> The Magnum/Michelle romance is taken up several times, even resulting in the birth of a child. In the series finale, Michelle dies, and Magnum returns to the Navy so that he may provide a steady income for their child as the primary parent.<sup>104</sup>

The romance plot with Michelle is not taken up in every episode – or even every season – and Magnum becomes involved with plenty of other women throughout the series. The larger series narrative, however, is always shaped by this past, even if past events are not directly referenced in individual episodes. Magnum’s love for Michelle, his heartache at her presumed death, and the trauma he carries after her return and subsequent disappearance are facets that shape the character’s emotional vulnerability. For Horace Newcomb, this kind of “cumulative narrative” means the “essential connections are not in the sequence of events, or in their causes and effects, but in their resonance.”<sup>105</sup> Like the members of the A-team, Murdock in particular, Magnum suffers traumatic flashbacks of combat and losing friends. For Christopher Anderson, these traumatic memories belonging to Magnum and his fellow soldiers attempt to culminate in a social memory, a reconciling of individual experiences in Vietnam with a larger collective history.<sup>106</sup>

In his work on melodrama, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith observes that “feminine” genres like melodramas tend to have impotent, suffering heroes while “masculine” genres have active heroes who are immune to suffering.<sup>107</sup> In this way, Joyrich elaborates, the melodrama “seems to disallow for the achievement of a masculine ideal.”<sup>108</sup> As specific examples of a broader trend in long 1980s action series, characters like Magnum and Murdock show that trauma and heroism can coincide, and that aspects of melodrama that allow for exploration of psyche need not exist

in wholly separate spheres from action and adventure. This allows for the bleeding of elements of melodrama into traditional men's genres, granting male audiences cultural permission to feel and cry. Although Joyrich sees this as an "attempt to save masculinity even in the 'feminized' world of TV," the pervasive trope of Vietnam trauma does the opposite – it saves masculinity from itself, allowing for an appreciation of feminine qualities, such as emotional intelligence, that allow the action heroes to complete their work.<sup>109</sup>

The feminized landscape in which this work is performed is valued for its healing qualities. Magnum's leisurely lifestyle in the tropical paradise of Hawaii is restorative to his mental health, at least when memories of the past are kept at bay. Sandy Flitterman sees the series' Hawaiian setting as the intersection between East (Vietnam) and West (United States), mystery and romance. It is Hawaii, she contends, that serves as the femme fatale to Magnum's detective. While many episodes do capitalize on the cultural and political clash of East-meets-West, Hawaii just as often serves as an Eden that helps Magnum stop equating the tropics with the horrors of war. This is played out in myriad scenes of Magnum swimming, sunning, and driving Robin Masters' Ferrari across the landscape.

This process plays out beyond the Michelle narrative, in singular cases involving old Navy buddies and in Magnum's often flawed investigative style. He is at times unable to resolve cases; sometimes the bad guys get away and mysteries remain unsolved. At other times, Magnum stumbles upon the solution without any successful line of investigation. Anderson describes Magnum as "confused and vulnerable, a detective unable to protect himself from the impinging forces of a world which he often fails to understand or to affect," and sees this as central to the series' thematic ruminations on the futility of the Vietnam War.<sup>110</sup> In the episode entitled "Woman on the Beach," Magnum hunts for an exotic woman, only to discover she has

been dead for years.<sup>111</sup> The episode swiftly turns from a detective procedural to a murder mystery, concluding with the dead woman walking toward Magnum on the beach and then, before he can do a double-take, vanishing. In the final shots of the episode, the camera lingers on Magnum's face, puzzling over the unsolvable possibility that he has just seen a ghost. In her extended reading of the episode, Flitterman finds the lack of resolution is an example of the way in which *Magnum PI* makes femininity itself unsolvable – an “enigmatic question that frustrates all investigative attempts.”<sup>112</sup> When Magnum does solve a case successfully, Haralovich argues, the narrative is restored to its serial components: Magnum swimming in the ocean or jogging on the beach (enjoying the paradise that is Hawaii), Magnum affectionately antagonizing the caretaker of the estate on which he lives, Magnum and his friends enjoying camaraderie.<sup>113</sup>

While Flitterman sees the lack of concrete resolutions to Magnum's investigative work as the crucial serial component to the narrative, Haralovich finds it to be personal and interpersonal moments. In fact, both readings emphasize how the series complicates masculinity within the action genre. In addition to his brawls, car chases, and occasional successes, Magnum is also a failed hero with an imperfect record. When his mental and emotional faculties are at their most vulnerable, his strong body is on display, reminding viewers that he can muscle through troubles while also positioning him as an object to be gazed at.

Magnum's imperfect record as a detective contrasts the weekly successes of the A-team and MacGyver, who almost never fail to finish their missions successfully, but it echoes other crime dramas during the long 1980s and is reflective of men's increasing sense of incompetence and impotency in a changing American culture. As crime dramas began to engage with more complicated, morally ambiguous stories, crime-fighting characters became less patently heroic (in the sense of tidily wrapping up cases) and more human (in recognizing that sometimes there

is no perfect solution). In the pilot to *Hill Street Blues*, two officers, Hill (Michael Warren) and Renko (Charles Head), unsuccessfully infiltrate a gang-infested neighborhood and are shot down in a dramatic spray of bullets. The original pilot ended with their colleagues at the precinct learning that Hill and Renko had arrived at the hospital dead. At the suggestion of a representative from an affiliate station, the final scene was reshot to say they were in critical condition so as not to lose valuable characters for which the audience had come to care over the course of the episode, characters who could potentially serve as leads in a spinoff at some point in the future.<sup>114</sup> Although this choice was done with attention to the financial benefits of a spinoff, it enabled future episodes to explore Hill and Renko's mental and emotional states after the traumatic incident.

The failures of the Hill Street officers to succeed in their duties and the psychological toll this takes on them were Brandon Tartikoff's vision for a series to be created and written by Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll as something different than the traditional heroic cops-and-robbers story.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) on *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-90) is often faced with the "question of success" that leads him to "constantly confront the legitimacy and usefulness of his job" as a vice officer.<sup>116</sup> For men, success at work is a marker of success at masculinity. As Andrew Tolson succinctly puts it, "through working, a boy, supposedly, 'becomes a man.'"<sup>117</sup> *Magnum PI*, *Miami Vice*, and *Hill Street Blues* do not depict male characters as adolescents who have not yet fully matured into men, but the characters' failures at their jobs are an allegory to the failures of masculinity in a broader cultural context.

Voiceover narration further enables *Magnum PI* and *MacGyver* to delve into the insecurities, fears, and hopes of the protagonists. Each episode of *Magnum PI* is framed with Magnum's narration, which is just as often an explanation of events in the story world that the

plot abbreviates for the sake of time as it is Magnum's contemplative musings. During his narration of an investigation, Magnum often says to the viewer, "I know what you're thinking, and you're right/you're wrong." These repeated phrases allow Magnum to share his motivations and moral dilemmas with the audience.

A particularly effective use of voiceover narration is in the episode "Home from the Sea," the entirety of which Magnum spends treading water in the ocean, hoping for a miraculous rescue after the wake from a power boat carries away his surf-ski.<sup>118</sup> In the voiceover narration, Magnum talks about his childhood, especially his relationship with his father; this voiceover and a flashback to his father teaching him how to swim grant the audience new insights into the character that have little to do with a detective procedural. Newcomb finds the use of voiceover in this episode to be an "exploration of the strongest sort of memory."<sup>119</sup> Although the "present" plot is Magnum at risk of drowning, the real story of the episode is in the voiceover and flashbacks, the story of how Magnum's relationship with his father shaped him into the man he has become in the present.

*MacGyver* is similarly framed by the title character's voiceover, which is even less likely to explain the current mission in clear detail. Instead, MacGyver tells the audience stories about his favorite teachers or his time in the Boy Scouts, lessons he learned as a child that parallel his current predicament. In the pilot, MacGyver defuses a missile while his voiceover narration describes learning to ride a horse as a child. He explains that he learned to be patient, that "easy does it," because otherwise the horse would be spooked, and "you might as well hitch yourself to a rocket."<sup>120</sup> As the audience hears this, MacGyver gently strokes the missile and sets to work on it, careful not to make a false step that might detonate the explosives. MacGyver's narration is

often humorous, its punchline the connection between MacGyver's stories and his current mission.

For *Magnum PI* and *MacGyver*, voiceover narration gives the viewer insight into the character's complex emotions and history. Far from simply narrating procedure and action from A to B to C, the voiceovers in these two series serve to complicate and challenge the process by which action heroes succeed – and sometimes fail – at their missions. In this way, the voiceover narration works against the traditional masculinization of the detective and spy genres. For instance, the terse voiceover narration at the beginning of *Dragnet* (NBC, 1951-59) declares: “The story you are about to see is true...” This establishes main character Joe Friday as a heroic sergeant, guaranteeing the success of the police procedural since the criminals have already been brought to justice and the story is merely being replayed for the audience to appreciate.

Christopher Anderson singles out the final line of many episodes of *Hawaii 5-0*, *Magnum's* studio predecessor. Although “Book 'em, Danno” is said in dialogue rather than voiceover, this line demonstrates that, as with *Dragnet*, “the solution to the crime is both inevitable and final.”<sup>121</sup> By contrast, the voiceover narration in *Magnum* often attests that there is no solution, not a simple one anyway, and that it is futile for “lone individual, even a detective hero to force the chaos of experience to submit to his will.”<sup>122</sup> MacGyver is far more successful with his missions than Magnum with his detective work, and so the use of his voiceover is less melancholic but equally heartening. MacGyver's anecdotes from his past contribute to a sense of the character as a hero with a heart and with dreams. Collectively, the voiceover narration in both series reworks the masculine detective and spy genres into genres invested in emotions as much as investigations.



Voiceover narration also serves to mitigate the fetishization of men's bodies within action series from the long 1980s. Images of Tom Selleck/Magnum on the beach or in the Ferrari are often paired with voiceover narration describing his thoughts on a current investigation. Sandy Flitterman finds this juxtaposition of sight and sound to deemphasize the "beefcake" aspects of the series.<sup>123</sup> The question of how this juxtaposition serves the series' audience is central for Flitterman, who sees the combination of "beefcake" and voiceover as one way *Magnum PI* managed to appeal broadly, to audiences of both men and women.

### Men's Bodies: Subverting the Jiggle Era of Primetime

Casting, continuing story elements, and voiceover narration contribute to a reshaping of the action series. During the 1970s, under Fred Silverman's leadership, networks began to incorporate sexual fare as a way to increase ratings. Silverman's brief but successful run as ABC's president from 1975 to 1978 had turned the network into the broadcast ratings leader as a result of sexually-themed programming. Included in the lineup of programs disparagingly dubbed "jiggle TV" by competitor Paul Klein from NBC was *Charlie's Angels* (1976-81), an action series about three women private investigators that was a top ten hit within its first season and remained in the top twenty for four of its five seasons. In her history of 1970s television, Elana Levine finds that the success of *Charlie's Angels* inspired no less than twenty-three pilots for action series and made-for-TV movies featuring women as the lead characters.<sup>124</sup> Not all were turned into series, and many of that were only enjoyed brief runs, but, Levine notes, the "presence of sexy young women in television programming did not fade away" in the late 1970s

but persisted through the casting of attractive women as guest stars and secondary characters across broadcast networks.

By 1981, *Charlie's Angels* ended its run to falling ratings and changing timeslots. Suzanne Somers, who had played the naïve blonde bombshell Chrissy, departed from *Three's Company* in that same year. Levine sees this concurrent timing as a demonstration of the waning of ABC's "sex-centered glory" and changes to broadcast television in general as the 1980s ushered in the era of increasing competition in the form of cable and home video.<sup>125</sup>

While "jiggle TV" may have concluded in the early 1980s in its original form, television continued its exploitation of bodies and sex for the pleasure of the viewer. During the long 1980s, however, it became more common to see the exploitation of men's bodies in lieu of or alongside women's. This was partly the result of an attempt to capture audiences of women by providing them with eye-candy, but, whether intended or not, also offered men the opportunity to partake in the queer pleasure of looking at other men.

Perhaps the most glaring example of male body exploitation during the long 1980s was Don Johnson/Sonny Crockett in *Miami Vice*. That series' emphasis on aesthetics, especially men's fashion, has led several scholars to deem it a quintessential example of the superficiality of postmodernism. Todd Gitlin, for instance, explains that on *Miami Vice* "everything happens for the sake of display" – a pronouncement he sees as demonstrative of its narrative weaknesses.<sup>126</sup> The pilot, for instance, features a scene that is temporally luxurious by television standards. Sonny and his partner Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas) drive in a convertible down the highway at night, the wind blowing through Sonny's hair, with Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight" playing in the background.<sup>127</sup> NBC president Brandon Tartikoff describes feeling the hair on the back of his neck stand up when he watched this sequence, which he said looked

like something out of Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 French New Wave film *Breathless*.<sup>128</sup> For Scott Benjamin King, the importance of image to this series renders the body of Don Johnson as an object for spectatorial pleasure, much like the display of women's bodies on *Charlie's Angels*. Both series make use of narratives that justified frequent costume changes, so that the characters essentially served as mannequins or models.<sup>129</sup>

This display was intended as much for the pleasure of the women watching *Miami Vice* as for men, for whom Johnson served as a fashion icon.<sup>130</sup> As Lynne Joyrich notes, television executives may "be trying to reach 'consumers' more than they are trying to address 'feminine' or 'feminized' viewers" with any particular program, but they "assume that the heaviest consumers are most likely to be women on the basis of historical, social, and ideological constructions."<sup>131</sup> What series like *Miami Vice* offered was the opportunity to think more about men as consumers: the creative director of *GQ* admitted that the series profoundly shaped the fashion spreads and ads featured in the magazine during the series' run and for some time after.<sup>132</sup>

The gender reversal of *Charlie's Angels* is more than just a conceit of *Miami Vice* or *Magnum PI*. Indeed, *Magnum PI* can be compared to *Charlie's Angels* on several levels that triangulate its appeal to men and women for myriad reasons. Like the angels, Magnum is supported through a wealthy but unseen benefactor. For the angels, it is Charlie, who is heard but never seen and who notifies them of their assignments as investigators through his Townsend Agency. Robin Masters, who owns the Hawaiian estate upon which Magnum lives, is a novelist not directly involved with Magnum's work as a private investigator, but Masters grants Magnum the use of his guest house and Ferrari, thereby "taking Magnum away" from his previous life (as Charlie's voiceover in the title sequence says of the angels). The angels are guarded by Bosley

(David Doyle), a sexless, older man who never quite gets his hands as dirty as them but who is nonetheless charged with protecting them; Magnum has Higgins (John Hillerman), the caretaker of Masters' estate who often gets Magnum out of trouble and who enjoys a begrudging friendship with him.

The similarity between the series' premises is a building block for larger changes to television during the long 1980s. *Charlie's Angels* has become a central text through which television studies and the popular press scholars debate representations of feminism and femininity.<sup>133</sup> Anna Gough-Yates finds that ultimately the series was "both constituent in, and a consequence of, attempts by the commercial market to reroute (and thus depoliticize) feminist discourses into the logic of commodity relations and individual consumer 'lifestyles.'"<sup>134</sup> For Elana Levine, the debates over *Charlie's Angels* as a feminist text highlight the complex ways the series "engaged with the women's movement and the questions it raised, even if that engagement ultimately resulted in a nonfeminist embrace of fundamental sexual difference."<sup>135</sup> Susan Douglas reads the series as the story of a white male patriarch infantilizing and yet sexualizing three women but also the story of women working together, usually to ferret out deviant men. In this way, she claims, the series tried to "espouse female liberation and to promote the objectification of women's bodies... a compromise with empowering and thwarting effects."<sup>136</sup>

The question of whether *Charlie's Angels* was television feminism or female exploitation lay in the series' premise, in which a wealthy but unseen man named Charlie Townsend has hired them for his private investigations agency after they have become disgruntled with their mistreatment as women police officers. In the original opening credits, for instance, the angels succeed at the police academy, only to be relegated to working as a crossing guard, secretary,

and meter maid after graduation. In voiceover Charlie declares that he has “taken them away” from this misery. Have the angels have taken control of their destiny, since Charlie has given them jobs that allow them to fully utilize their myriad skills, or are they still victims of a patriarchal system in which Charlie’s paternal beneficence is the only reason they now have jobs they enjoy?

Action series from the long 1980s depict a similar ideological struggle on the part of the male lead characters. Magnum and Sonny Crockett have an outward appearance of agency over their own destinies in ways Charlie’s angels, all women, could not. The unseen voice of Charlie phoning the angels with instructions is replaced by Magnum, who directs his own cases and provides his own voiceover narration. But agency in determining one’s line of investigative approach does not make up for lack of investigative success within the narrative or the display of men’s bodies for the viewer outside the narrative. As a series that questions the dominance of masculinity, *Magnum PI*, like *Miami Vice*, subverts the “jiggle era” of television by reversing the gender of the body being gazed at. Rather than being an attempt to recoup masculine power, this is but one example of how television in the long 1980s reveals the complexities, including queer possibilities, of masculinity.

Through its aesthetics and use of bodies for display, *Magnum PI* constructs an ideal viewer who appreciates the complex masculinity exhibited in a beautiful male body – thus changing who is doing the “jiggling” and for whom. Lynne Joyrich similarly finds that the male body was exploited in action series from the 1980s, naming *MacGyver*, *Magnum PI*, and *The A-Team*, among others.<sup>137</sup> Building on Modleski’s criticism of *Three Men and a Baby*, Joyrich sees this as a “hypermasculine defense against a feminization associated with TV and postmodernity (particularly, with post-civil rights, post-Vietnam, and post-women’s movement America).”<sup>138</sup>

Joyrich claims that the display of the male body on screen, as well as its exploitation in secondary texts like the *Soap Opera Digest* cover with Richard Dean Anderson on the cover, “emphasize the stars’ sex appeal and glorify their love lives” to reiterate their virility.<sup>139</sup>

But women-led action series like *Charlie’s Angels* saw the same exploitation of sex and sexuality on- and off-screen. Interviews with the *Angels* stars that emphasized their traditional performance of gender roles in their marriages served to mitigate any concerns over the possibility of their lesbianism (stemming from the female-centric world of the series) and of their sex symbol status.<sup>140</sup> There was nothing new to the treatment of male action stars in the popular press, particularly in the way interviews and articles touted the actors’ heterosexuality and understanding of male gender roles.

Joyrich further draws on the works of Steve Neale to examine how the male body on screen is depicted in ways that attempt to relegate the queer act of looking. Neale contends that within films that are created within a heterosexist and patriarchal society, “the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated by and, in some other way, its erotic component repressed.”<sup>141</sup> Rather than allowing the spectator a fetishistic gaze at male bodies on screens, films, especially historically men’s genres like action movies and Westerns, mitigate the act of looking by allowing the spectator a narcissistic identification with the character. Fight scenes, mutilated bodies, blood, and sweat all mark the male body as masculine, allowing male spectators to identify with the virility of the characters on screen – and thereby diminishing the homoerotic act of looking at another man’s body. For Neale, the use of men’s bodies in certain films reiterates a binary difference between men (with whom we identify while watching a film) and women (whom we gaze at sexually while watching). Likewise, Joyrich argues that “the exhibition and production of masculinity” on

television desperately reiterates a binary gender difference at a time when the divisions between the sexes were becoming less clearly defined.<sup>142</sup>

I agree with Joyrich's assertion that there is an ethos of desperation toward proving manliness and masculinity in action series of the long 1980s. In many of the programs I have studied here, the male protagonists strive to reiterate their masculinity in a world that increasingly does not revere it. However, this desperation is not merely reactionary, as often the heroes accept their failures as part of their emotional growth. The failures of men to succeed at work, their willingness to rely upon the help of others, their past traumas, and the exploitation of their bodies work deliberately to confuse and complicate traditional notions of maleness and masculinity.

#### Cooperation, Not Competition: Positioning the New Hero

One of the ways masculine strength is proven is in a man's ability to take care of problems on his own. Within action series, lone hero protagonists are often remembered despite the partners and helpers that surround them. (A simple historic example is the misleading title to *The Lone Ranger* [ABC, 1949-57], who worked alongside Tonto for over two hundred episodes.<sup>143</sup>) Tartikoff, for instance, describes the pilot to *Miami Vice* through Don Johnson's coolness without mentioning Philip Michael Thomas' presence in the same scenes.<sup>144</sup>

Action series in the long 1980s offered many compelling challenges to hegemonic masculinity, though the series are often remembered (falsely) for their simplistic displays of machismo and singular heroes. Narratives that reiterated the value of teamwork were one way in which these series reconfigured expectations for masculine courage and heroism on screen.

Drawing upon the lineage of “the band of brothers” motif, many of these series celebrate the intimate connections men can forge when working together. In doing so, they also invite queer readings of the narratives and protagonists, further opening up possibilities for the performance of masculinity in the long 1980s.

The opening credits to *The A-Team* explain the team’s history:

In 1972, a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the A-Team.

Although the team have escaped the military, they remain together, rather than pursuing new, individual lives. Although following orders to rob the Hanoi Bank as part of special operations landed them in military prison, they continue to follow military hierarchy. The colonel, Hannibal (Peppard), is the unequivocal group leader. The members of the team bring their individual strengths and skills to each case; their success each week hinges upon their varying talents. Because of their experiences together in combat, their collective prosecution, and their status as fugitives, the men of the A-team share a special bond that no one else can fully understand or infiltrate.

The series’ emphasis on homosocial bonding in life or death situations is at once masculinist and a challenge to traditional notions of masculinity. In many ways, the series echoes military “buddy” pictures. The contemporaneous *Platoon* (1986, dir. Oliver Stone) depicted Vietnam as a morally bankrupt war with camaraderie but also unethical leadership (like the general who sent the A-team on their secret mission) but also a war that produced deep bonds among soldiers. As elite fighters, the men of the A-team repeatedly demonstrate their physical



strength and cunning, important masculine qualities. Yet as an elite corps, the team spend most of their time in the company of men – each other – with women characters in the background.

For its first two seasons, *The A-Team* featured one woman starring character among the cast. Melinda Culea played Amy Allen, a reporter who hired the team in the pilot to help locate a missing correspondent from her newspaper.<sup>145</sup> Amy continued to work and travel with the team until Culea was swiftly dropped from the series in season two, reportedly after asking producers to make her character more central to the storylines and seeking equal pay with the male cast members. At that time, Marla Heasley was cast as recurring character Tawnia Baker, who was more of a sex kitten than Culea's smarter Amy. In Heasley's own words, the character was supposed to be the "bimbo" of the group.<sup>146</sup> The character Tawnia was written out in the third season when she departed to marry.<sup>147</sup> During the remainder of season three and the rest of the series' run, there were no regular women characters. The cast have famously reported that George Peppard was vocal about not wanting women in the cast, a sentiment Mr. T and Dirk Benedict echoed following Culea's firing.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the public difficulties Culea's departure brought for the series, which was only echoed a year later when Heasley left, the cast described themselves as a team off-screen as well. Peppard was quoted in a 1984 issue of *People* as saying that the cast were all "men of good heart" who liked and respected each other.<sup>149</sup> This was despite Peppard's reputation as someone difficult to work with.<sup>150</sup> On the whole, the male cast members describe their experiences on set as emphasizing the same spirit of brotherhood that the series' narrative reiterated week after week.

The series narrative often attests to the value of masculinity capable of transgressing norms. In "Point of No Return," after being exposed to radiation to stop plutonium theft, Face

and Murdock strip down and bathe together in a hot tub full of iodized salt to prevent radiation sickness from setting in.<sup>151</sup> In “Cowboy George,” a mix-up puts the team alongside Boy George, a 1980s pop singer who wore heavy eye makeup and jewelry and who was widely speculated to be gay (though he did not confirm rumors until many years later).<sup>152</sup> Although they are tough military men, the team are excited to meet the flamboyant singer. Notably, it is Hannibal and B.A., the two most macho of the group, who are the most eager. The episode concludes with them, and a crowd of rowdy country music fans, dancing along to a concert given by Boy George and his band the Culture Club.

*The A-Team* is the only one of the three series studied here that attests to teamwork so explicitly in its title. The titles to *Magnum PI* and *MacGyver* emphasize the singular protagonist of each series, but the series narratives reiterate that neither can succeed without assistance from others. The premise of *MacGyver* from the pilot is that the character is the most highly qualified person to intervene in extreme situations – and often the only one qualified, so that he is assigned jobs to do alone. Yet apart from the “opening gambit,” a scene that opens many early episodes with MacGyver in the middle of a short adventure, the primary storylines involve him traveling to a specific destination to fulfill a dangerous mission. Along the way, MacGyver typically befriends locals, recruiting them or the various victims he is charged with saving into working with him. More interesting, though, are the episodes in which MacGyver is not sent to an exotic location on a dangerous mission but remains in the U.S., often in familiar territory. Within these stay-at-home episodes, MacGyver’s primary focus is teaching others the value of teamwork.

The most compelling example is the third season’s “Thin Ice,” in which MacGyver returns home to Minnesota to fill in for his beloved high school hockey coach during an illness.<sup>153</sup> The star player of the high school team, Derek (Jeff Schultz), is being scouted by

professional teams, but MacGyver believes the boy's temper and bravado work against the success of the team. He encourages Derek to stop fighting and getting penalties and to learn to work with his teammates. As it turns out, the team recruiting him is less interested in his hockey talents than the entertainment value of his temper, which they believe will sell tickets to games. Derek's father (Clu Gulager) knows a professional contract would secure his son's future and tells MacGyver to back off. In the end, however, Derek realizes that MacGyver is right. By setting aside his ego and working with his teammates, he leads the team to the championship. This episode is compelling for its lack of high-stakes action adventure and for MacGyver's adeptness at working with teenagers. But what is most revealing about this episode in terms of masculinity is MacGyver's insistence throughout the episode that teamwork and cooperation are better than competition.

Magnum, too, works in tandem with a cadre of helper-friends who bail him out of trouble through what Newcomb describes as a "mystical sense of communication."<sup>154</sup> Rick (Larry Manetti) and T.C. were Magnum's buddies in the Navy during the Vietnam War, and so, like the members of the A-team, the three share a traumatic past that unites them. Even the effete Higgins, who generally finds his British manners superior to Magnum's crass American ways, assists Magnum when he can, and at other times relies upon Magnum for personal advice. Magnum and his friends share a sort of psychic bond. In "Home from the Sea" as Magnum is adrift in the ocean, dangerously close to drowning, Rick, T.C., and Higgins sense that Magnum is in danger and manage to find him by scouring the coastline from T.C.'s helicopter. A similar plot occurs in "Solo Flight" as Magnum is pinned beneath a crashed airplane; the episode even recycles flashback footage of Magnum's childhood that was first seen in "Home from the

Sea.”<sup>155</sup> Although Magnum frees himself, he is motivated by visions of his friends encouraging him and offering advice about how to do so.

While competition between men serves as a source of interpersonal and business conflict on women’s melodrama series like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, men’s action adventure series value cooperation. For J.R. Ewing, younger brother Bobby (Patrick Duffy) is at best a roadblock preventing J.R. from his pursuits and at worst a direct threat. When men are in competition for resources or women, loyalty proves to be a weakness. The primetime serial cemented competition as an essential quality of masculinity.

On action series, however, men work together for the sake of professional success or personal growth. The series *Simon and Simon* (CBS, 1981-89) depicts two brothers who run a private investigation agency. Although Rick (Gerald McRaney) and A.J. (Jameson Parker) have different attitudes toward their work that provides the conflict within many episodes, their cooperation ultimately results in the successful conclusion to their investigations. Similarly, the title characters of *Hardcastle and McCormick* (ABC, 1983-86) balance their different skills as a judge and street-smart car thief to capture criminals who have escaped conviction. Cooperation, not competition, allows action heroes of the long 1980s to succeed in their various missions, and this emphasis on teamwork and partnership challenges the lone cowboy myth that had long been associated with the action hero.

### Money, Class, and Masculinity

Despite several television series touting the virtues of cooperation, in reality competitive individualism thrived in the long 1980s. Under Ronald Reagan’s view of business and trade,

competition “would only enhance the quality of life for Americans.”<sup>156</sup> While many scholars have noted the importance series like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* played in depicting yuppie values, *Magnum PI*, *The A-Team*, and *MacGyver* are equally valuable for the way characters eschew Reagan-era competition and the drive to acquire. J.R. Ewing and Blake Carrington perform their masculinity through their roles as business titans, reaffirming Sharon Bird’s claim that hegemonic masculinity *is* competition.<sup>157</sup> By contrast, Magnum, MacGyver, and the men of the A-team may struggle for the “quality of life” that capitalism promises, but their complex relationship with money and social class offers insights into a range of masculinities during the long 1980s, on screen and off.

*Magnum PI* encourages viewers to covet Robin Masters’ mansion and Ferrari, and Magnum himself for gaining access to them. As Haralovich puts it, “Magnum lives the lifestyle of the rich and famous without the equivalent access to capital.”<sup>158</sup> Although Magnum talks about needing investigative work to pay his bills, he is just as likely to take a case without the prospect of pay or to spend his own money, and that of T.C. and Rick, in order to pursue a line of investigation if he believes it is the morally right thing to do. Haralovich sees the relationship between money and gender play out in opposite directions in Magnum and Higgins. Both live on Robin Masters’ estate, but while Higgins chides Magnum for welching off Masters, Higgins himself is content with his position as caretaker (and Magnum even speculates that Higgins could be the unseen Masters). Higgins belongs on the estate because he shares the taste of the upper class as a sergeant major in the British army and, it is eventually revealed, a baron.<sup>159</sup> He fits in while Magnum, with his Detroit Tigers baseball cap and love for beer, does not. Haralovich claims that Higgins’ “British snobbery, enthusiasm for class stratification, and imperialist history is countered with American mockery of class privilege.”<sup>160</sup> Contrasted with

Higgin's effete British manners, Magnum becomes a working-class hero who has it all without becoming a wealthy snob. Magnum is no less masculine than Higgins. In fact, he is repeatedly portrayed as more handsome and more successful with women. Higgins, meanwhile, has more difficulty maintaining relationships and reluctantly seeks Magnum's advice. Magnum and Higgins therefore present two different forms of masculinity. For Magnum, access to status symbols and potent heterosexuality affirm his masculine power, even if he struggles financially. For Higgins, a more effeminate demeanor is overcome by socio-economic status.

The dueling forms of masculinity embodied by Magnum and Higgins reflect changing social understandings of masculinity in the long 1980s. As more women entered the corporate workforce, more men sought greater participation in home life, a widespread and popularly discussed shift in gender roles that television acknowledged in varied ways. Domestic sitcoms like *Who's the Boss* (ABC, 1983-91) and *Mr. Belvedere* (ABC, 1985-90) examined men's changing gender roles by depicting men as maids, cooks, and child care providers for working women. As the division between male and female gender roles was perceived to be eroding, psychologists were keen to study the effects on men's psyches.<sup>161</sup> William Gaylin's *The Male Ego* described the damage done to man's mental health caused by the decay of his role as breadwinner and his inability to ever stop climbing the ladder of success.<sup>162</sup> Magnum is a model for how to preserve health and happiness by reaping the benefits of someone else's material success.

MacGyver has less interest in material wealth, though like Magnum is dependent upon it in order to do his job. Unlike Magnum, MacGyver is unlikely to drive an expensive car or take up residence in the mansion. MacGyver lives in the shadows, first as an agent for a fictional government intelligence agency called the Department of External Services (DXS) and later a non-governmental organization known as the Phoenix Foundation. Neither organization spares

any expense in sending MacGyver around the world to complete special missions. While MacGyver personally has little regard for money or material goods, his work is enabled through vast sums of wealth.

Most viewers, however, do not see MacGyver as part of the “the system” or “working for the man,” a character who profits from increased defense spending or increased outsourcing of defense contracts under the Reagan administration.<sup>163</sup> Instead, MacGyver is most fondly remembered for his ability to improvise gadgets from objects at hand. The point of “MacGyverisms,” the term for the improvised gadgets MacGyver constructs, is to show how ingenuity trumps stockpiles of expensive equipment and weapons. His ability to jury-rig explosives, smoke bombs, and other devices and his refusal to carry or use guns position MacGyver as counter to hegemonic masculinity, particular the action hero of contemporaneous films and television. The series narrative repeatedly asserts the value of brains over brawn and wealth.

*The A-Team* similarly depicts the fashioning of weapons and shields from scraps. Like Magnum, the A-Team struggles for money and depends on clients to keep themselves above water. Often seeming materialistic, the team demands money, before they will offer a prospective client assistance, despite often the client’s desperate and timely needs (such as kidnappings). The team cuts bargains when clients can’t pay the full fee, and they use the money on expenditures related to the case instead of as pure profit. While MacGyver may benefit from unseen bills paid by his employer and Magnum may pay his bills through his employment, the A-team live so far on the fringes of society that they carry few expenses unrelated to their clients’ cases.

Yet, as with other action series, *The A-Team* reflects dual attitudes toward money. Face, the con artist of the group, venerates wealth. His cons are always masquerades of wealth: he pretends to be a movie producer and oil tycoon in the pilot, he dresses in fancy suits, and he manages to live in Los Angeles' swankiest apartments. In desperate times, however, even Face will put aside his materialism to "do what is right."

Other drama series from the long 1980s call attention to Reagan-era values of acquisition and consumption, as did more positive, episodic series like *Hart to Hart* (ABC, 1979-84), in which a benevolent millionaire couple uses their free time and wealth to solve murder mysteries. These series encourage aspirational viewing, promising audiences that "there are still great fortunes to be made in America, and, better still, that the 'good life'...is worth sweating for after all."<sup>164</sup> However, the villainy and amorality of characters within series like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* also attest to the fact that the supremely rich live by a different moral code. Michael Pollan remarks that "money has loosened the ties of civilization" in these series, many of which are set in the West – in Texas, California, and Colorado – a quintessential locale for the American dream of making a fortune and new life for oneself. These series also rely upon businesses that exploit the natural bounties of the land: oil (*Dallas* and *Dynasty*) and fertile soil (*Falcon Crest*).

Although the three action series on which I have concentrated here happen in exotic, varied locations, the men's primary occupation is never to exploit and pillage. The A-Team travel from place to place as they are hired, but at home in Los Angeles, rather than living out a Californian dream, the men scatter to a veteran's mental hospital, a rough ghetto, places that remind the viewer of the team's financial and legal status as outsiders. Gina Marchetti argues that *The A-Team* is designed as a "fantasy for workers, children and the disenfranchised" because the series' premise rests on the ability of the underdog to defeat those in power week after



week.<sup>165</sup> Any destruction that occurs in the series' big action sequences in the fourth act of each episode are, for Marchetti, part of the series' ambivalent representation of the value of property, which "parallels the viewer's own feelings of envy, desire, and frustration" at wealth inequities.<sup>166</sup>

Like *The A-Team*, MacGyver's missions require him to travel around the world, with each episode set in a different exotic, remote location. Although MacGyver may steal an artifact or destroy an arsenal, his primary goal is to protect the innocent (i.e. the viewer), sometimes destruction is a necessary evil for the success of the mission. When MacGyver comes home, it is to the simplicity of life in wholesome Minnesota, where he fishes, plays hockey, and enjoys the idyllic natural landscape. Whatever damage has been wrought during his travels is atoned for with MacGyver's simplistic appreciation of home.

#### Conclusion: New Directions for Gender and Genre

Television in the long 1980s is often remembered for its stylistic and material excesses, embodied in series like *Miami Vice* and *Dynasty*, in which competition and consumption are hallmarks of masculinity foregrounded in the narrative. To be a real man, these series assert, one must have wealth – or at least dress the part. I contend, however, that series like *Magnum PI* and *The A-Team* reveal a much more complex relationship between masculinity and wealth. In particular, as characters within these series struggle to survive financially, they demonstrate the fragility of masculinity during an era in which women became more independent. This fragility is also exhibited in the narrative structure of action series, which in the long 1980s began to value sustained storylines depicting men's personal and interpersonal conflicts, especially trauma

from the Vietnam War. Additionally, by casting men like Tom Selleck, who straddled a line between “beefcake” and “ordinary guy,” action series present masculinity as something to be displayed for female viewers and something that was evolving away from the superficial, limited cowboy image. Primetime serials and action dramas stand as counterpoint examples of how gender and genre entangled in the long 1980s to participate in opposite ends of television’s representations of masculinity.

By the end of the long 1980s, many of the drama series studied in this chapter had concluded their original series runs on prime time. Most, however, continued to have second lives in syndicated reruns and made-for-television movies. Their additional influence on storytelling could be felt in the 1990s, a period that Jason Mittell singles out as the start of an era in which narrative complexity became the standard form for many drama series.<sup>167</sup> Jeffrey Sconce similarly credits series like *Magnum PI*, among others, for the sea change in the way the stories are told on primetime drama series.<sup>168</sup>

By the end of the long 1980s, Robert J. Thompson contends audiences could “recognize a ‘quality show’” through key identifying characteristics that had little to do with the quality of enjoyment it gave them: ensemble series, controversial subject matter, continuous narrative elements, awards but not necessarily high ratings, etc.<sup>169</sup> Recent television criticism and scholarship has become transfixed with contemporaries to this quality phenomenon, particularly those featuring troubled male protagonists.<sup>170</sup> These same prestige dramas are also heralded for their cinematic look, lavish production design, and high budgets in addition to their storytelling. All of these qualities are characteristics of action series and serial melodramas from the long 1980s.

In her study of audience responses serial melodrama, Ien Ang cautions that “not all women are attracted to melodrama, or not always, and that some men can be moved by melodrama too.”<sup>171</sup> For this reason, Ang asserts that “femininity and masculinity are not enduring subject positions inhabited inevitably by biological men and women, but that identity is transitory, the temporary result of dynamic identifications.”<sup>172</sup> In addition to gender, I posit that sexuality may also be a temporary, resulting from dynamic engagement with a favorite series or the actor or character within it. Action series of the long 1980s offered audiences the opportunity to simultaneously identify with and fetishize the central male heroes, and they granted men permission to engage with melodrama by hiding it under the protective veil of war trauma. Action series of the long 1980s thus reveal the moment at which television melodrama started to become a bona fide mode for audiences of men, laying the seeds for some of today’s most reputable and critically acclaimed male melodramas.

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<sup>1</sup> Each episode of *Magnum PI* in syndication was worth an estimated \$2 million in revenue. See Robert Reinhold, “Tom Selleck Stalks His Future,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1987. *MacGyver* went off the air in 1992 but returned with two television movies in 1994. *Miami Vice* was remade into a feature film in 2006; *The A-Team* was a feature film in 2010 with an updated setting: the team served in Iraq, not Vietnam. CBS ordered a reboot of *MacGyver* for its 2016-2017 season with a slightly different narrative structure, in that the genius MacGyver works with team members. See Nellie Andreeva, “‘MacGyver’: What We Know About the Changes on Newly Picked Up CBS Series,” *Deadline*, May 13, 2016. As of February 2018, CBS has ordered a pilot of a rebooted *Magnum PI*, as well as *Cagney and Lacey*, for consideration in its fall schedule. The *Magnum* reboot is being led by Peter Lenkov, who is also responsible for the *MacGyver* reboot. See Nellie Andreeva, “‘Magnum PI’ & ‘Cagney and Lacey’ Reboots, Cops Drama ‘Chiefs’ Get CBS Pilot Orders,” *Deadline*, January 18, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Susan King, “‘MacGyver’ ABC’s Secret Hit: Richard Dean Anderson Explains How the Show - Like Its Main Character - Manages to Survive,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> The concept for *Miami Vice* is often remembered as “MTV Cops,” a phrase Brandon Tartikoff is supposed to have scrawled on a napkin in a fit of inspiration. Tartikoff asserts that the story is apocryphal and that the concept evolved after months of interviews and meetings; nevertheless, the idea of “MTV Cops” has heavily shaped popular perceptions of *Miami Vice*. See Brandon Tartikoff and Charles Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride* (New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1992), 77.

<sup>4</sup> John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 9. The phrase “Least Objectionable Programming” is attributed to Paul Klein, NBC’s vice-president for audience measurement in the 1970s. See

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Klein, "Why You Watch What You Watch When You Watch," *TV Guide*, July 24, 1971, 6-9. Interestingly, in 1982, Klein founded the Playboy Channel, which arguably presented some of television's most objectionable programming at the time.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Fiske, *Television Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 200-225.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Desjardins, "Gender and Television," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 673. Desjardins is referring specifically to the cop show (*Hill Street Blues*), the hospital show (*St. Elsewhere* [NBC, 1982-88]), and the detective show (*Magnum PI*).

<sup>7</sup> *Dallas*, "A House Divided," CBS, March 21, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> *Dallas*, "Who Done It," CBS, November 21, 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Meisler, "When J.R. Was Shot the Cliffhanger Was Born," *New York Times*, May 7, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Corliss, "The 'Dallas' Shot That Was Heard Around the World," *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Routledge, 2008), 79, 90-96.

<sup>13</sup> Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary American Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 236.

<sup>14</sup> Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 136-137.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Sewell, "From Discourse to Discord: Quality and Dramedy at the End of the Classic Network System," *Television and New Media* 11, no. 4 (2010): 244-245.

<sup>16</sup> Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *The Velvet Light Trap* 58, no. 1 (2006): 31.

<sup>17</sup> Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 180.

<sup>18</sup> Meisler, "When J.R. Was Shot."

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 98.

<sup>20</sup> Elana Levine, "Historicizing the Influence of Soap Opera," *The Velvet Light Trap* 79 (2017): 105-109.

<sup>21</sup> Caryn Murphy, "Selling the Continuing Story of Peyton Place: Negotiating the Content of the Primetime Serial," *Historical Journal of Radio, Television, and Film* 33, no. 1 (2013): 120-121.

<sup>22</sup> Moya Luckett carefully chronicles the changing attitudes of the American public toward the series through its five-year history, beginning with shock at its depictions of sexuality and ending with a sense that the series was too outmoded as American culture became more sexually permissive. For Luckett, *Peyton Place's* significance in television history lies in its exploration of single girls and their sexual desires, an exploration enabled through its dramatic structures and serial storylines. See Luckett, "A Moral Crisis in Prime Time: *Peyton Place* and the Rise of the Single Girl," in *Television, History, and American Culture*, eds. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 75-97.

<sup>23</sup> NBC president Brandon Tartikoff reportedly wanted to develop a 52-week television schedule with new series premiering at unconventional times, rather than a September-May schedule that

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emulated the school year. See Jerry Buck, "52-Week Season Eyed," *Ocala Star-Banner*, August 2, 1986, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), 254.

<sup>25</sup> "Next Season Will Shower Screen with Soaps," *Broadcasting*, April 28, 1980, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," *Screen* 25, no. 1 (1984): 4-16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Actress Linda Gray addressed Sue Ellen's realistic "functioning alcoholism" in a 2006 interview. See Jan Moir, "'I Was the Very First Desperate Housewife,'" *The Telegraph*, July 10, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Christine Geraghty finds that Blake's character softens somewhat starting in the second season of *Dynasty*, when his ex-wife Alexis (Joan Collins) was introduced. Prior to Alexis' introduction, Blake was the only real villain on the series. In the first season, he orders guard dogs to attack a man who trespasses on his property, rapes his wife to remind her of his possession of her, and shoves his son's gay lover into a fireplace, causing his death. Certainly with the arrival of Alexis, the format of the series changed somewhat, as conflict between women began to occupy more narrative time. Geraghty contends this made Blake merely a passive responder to troubles hurled at him, though she admits he is "given to moments of ungovernable rage." I contend that the increase of narrative attention paid to Alexis did not change Blake but only change the amount of time the series gave to him and agree with Geraghty that his "outbursts of excessive action are a way of reasserting patriarchal power." See Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," 14.

<sup>31</sup> Todd Gitlin, "Make It Look Messy," *American Film*, September 1981, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Schatz, "Hill Street Blues," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 766.

<sup>33</sup> Rodney A. Buxton, "Magnum PI," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 983.

<sup>34</sup> Horace Newcomb, "Magnum PI: The Champagne of TV?," *Channels of Communication*, April/May 1985.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Craft, "Elegy for Mary Hartman," in *Television: The Critical View*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 98.

<sup>36</sup> Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 153-195.

<sup>37</sup> Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> For more on the "turn toward relevance" within 1970s broadcast television, see Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 203-220.

<sup>39</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 201.

<sup>40</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 78.

<sup>41</sup> *Soap*, "Episode 1.18," ABC, January 24, 1978.

<sup>42</sup> Mittell, *Genre and Television*, 174.

<sup>43</sup> Maurine Christopher, "Protests Slow 'Soap' Sales, but ABC Predicts Full House," *Advertising Age*, August 15, 1977, 2, 73.

<sup>44</sup> On the rewriting of the scene, see Christopher, "Protests Slow 'Soap' Sales," 73. Burt Reynolds' centerfold can be found in the April 1972 issue of *Cosmopolitan*. The episode in question is *Soap*, "Episode 1.1," ABC, September 13, 1977.

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- <sup>45</sup> Although the job of sheriff is often, especially in the Western, a job in exercising one's masculine authority, Burt is not particularly good at it. His incompetence, coupled with his sincere desire to "protect and serve," speaks to his new man sensibility: he tries to be a sheriff for the people.
- <sup>46</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen Books, 1985), 9.
- <sup>47</sup> Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, 62.
- <sup>48</sup> Moir, "'I Was the Very First Desperate Housewife.'" Gray has spoken openly about her decision to leave the series when her character Sue Ellen seemed to become stagnant, but she also speaks with fondness of her time on the series and with actors Larry Hagman and Patrick Duffy, despite her conception of the series as less than feminist.
- <sup>49</sup> Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," 4.
- <sup>50</sup> Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, 51.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 63.
- <sup>52</sup> Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," 12.
- <sup>53</sup> Mike Donaldson, "What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?", *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (1993): 655.
- <sup>54</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "The Cult of Masculinity: American Social Character and the Legacy of the Cowboy," in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*, ed. Michael Kaufman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 266-273.
- <sup>55</sup> Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 9-12.
- <sup>56</sup> Mary Beth Haralovich, "'Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget': Series Design and Popular Appeal of *Magnum, P.I.*," *Journal of Film and Video* 43, no. 1-2 (1991), 134.
- <sup>57</sup> Matthew returned several seasons later, only to be killed by Blake's son. For more on the distinctions between *Dynasty*'s first season and its subsequent eight in terms of narrative and aesthetics, see Alex Mar, "The *Dynasty* That Could Have Been," *Slate*, May 25, 2011.
- <sup>58</sup> Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 85.
- <sup>59</sup> Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, 51.
- <sup>60</sup> Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," 15-16.
- <sup>61</sup> Robert Lindsey, "Soap Operas: Men Are Tuning In," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1979.
- <sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Amanda Marcotte, "How to Make a Critically Acclaimed TV Show about Masculinity," *Jezebel.com*, September 7, 2011.
- <sup>63</sup> Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 99.
- <sup>64</sup> Mittell, *Complex TV*, 246.
- <sup>65</sup> Henry Winkler was fresh off the role for which he is best known, Fonzie from ABC's *Happy Days* (1974-84), a character who was macho-yet-fragile in ways not unlike what Winkler ultimately envisioned for the character MacGyver. Together with Rich, Winkler had sold to ABC thirteen episodes of *Mr. Sunshine*, a sitcom about a blind university professor before producing the pilot for *MacGyver*.
- <sup>66</sup> John Rich, *Warm Up the Snake: A Hollywood Memoir* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 159.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>68</sup> Following his appearance on *General Hospital*, Richard Dean Anderson had been in a TV version of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (CBS, 1982-83) and a melodrama set on a military base called *Emerald Point N.A.S.* (CBS, 1983-84), which was created by Richard and Esther

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Shapiro, the creators of *Dynasty*. *Emerald Point N.A.S.* combined the high stakes spy plots of *MacGyver* with *Dynasty*'s (and *General Hospital*'s) greater emphasis on character development and emotional storylines. Although short-lived, the series might be credited as giving Anderson a chance to perform genre-mixed acting and may have helped him, along with his previous stint on *General Hospital*, to develop *MacGyver* into a softer kind of hero.

<sup>69</sup> Rich, *Warm Up the Snake*, 159.

<sup>70</sup> King, "'MacGyver' ABC's Secret Hit."

<sup>71</sup> Denny Angelle, "MacGyver: Crime Fighter without a Gun," *Boy's Life*, August 1988, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Mila Hasan, *The Legacy of MacGyver: Unofficial and Unauthorized* (self-published, 2015), 20.

<sup>73</sup> Morgan Grendel, "The Fall TV Season: Hope for 'Spenser,' 'MacGyver' Seen: New Series Facing 'Killer' Time Slots," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1985.

<sup>74</sup> Sandy Flitterman, "Thighs and Whiskers: The Fascination of 'Magnum, p.i.,"' *Screen* 26, no. 2 (1985): 42-58.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Snauffer, *Crime Television* (Westport: Praeger Books, 2006), 114.

<sup>77</sup> As quoted in Peter J. Boyer, "TV Turns to the Hard-Boiled Male," *New York Times*, February 16, 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Snauffer, *Crime Television*, 114. Bellisario had started his television career writing for the production company of Stephen J. Cannell prior to Cannell's creation of *The A-Team*. *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was sold in syndication as *Black Sheep Squadron*.

<sup>79</sup> David Marc and Robert J. Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1992), 175, 241.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Champlin, "Selleck: A Runaway Male Sex Symbol," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1984, L1, L9.

<sup>81</sup> Tania Modleski, "Three Men and Baby M," *Camera Obscura* 6, no. 2 (1988): 80.

<sup>82</sup> Reinhold, "Tom Selleck Stalks His Future."

<sup>83</sup> By the final season, Selleck, who was serving as producer, pushed for his wardrobe to favor pants over shorts as both he and Magnum aged into their forties. See Reinhold, "Tom Selleck Stalks His Future."

<sup>84</sup> Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> "Actor's Libel Lawsuit Leaves Media Asking How to Cover Outing," *The Advocate*, August 13, 1991.

<sup>86</sup> EW Staff, "Tom Selleck's Lawsuit," *Entertainment Weekly*, July 26, 1991; "Selleck Wins Lawsuit, Gets Apology from Globe," *Orlando Sentinel*, August 6, 1991.

<sup>87</sup> Marc and Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers*, 211.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Edelstein, "Stephen J. Cannell: A Novel Approach to Life and Television," *Broadcasting and Cable*, January 12, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 166.

<sup>90</sup> Jimmie Reeves, "Television Stars: The Case of Mr. T," in *Television: The Critical View*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 448.

<sup>91</sup> Vernon Scott, "Peppard in New Series," *Hollywood Reporter*, January 13, 1983.

<sup>92</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 447.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

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- <sup>95</sup> D. Keith Mano, "Eye to Eye with Mr. T," *Playboy*, September 1983, 84-86.
- <sup>96</sup> Brian Cronin, whose blog *Legends Revealed* attempts to prove or debunk urban myths about the entertainment industry, confirmed that B.A. Baracus never said, "I pity the fool," on *The A-Team* through a marathon watching session of every episode of the series. In a blog post that was picked up by the Huffington Post, Cronin explores the history of the catchphrase. See Cronin, "Did B.A. Baracus Never Actually Say 'I Pity the Fool' on 'The A-Team'?", *Huffington Post*, July 24, 2015. "I pity the fool" was so associated with Mr. T's star persona that it became the title for a reality series about him (*I Pity the Fool*, TV Land, 2006).
- <sup>97</sup> His work with children and professed love for his mother inspired the popular press to nickname Mr. T, at times, "Mr. Softie." See Jeff Jarvis, "The A-Team's Mr. T," *People*, May 30, 1983, 108-110.
- <sup>98</sup> Fiske, *Television Culture*, 202.
- <sup>99</sup> Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 17.
- <sup>100</sup> Reeves, "The Case of Mr. T," 445-446.
- <sup>101</sup> Newcomb, "Magnum PI," 23; Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 30.
- <sup>102</sup> Daniel Miller, "Primetime Tours of Duty," in *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television*, ed. Michael Anderegg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 166-189.
- <sup>103</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Memories Are Forever," CBS, November 5, 1981.
- <sup>104</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Resolutions," CBS, May 8, 1988.
- <sup>105</sup> Newcomb, "Magnum PI," 25.
- <sup>106</sup> Christopher Anderson, "Reflections on *Magnum, P.I.*," in *Television: The Critical View*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 123-124.
- <sup>107</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," *Screen* 18, no. 2 (1977): 113-118.
- <sup>108</sup> Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 60.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 85.
- <sup>110</sup> Anderson, "Reflections on *Magnum, P.I.*," 117.
- <sup>111</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Woman on the Beach," CBS, October 22, 1981.
- <sup>112</sup> Flitterman, "Thighs and Whiskers," 58.
- <sup>113</sup> Haralovich, "'Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget,'" 131.
- <sup>114</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 162.
- <sup>115</sup> Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 279-280.
- <sup>116</sup> Scott Benjamin King, "Sonny's Virtues: The Gender Negotiations in *Miami Vice*," *Screen* 31, no. 3 (1990): 288.
- <sup>117</sup> Andrew Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity: Male Identity and Women's Liberation* (New York: Harper's Books, 1977), 47.
- <sup>118</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Home from the Sea," CBS, September 29, 1983.
- <sup>119</sup> Newcomb, "Magnum PI," 25.
- <sup>120</sup> *MacGyver*, Pilot, CBS, September 19, 1985.
- <sup>121</sup> Anderson, "Reflections on *Magnum, P.I.*," 117.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>123</sup> Flitterman, "Thighs and Whiskers," 45.
- <sup>124</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 39.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 45.



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- <sup>126</sup> Todd Gitlin, "Car Commercials and *Miami Vice*: 'We Build Excitement,'" in *Watching Television*, ed. Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 152.
- <sup>127</sup> *Miami Vice*, "Brother's Keeper," NBC, September 16, 1984.
- <sup>128</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 79.
- <sup>129</sup> King, "Sonny's Virtues," 283.
- <sup>130</sup> Richard Zoglin, "Cool Cops, Hot Show," *Time*, September 16, 1985.
- <sup>131</sup> Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception*, 40. See also Beverly Houston, "Viewing Television: The Metapsychology of Endless Consumption," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no. 3 (1984): 183-195.
- <sup>132</sup> Guy Trebay, "Roll Up Your Sleeves and Indulge in a Miami Vice," *New York Times*, July 20, 2006, G1.
- <sup>133</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 146-157; Anna Gough-Yates, "Angels in Chains?: Feminism, Femininity, and Consumer Culture in *Charlie's Angels*," in *Action TV: Tough Guys, Smooth Operators, and Foxy Chicks*, eds. Bill Osgerby and Anna Gough-Yates (New York: Routledge, 2001), 83-99.
- <sup>134</sup> Gough-Yates, "Angels in Chains," 94.
- <sup>135</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 157.
- <sup>136</sup> Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), 216.
- <sup>137</sup> Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception*, 84.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 91.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 81.
- <sup>140</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 154-157.
- <sup>141</sup> Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983), 14.
- <sup>142</sup> Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception*, 84.
- <sup>143</sup> April Selley offers an in-depth examination of how men's partnerships in film and television tend to neglect the significance of the role of the racialized partner while offering queer possibilities for the duo. Though Selley does not specifically address *The Lone Ranger*, her larger argument applies. See April Selley, "'I Have Been, and Ever Shall Be, Your Friend': *Star Trek*, *The Deerslayer*, and the American Romance," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20, no. 1 (1986): 89-104.
- <sup>144</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 79.
- <sup>145</sup> *The A-Team*, "Mexican Slayride," NBC, January 23, 1983.
- <sup>146</sup> Jeff Jarvis, "*The A-Team* Draws Fire," *People*, January 20, 1984.
- <sup>147</sup> *The A-Team*, "The Bend in the River, Part II," NBC, September 25, 1984.
- <sup>148</sup> Jarvis, "*The A-Team* Draws Fire."
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>150</sup> Louise Farr, "'He Made a Lot of Enemies,'" *TV Guide*, August 31, 1985, 26-29.
- <sup>151</sup> *The A-Team*, "Point of No Return," NBC, November 21, 1986.
- <sup>152</sup> *The A-Team*, "Cowboy George," NBC, February 11, 1986.
- <sup>153</sup> *MacGyver*, "Thin Ice," ABC, February 1, 1988.
- <sup>154</sup> Newcomb, "*Magnum PI*," 25.
- <sup>155</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Solo Flight," CBS, February 4, 1987.
- <sup>156</sup> Peter Wallison, *Ronald Reagan: The Power of Conviction and the Success of His Presidency* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004).

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- <sup>157</sup> Sharon Bird, "Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity," *Gender and Society* 10, no. 2 (1996): 120-132.
- <sup>158</sup> Haralovich, "'Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget,'" 124.
- <sup>159</sup> *Magnum PI*, "Echoes of the Mind I," CBS, September 27, 1984; "Echoes of the Mind II," CBS, October 4, 1984.
- <sup>160</sup> Haralovich, "'Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget,'" 124.
- <sup>161</sup> Lisa Belkin, "Bars to Equality of Sexes Seen as Eroding, Slowly," *New York Times*, August 20, 1989, A1, A26.
- <sup>162</sup> William Gaylin, *The Male Ego* (New York: Viking Books, 1992).
- <sup>163</sup> United Press International, "Defense Scandal Heats Up, Reagan Calls in Top Aides: President 'Upset' by Revelations," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1988.
- <sup>164</sup> Michael Pollan, "The Season of the Reagan Rich," *Channels of Communication* 2 (1982): 14.
- <sup>165</sup> Gina Marchetti, "Class, Ideology, and Commercial Television: An Analysis of *The A-Team*," *Journal of Film and Video* 39 (1987): 21.
- <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>167</sup> Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 33.
- <sup>168</sup> Sconce, "What If?," 102.
- <sup>169</sup> Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, 16.
- <sup>170</sup> See, for example: Lotz, *Cable Guys*, or David Bianculli, *Platinum TV: From I Love Lucy to The Walking Dead, How TV Became Terrific* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).
- <sup>171</sup> Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 96.
- <sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

### Chapter Three Television's "Mr. Moms": Idealizing the New Man in 1980s Domestic Sitcoms

Laid off from his executive position at a car manufacturing company, Jack (Michael Keaton) becomes a stay-at-home parent while his wife Caroline (Teri Garr) lands a job as an advertising executive. The title of this film, *Mr. Mom*, indicates the gender role reversal on which much of the film's comedy is predicated. Jack performs the traditional feminine labor of cooking and cleaning, badly, while becoming increasingly obsessed with daytime soap operas. The housewives in the neighborhood are charmed by his willingness to serve as a stay-at-home dad; one even attempts to have an affair with him. Meanwhile, Caroline is a natural in the world of advertising because her homemaking experience offers her unique insights into the minds of women consumers. She quickly rises through the ranks at the ad agency, only to have her success undermined when her boss tries to seduce her. These plotlines characterize the danger of gender role reversal as principally sexual. Outsiders in homosocial spaces, Jack and Caroline are both targets for sexual aggressors. Before these aggressions result in an infidelity that might destroy their marriage, order is restored: Jack returns to work at the car factory while Caroline resigns in fury and resumes her role as homemaker. As this conclusion to the film makes clear, men are better equipped to handle the wolves that prey in the business world, and women are safer and happier when ensconced in the home. Nonetheless, the experience of switching roles has given Jack and Caroline greater appreciation for each other's contribution to the family.

Released in 1983, *Mr. Mom* received mixed reviews but was reasonably successful at the box office. The film grossed over sixty-four million dollars domestically and led to a three-picture deal with Universal for writer John Hughes.<sup>1</sup> Critics were mild in their praise, not because the gender role reversal was too cutting edge but because, as Roger Ebert says, the

narrative hinged upon “manufactured, artificial situations inspired...by memories of old TV shows” in which husbands and wives trade places to disastrous but comedic results.<sup>2</sup> As more American men became “Mr. Mom” – a phrase that entered the vernacular – the film’s tidy resolution restores family order at the expense of exploring the many complexities of changing family dynamics.

Ebert’s complaint that the film is too reminiscent of old television is demonstrated in sight gags and physical comedy in which Jack fails at performing domestic labor. He is, for instance, unable to control the vacuum cleaner, which takes on a life of its own and chases the family around the house [Figure 3.1]. It is easy to imagine this scene in black and white, with Desi Arnaz standing in for Michael Keaton as he runs in terror from the vacuum. It could easily be a scene out of the 1952 episode of *I Love Lucy* in which Arnaz’s character Ricky has a miserable time serving as housewife while Lucy goes to work in a candy factory.<sup>3</sup> But *Mr. Mom*’s connection to television extends beyond allusions to TV plots. Television producer Aaron Spelling was billed as executive producer for the film, and several television writers assisted John Hughes with script revisions.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the film coincided with a new trend in domestic sitcoms that depicted men in charge of the home.



*Figure 3.1. Jack and his son are terrorized by the vacuum cleaner in Mr. Mom.*

Shortly after the film's release, "Mr. Moms" flooded the primetime broadcast schedule. While not a direct result of *Mr. Mom*'s box office success but instead a product of the same socio-cultural context, Mr. Mom sitcoms were broadcast networks' attempt to cash in on the changing dynamics of the American family, especially the increase of working mothers. Some of primetime's Mr. Moms were single fathers while others were paid domestic workers serving as surrogate parents to the family's children. Beginning in 1984 and persisting until 1992, the end of the long 1980s, television sitcoms proliferated with examples of men engaged with domestic duties.

Taken individually, any one "Mr. Mom" story might be exceptional, worthy of closer investigation for its relationship to the changing social landscape. However, given what Todd Gitlin describes as television's "recombinant culture," in which one successful series spawns copycats and spinoffs, it is the trend or proliferation of stories with domestic men that is significant.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I examine three different trends within "Mr. Mom" sitcoms. First, series like *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-89), *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-92), and *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-92) featured families with two working parents who shared household duties. Although marital egalitarianism was sometimes more an ideal than an achievement among the couples in these series, dialogue and plotlines repeatedly emphasize the need for men to be "participant fathers" who are actively involved in family matters.<sup>6</sup> Second, on series like *Who's the Boss* (ABC, 1984-1992), *Charles in Charge* (CBS, 1984-85; syndication, 1987-90), and *Mr. Belvedere* (ABC, 1985-90), "domestic dads" were solely responsible for child care, cooking, and cleaning. As a consequence of the mother's work outside the home, male domestic workers are hired to maintain the household. In the case of these three series, men prove to be as skilled at household labor as the mother, if not more so, and often function as surrogate parents to the

children. Finally, later into the long 1980s, series like *My Two Dads* (NBC, 1987-90) and *Full House* (ABC, 1987-95) eliminate the wife-mother entirely. These series depict households run by “lead dads” and “helper dads,” who, as a team, are prototypes for contemporary sitcoms featuring gay parents.

As in the film *Mr. Mom*, the humor in these series often stems from the juxtaposition of masculinity and domesticity. For instance, the opening credits to *Who's the Boss* feature housekeeper Tony (Tony Danza) cleaning the drapes by raising the vacuum cleaner in an overhead press that reveals his bulging biceps [Figure 3.2]. Unlike the film *Mr. Mom*, however, the narratives of these series do not culminate in a logical return of the woman to the home. Instead, across multiple episodes and seasons, the gender role reversal is shown as complex, often with frustrating side effects, but is also shown to bring family harmony. Across the long 1980s, family harmony was at first achieved alongside the wife-mother but increasingly through her excision from the household. For Mary Desjardins, producers “persisted in creating sitcoms that banished mothers,” and some series even “featured men as both mothers and fathers.”<sup>7</sup> Lynne Joyrich similarly finds that 1980s sitcoms effected “an erasure of the women by defining the world as one big masculine home.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, by the 1987-88 season, not a single new domestic sitcom featured a traditional mother.



*Figure 3.2. The opening credits to Who's the Boss show Tony's masculine approach to cleaning.*

The argument I make in this chapter is two-fold. First, Mr. Mom sitcoms offered increasingly progressive depictions of masculinities that highlighted the tensions between “new man” ideology and Reaganesque machismo in response to the women’s movement. However, what was progress for masculinity – and what was often intended as a fantasy for heterosexual women viewers – resulted in regressive depictions of wives and mothers. Elsewhere on the primetime schedule, women thrived in all-female environments, but in domestic sitcoms women’s success outside the home came increasingly at the expense of her role within it. As women were liberated from the domestic sphere, men were liberated to claim it as their domain of expertise. In this way, Mr. Mom sitcoms reveal many of the feminist and anti-feminist anxieties about the American family during the long 1980s.

## Sitcoms and Evolving Images of Family

Since the beginning of television, the family has been redefined and reconfigured in various phases. While popular opinion may hold that television “back then” presented more agreeable families with simpler gender and social dynamics (for instance, in series like *Leave It to Beaver* [CBS, 1957–58; ABC, 1958–63]), television scholarship since the 1970s has continuously attested to the complex ways in which sitcoms have challenged gender and family construction since the dawn of primetime broadcasting. Mr. Mom sitcoms were therefore not a departure from the legacy of previous sitcoms but an important continuation of television’s longstanding tradition to highlight social conventions and challenge them. What distinguishes Mr. Mom sitcoms is that throughout the reconfigurations of the family in previous decades, the wife-mother remained its lynchpin, with few exceptions. By the end of the long 1980s, however, Mr. Mom sitcoms had positioned men at the center of the family circle.

In the 1950s, sitcoms like *I Remember Mama* (CBS, 1949-57) and *The Goldbergs* (CBS, 1949-51; NBC, 1952-56) presented urban working-class life among immigrants and ethnic minorities whose struggles to maintain their traditions was in tension with the desire and sometimes need to assimilate into American culture. In an extended reading of an episode of *Mama* in which the title character gets a new stove for her birthday, George Lipsitz observes how the explicit resolution, in which Mama turns down the new stove in favor of a cooker her husband will make for her, favors traditional values but is directly opposed to the entirety of the episode, which touts the “unquestioned value” of the stove.<sup>9</sup> Nostalgia for traditional immigrant life that is promoted through the episode’s resolution cannot compete with the implicit message that buying a household convenience product is “the true means of changing the unpleasant



realities or low status of women's work in the home."<sup>10</sup> Alongside this reification of consumption as an American value, though, 1950s sitcoms with immigrant and working-class families celebrated communal urban living at a time when American families were becoming increasingly isolated in their suburban, single-family dwellings. As a discursive genre, these sitcoms can be read as alleviating or fomenting concerns within 1950s America.

Television's suburban domestic sitcoms in the 1950s and 1960s have endured popular imagination as narratives of wholesomeness in which Father knew best, though more careful readings demonstrate more complex family dynamics and societies. Lynn Spigel notes that Donna Reed's character Donna Stone is remembered – and poked fun of – for being “television's ideal sacrificing mother.”<sup>11</sup> In a review of a 2006 art show reflecting nostalgically on mid-century suburbia, Benjamin Genocchio credits the “squeaky-clean optimism” of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (CBS, 1961-66) with defining American perceptions of suburban life.<sup>12</sup> That same series, however, offered two starkly contrasting images of life for women, as happily married housewife or as professionally successful but forever single career gal. Michael Ray Fitzgerald argues that Cold War suburban sitcoms insisted that a woman's place was in the home, and series featuring career woman “didn't so much glorify working women as mock them.”<sup>13</sup> Fitzgerald cites examples in which Laura Petrie (Mary Tyler Moore) of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* seems fed up with her role as housewife, even nostalgic for her earlier career as a performer, and credits the closed narrative resolution in which Laura happily returns to her domestic duties as evidence that 1960s television negated the aspirations of middle-class women.<sup>14</sup> Within the home, however, Laura is the commander, even of husband Rob (Dick Van Dyke), and Rob's colleague and friend Sally (Rose Marie), while desperate to land a man, is a talented, successful writer for television who clearly loves her job and the independence it grants

her. Sally may not have a man in her home life, but she has plenty in her work life, which is also where she is most validated.

Elsewhere on primetime in the 1960s, fantasy comedies with aliens, genies, witches, werewolves, and talking animals attracted viewership. Series like *Bewitched* (1964-72), *The Addams Family* (1964-66), and *I Dream of Jeannie* (NBC, 1965-70) managed to call into question the perfection of the suburban nuclear family while also imitating its patriarchal structure. This tension between the traditional past and the more liberal future would be built upon in subsequent decades. For instance, the series *Mr. Ed* (first-run syndication, 1961; CBS, 1961-66) features a talking horse whose intelligence assists his human male companion, Wilbur (Alan Young) with his daily challenges. Darrell Hamamoto reads the series as an allegory of racial equality wherein the neighbors' contempt and disbelief that Mr. Ed can talk serves as a replacement for intolerance toward "newly enfranchised minorities."<sup>15</sup> Although viewers know, as does Wilbur, that Mr. Ed is a "superior human consciousness trapped in an equine body," his physical appearance prevents him from ever achieving biological equality with humans. J. Fred MacDonald attributes these programs to networks' attempts to target a younger generation as "mass culture in the United States was being created by the desires and pocketbooks of youngsters" known as the Baby Boom generation.<sup>16</sup> That generation would grow up to watch the workplace comedies of the 1970s, in which their expressions of individuality were somewhat freed from the constraints of suburbia; they would also be the viewers and inspiration for Mr. Mom sitcoms in the 1980s.

Building on seeds 1960s series with unconventional characters challenging the family dynamic, a proliferation of workplace comedies like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-77) and *M\*A\*S\*H* (CBS, 1972-83) recreated families among colleagues. Ella Taylor attributes

the rise of family-workplace comedies to two factors. Narratively, “the workplace offers wider possibilities than the home for advancing plot and characters” by letting the audience inside fields of business they do not ordinarily get to see, unlike the familiar home, whose “broad counters are recognizable to everyone.”<sup>17</sup> In terms of audience and network changes, Taylor suggests that the trend for workplace comedies in the 1970s resulted from their potential appeal to “baby boomers preoccupied with occupational life, professional success, and ‘getting ahead’” as well as a growing audience of working women.<sup>18</sup> Todd Gitlin similarly sees 1970s workplace comedies as exemplary of a generational shift in American culture, but one he characterizes as a matter of how young people responded to authority. Where “television had usually said that when push came to shove Father rather than Mother, Son, or Daughter knew best,” the younger generation, questioning of authority, were the center of the workplace pseudo-families.<sup>19</sup> He describes Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore), the titular character on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, as the “heart of a workplace group” and the anti-war doctors on *M\*A\*S\*H* as “so lovable” that the “American right never saw much payoff in blasting [the series] for dangerous pacifist tendencies.”<sup>20</sup>

As Ella Taylor argues, within these series, the workplace serves as an “idealized construction of family, a workplace utopia whose most fulfilling attributes are vested not in work activity but in close emotional ties between coworkers.”<sup>21</sup> Horace Newcomb similarly claims that sitcom families can be defined as any group “united by ties of love, warmth, and mutual concern” regardless of marital or blood relations.<sup>22</sup> Through constant reiteration of the bond among co-workers, workplace comedies offered a “satisfying vision of family and community” that assuaged social anxieties about the decline of the post-World War II suburban nuclear family.<sup>23</sup> For Bonnie Dow, the mitigation of anxieties about changes to the family dynamic that

resulted from moving the family unit from home to work replicated, rather than questioned or challenged, traditional family politics and gender roles.<sup>24</sup>

Many 1980s series borrowed the 1970s trope of “friends as family” but specifically delved into women’s relationships and intimacy between women. In doing so, these series avoided the trap of replicating the wife-mother role for the working woman in her new environment. The domestic sitcom has always at heart invested itself in the exploration of gender roles, but 1980s women-oriented programs especially brought attention to feminism by acting out its many tensions and iterations on screen.<sup>25</sup> This emphasis on women characters and primetime programming for women stemmed from television executives becoming “increasingly sensitive to the need to appeal to working women as a key television audience.”<sup>26</sup> Although women had long been the target of much television advertising, since they were presumed to be the primary household consumers, in the 1980s the working woman in particular was valued for having a disposable income that made her the hot new market for advertisers.<sup>27</sup> As more women joined the corporate workforce and began to marry later in life, their disposable incomes became attractive for television advertisers; in turn, network executives created a battery of programming intended to appeal to this “quality audience.”

Examples of what Bonnie J. Dow calls “prime-time feminism,” sitcoms like *Kate and Allie* (1984–89), *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985–92), and *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986–93) offered fantasy worlds in which women’s relationships with men were secondary to their relationships with each other.<sup>28</sup> The two title characters of *Kate and Allie* were divorced women who created a new household with their three children, with one mother serving as the breadwinner and the other as the domestic homebody. Dow describes the series as a “positive alternative to the traditional nuclear family [that] has important feminist implications” in its

elimination of the husband-father from the family circle.<sup>29</sup> Robert H. Deming similarly notes that the series offered progressive images of women as it interrogated a new female subjectivity, but owing to television's structure, in which multiple ideological positionings are possible for audiences, Deming hesitates to call *Kate and Allie* a feminist text.<sup>30</sup> *The Golden Girls* promised divorced and widowed women that the second half of their lives would be filled with laughter and love from roommates-turned-friends-turned family. On *Designing Women*, a group of colleagues and friends ran a successful decorating business out of one woman's living room; they therefore turned "women's work" and women's friendships into a money-making enterprise.

Even dramas like *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1981-1988) foregrounded intimate relationships among central women characters. As Julie D'Acci chronicles in a comprehensive study of the series, its marketing, and its reception, the primacy of women's friendships was an active choice on the part of network executives and producers to appeal to a "quality women's audience."<sup>31</sup> However, D'Acci finds that this audience was not a ready-made demographic; "rather, they had to be continually fashioned, and in working to fashion them TV participated in the process of gender construction."<sup>32</sup> Similar to Lipsitz's observation that working-class sitcoms of the 1950s participated in the creation of the ideal consumer, D'Acci believes that 1980s women's programming constructed gender within not only the television characters themselves but also the audience through promotional materials, interviews, advertisements, and other extratextual materials.

The work of Dow and D'Acci, as well as others writing about women's programming and women as audiences in the 1980s, emphasizes the industry's investment in women, femininity, and feminism. While the "quality" audience of women with disposable incomes was

attractive to industry executives and advertisers, in fact *Cagney and Lacey* had relatively mediocre ratings because it was less successful with broader audiences (including men). Its ability to remain on the air was a result of its appeal to a “highly prized demographic” (working women from ages eighteen to fifty-four); high ratings among this group made up for lower ratings overall.<sup>33</sup>

Series that did not have the “quality” label but were popular on primetime are valuable to study, as they offer a different account of what television was invested in. A different television market in the 1980s, in which first-run syndication was beginning to achieve more attention, resulted in different kinds of series, with different families, finding their way to the television airwaves. Some half-hour sitcoms which were panned by critics attracted big enough audiences to demonstrate the viability of first-run syndication as a distribution model.<sup>34</sup> Popular series like *Mr. Mom* sitcoms can reveal ways in which television executives sought to attract audiences of women along with children and men while working to construct images of masculinity on screen.

The concept of the “alternative television family” in the long 1980s was not limited to ensemble casts of women, nor were “alternative family” sitcoms the exclusive provenance of feminism. African-American children adopted by wealthy white parents were at the center of *Diff'rent Strokes* (NBC, 1978-85; ABC, 1985-86) and *Webster* (ABC, 1983-87; first-run syndication, 1987-89). Other series further departed from the conventional nuclear family with the introduction of non-human characters. The title characters of *Mork and Mindy* (ABC, 1978-82) were extraterrestrial and human, respectively, and in later seasons they produced a hybrid offspring baby who resembled an older human man. The syndicated *Small Wonder* (1985-89) featured a robotic “daughter” to an otherwise ordinary suburban family. The more popular *ALF*

(NBC, 1986-90) similarly depicted a middle-class suburban family who took in an unusual additional member, in this case a furry “Alien Life Form” who liked to eat cats. Series like *Silver Spoons* (NBC, 1982-86; first-run syndication, 1986-87), *Rags to Riches* (NBC, 1987-88), and *Empty Nest* (NBC, 1988-95) featured single fathers while *Perfect Strangers* (ABC, 1986-93) featured a household forged of two culturally divergent cousins. By fall of 1987, audiences could see one of these “modern families” on television every night of the week [Figure 3.3].<sup>35</sup>

Day	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	Network
Sunday	Family Ties	My Two Dads	Movie			NBC
Monday	Frank's Place	Kate & Allie	Newhart	Designing Women	Cagney & Lacey	CBS
	ALF	(Valerie's Family)	Movie			NBC
Tuesday	Who's The Boss	Growing Pains	Moonlighting		thirtysomething	ABC
Wednesday	Perfect Strangers	Head of the Class	Hooperman	The Slap Maxwell Story	Dynasty	ABC
Thursday	The Cosby Show	A Different World	Cheers	Night Court	Hill Street Blues	NBC
Friday	Full House	I Married Dora	Max Headroom		20/20	ABC
	Rags to Riches		Miami Vice		Private Eye	NBC
Saturday	My Sister Sam	Everything's Relative	Leg Work		West 57th	CBS
	The Facts of Life	227	The Golden Girls	Amen	Hunter	NBC

Figure 3.3. The fall 1987 primetime schedule featured an alternative family sitcom at least once per evening. These sitcoms are highlighted in yellow.

As social and political discourses during Reagan’s administration urged a return to “bedrock values” of faith and family, domestic sitcoms challenged the composition of the

traditional nuclear family while still valorizing the family as the central unit in American society.<sup>36</sup> Mr. Mom sitcoms were the richest example of this. Similar to women-oriented series like *Kate and Allie* and *Designing Women*, Mr. Mom sitcoms addressed concerns about women in the workforce but did so by foregrounding men's, rather than women's experiences. The emphasis on Mr. Mom as the central character and the center of the family unit allowed television to explore anxieties and expectations for men and masculinity stemming from the women's movement. While the wife-mother works outside the home, Mr. Mom must engage in non-traditional gender role fulfillment that challenges his masculinity and, by extension, opens up possibilities for queer readings of him and his family. As I argue throughout this chapter, Mr. Mom sitcoms often reiterate the conservative value of family, even if the family itself is not traditional in its composition. Mr. Mom sitcoms highlight the potential feminization of men serving in a domestic capacity, and as the long 1980s progressed, the wife-mother decreased in importance in light of Mr. Mom's abilities until she was finally excised from the family. By the end of the long 1980s, Mr. Mom sitcoms were less concerned about the feminization of men and more invested in celebrating men's proficiencies across gender roles.

Studies of television in the long 1980s tend to gloss over the kinds of representations of men and masculinities that existed at the time. Amanda Lotz argues that "nearly all assessments of gender and television have examined the place and nature of women, femininity, and feminism on television while we have no typologies of archetypes or thematic analyses of stories about men or masculinities."<sup>37</sup> Lotz neglects to mention that there are studies into husband-fathers within domestic sitcoms, usually dividing them into one of two types: the infallible father who "knows best" or the bumbling yet loveable antihero. In a surveys of sitcoms from 1950-1990, Richard Butsch demonstrates that upwardly mobile fathers like Ward Cleaver of *Leave It*



to *Beaver* or Andy Taylor, the de facto patriarch of Mayberry on *The Andy Griffith Show* (CBS, 1960–68), tend to be voices of loving authority while blue-collar men like Ralph Kramden of *The Honeymooners* (CBS, 1955–56) or Stanley Roper of *Three's Company* and *The Ropers* (ABC, 1979–80) tend to fail at embodying masculine traits as successfulness, brawn, and wisdom.<sup>38</sup> Erica Scharrer similarly observes that fathers in lower socioeconomic classes tend to be the butt of jokes, though she argues that the bumbling, foolish father became pervasive in middle- and upper-class sitcom families by the 1990s.<sup>39</sup> Butsch and Scharrer offer a useful starting point for understanding masculinity within the domestic sitcom, though neither investigates the special complications to gender roles that arose in the long 1980s.

Male sitcom characters who performed domestic labor, fulfilling what was traditionally the role of the wife-mother, have received little attention in media studies, yet Mr. Moms are an important exception to the traditionally dichotomous understanding of sitcom husband-fathers. Mr. Moms served as important corollaries to working women characters, by taking up the role left unfulfilled by the women in the family, and as fictional corollaries to real-life working women who watched these programs. As examples of loving fathers, husbands, and childcare providers, Mr. Moms also demonstrate television's construction of masculinity, since there were proportionately more Mr. Moms on television than in American society. The television ideal of Mr. Mom was one solution to the problem generated by the women's movement.

The participant fathers, domestic dads, lead dads, and helper dads in sitcoms like *Family Ties*, *Who's the Boss*, and *Full House* were descendants of the 1970s new man, who was "conceived as a 'nurturing' figure seemingly in tune with the demands of feminism and women in general."<sup>40</sup> The narratives of Mr. Mom sitcoms are generally sympathetic to this new man ideology. Almost never is the audience asked to laugh at Mr. Mom for being engaged in matters

of the home, and rarely does he express frustration that the wife-mother is unable to fulfill the domestic role. As I discussed in the last chapter, popular primetime serial dramas in the 1980s often featured Reaganesque heroes, giants of capitalism who were ruthless and heartless – even as the serial narrative allowed for emotional conflicts to unfold week after week. By contrast, Mr. Mom sitcoms, even those with an episodic narrative that did not allow for extended emotional development, favored emotionally expressive, sensitive men.

### Participant Fathers: At the Center of the Family Circle

In the earliest trend in Mr. Mom sitcoms, the husband-father had to partake in household responsibilities alongside the working wife-mother. These fathers engage in what historian Anthony Rotundo terms “participant fatherhood,” an active form of parenting that became idealized in the late 1970s and more practiced in the 1980s.<sup>41</sup> As such, participant father sitcoms began relatively early in the 1980s, but they did continue throughout the decade. The participant father was usually a man in a two-career household where the wife had limited time for child care because of her outside employment. On *The Cosby Show*, Cliff Huxtable (Bill Cosby) is an obstetrician, and his wife Clair (Phylicia Rashad) is an attorney. Despite how time-consuming these two professions can often be, Ella Taylor observes that Cliff and Clair “have all the leisure time in the world to spend ‘quality time’ with their offspring.”<sup>42</sup> Andrea Press and Terry Stratham similarly see Cliff as an “idealized family man” who remains “intimately involved in his family’s home life.”<sup>43</sup> Jason Seaver (Alan Thicke) of *Growing Pains* is responsible for the children after his wife Maggie (Joanna Kerns) returns to work in fulfillment of a previous

arrangement the two had made to take turns as the primary parent. Jason serves out his turn by running his psychiatric practice from a home office, so that he is always around for the children.

Steven Keaton (Michael Gross) of *Family Ties* is the paradigmatic participant father among early 1980s sitcoms. Debuting in 1982, *Family Ties* was pitched as a series about the generation gap between liberal Baby Boomer ex-hippies and their more conservative children. It was initially given the timeslot following *The Facts of Life* (NBC, 1979–88), one of NBC’s highest rated programs and a series about another alternative family, a group of young women and their housemother at a fictional boarding school.<sup>44</sup> In the initial premise for *Family Ties*, Steven and his wife Elyse (Meredith Baxter Birney) were the central focus of a series rife with nostalgia for their hippie roots. Indeed, the original opening credits featured images of Steven and Elyse as barefoot flower children, and in the pilot they force their three children to watch a slide show chronicling their participation in the 1963 March on Washington. This culturally liberal past positions Steven as a likely participant father. Kenneth MacKinnon defines the “new man” emerging from the 1970s as a “middle-class professional, white, heterosexual, aged usually between mid-twenties and early forties, with a female partner – not necessarily a wife – who has imbibed feminist ideas” and cultivates “non-oppressive relationships with women, children, and other men.”<sup>45</sup> Steven has already demonstrated sympathy for the civil rights movement and so is more likely to be sympathetic to his wife’s self-actualization outside the home and to care for his children as a nurturer, rather than an aloof breadwinner.<sup>46</sup>

If Steven is a paradigmatic participant father, then his oldest son, Alex P. Keaton (Michael J. Fox), is a paradigmatic Reaganite. Although conceived as a series about how cool Steven and Elyse were compared to their more conservative children, *Family Ties* shifted to perceive their worldview as outdated. As the character Alex grew more popular among fans,

executive producer Gary David Goldberg, who had loosely conceived Steven in his image, began to tell more stories from Alex's perspective. According to Michael Saenz, the show's "largely liberal writers usually depicted Alex's ideology ironically," leaving the audience to laugh at Alex, but this laughter was sympathetic; Alex emerged as a "model of the clean-cut, determined yet human entrepreneur."<sup>47</sup> The series' ideological shift from liberal to conservative meant Steven – and by some extension, the 1970s new man – became a nostalgic figure, but one whose value *Family Ties* repeatedly attested to.<sup>48</sup>

The narrative of the pilot centers on Steven's participatory parenting style. Teenage son Alex (Michael J. Fox) goes on a date with an affluent socialite to her family's country club, which excludes minorities.<sup>49</sup> When Steven learns of this, he feels compelled to stop Alex from participating in a discriminatory system and compromising his values. Steven bursts into the club in a casual baseball jacket, embarrassing Alex. Steven explains that his father was not very involved in his life and was emotionally distant, which Steven translated to a lack of care. He struggles to reconcile participant fatherhood with Alex's need for increased freedom to make his own choices. The episode concludes with father and son on the sofa, side by side, Alex in a suit and tie, Stephen in a baseball jacket, so that it is no longer clear who is the adult and who is the child [Figure 3.4]. As they embrace, their generational and political differences temporarily subside, thanks to their deep familial bond. The audience is positioned through this resolution to empathize with Steven, who only wants, after all, to be a good father.



*Figure 3.4. Father and son reconcile their differences as equals in Family Ties.*

This resolution exemplifies an important development in the portrayal of fatherhood within sitcoms from “father knows best” to “father is trying his best.” In embarrassing Alex, Steven demonstrates that participant fathers may have the attention and energy for the job, but perhaps not always the right methods or answers. Similarly, the *New York Times* remembers Jason Seaver of *Growing Pains* as a character who “helped liberate TV dads from the prison of always being right and always being serious.”<sup>50</sup> Because participant fathers weren’t omniscient authoritarians, they also didn’t always have their children’s respect. Importantly, though, they didn’t demand it unflinchingly.

The fallibility – or simply the humanity – of participant fathers contrasted with Reagan-era discourses of supreme leadership through strength. In the case of *Family Ties*, the absence of a father who projected total confidence left a void to be filled by son Alex. Over its seven seasons, *Family Ties* increasingly focused on Alex, which Jane Feuer says makes the series one

of the “crucial Reaganite sitcoms.”<sup>51</sup> Although NBC president Brandon Tartikoff claims the network originally opposed casting Michael J. Fox because he did not have “the kind of face you’ll ever see on a lunch box,” Fox was nominated for an Emmy each year between 1985 and 1989 with three wins.<sup>52</sup> His portrayal of Alex was so successful that the character’s name is still invoked in Republican discourse.<sup>53</sup> Greater emphasis on Alex meant less screen time for and less ideological positioning of Steven’s more optimistic, sensitive worldview, yet often the series encourages the audience to shake their heads at Alex’s compulsion to achieve success and wealth. Additionally, though Alex may embody political and economic values contemporary to the 1980s, he is often a mouthpiece for outdated social values, unlike Steven. Alice Leppert describes Alex as an “Archie Bunker” type of character, a regressive contrarian whose politics are cut down by his parents.<sup>54</sup> Thus, if *Family Ties* is a “crucial Reaganite sitcom,” it is not because of its pure celebration of Reagan-era values but because of its repeated unveiling of the contradictions that existed between political conservatism and social progress in American society at the time.

In spite of the shift in perspective from Steven to Alex, *Family Ties* never abandoned its core message, that political and generational differences could be overcome through familial love. Any possibility for “energizing friction” between liberal and neoconservative attitudes is smoothed over by “the cozy warmth of domestic affection.”<sup>55</sup> Steven’s demonstrations of love, especially his participation in his children’s lives, are made possible by his class status. In fact, all the participant fathers in Mr. Mom sitcoms benefit from middle- and upper-class lifestyles that afford them time to be engaged with their families. Steven works as the manager of a local public television station, a job which reiterates his liberal values and middle-class existence, given public television’s typically affluent audience.<sup>56</sup> His wife Elyse is an architect and serves

as the primary breadwinner in the family. Episodes often contrast her hectic work schedule with Steven's commitment to carpools and homework. When Meredith Baxter Birney missed several episodes of the third season due to giving birth, Michael Gross' role increased, so that Steven appeared not only a participant father but the primary parent.

Other participant fathers in Mr. Mom sitcoms are busier, more financially successful men, but their white-collar jobs grant them the ability to decide when to dedicate time to their families. Jason Seaver of *Growing Pains* and Cliff Huxtable of *The Cosby Show* both own their own medical practices and can mostly set their own schedules, leading David Marc and Robert J. Thompson to describe both series as "neo-whitebread chic."<sup>57</sup> In Cliff's case, the untimely delivery of a newborn is an occasional plot twist that creates tension between Cliff's desire to be with his family and his commitment to his patients. By and large, though, the nature of their professional jobs and their wives' incomes grant these men time to be engaged in family matters.

Because of this affluence, participant fathers on Mr. Mom sitcoms were able to achieve an ideal desired by many. In a 1977 survey, nearly fifty percent of women disagreed that the male breadwinner was a good idea.<sup>58</sup> A 1979 survey by the men's magazine *Esquire* found that a "resounding majority of childless young men want to have children, and most of those who have children want more."<sup>59</sup> But having children was not the end-goal; men wanted to be involved in the daily affairs of the home. A survey from *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1983 found that forty-two percent of husbands were more active in household chores than they had been in the five years prior.<sup>60</sup>

For many men, however, being an active father and husband was complicated by economic realities. According to a survey of dual-income couples by the magazine *Fortune* in 1990, one of the primary promises of women's liberation – namely, that it would relieve men of

the burden of breadwinning – did not pan out in the 1980s. Instead, many men in white-collar jobs felt greater pressure to earn more than their newly successful wives. While women’s liberation offered women greater choices, the stereotype of “man-as-breadwinner” remained.<sup>61</sup> This is despite the fact that men’s wages decreased throughout the 1980s, necessitating women’s earnings to maintain a steady household income.<sup>62</sup> As one psychotherapist in the 1980s explained, men’s desire to respect their working wives was at odds with their deepest desires: “Underneath, what men want is to come home and have everyone greet the returning hero... There’s an increasing struggle for who is the hero” in a two-income household.<sup>63</sup> Among the couples surveyed by *Fortune*, marital harmony was primarily achieved by avoiding discussions of work and income at home.

Although some American fathers may have aspired to be as engaged in their children’s lives as Steven Keaton, Jason Seaver, and Cliff Huxtable, many workplaces did not offer the flexibility and support that would enable them to do so. Given the lack of support structures for men at work and the challenges of flat wages, historian Anthony Rotundo wrote in the 1980s that “there are more *women who advocate* participant fatherhood than there are *men who practice* it.”<sup>64</sup> Men in corporate America were “routinely not offered options when it comes to negotiating issues of work-family balance,” such as paternity leave or flex-time.<sup>65</sup> Additional need for men’s participation in home life as a result of women working outside the home meant that men were torn between work and family. Thus, while increased household income and personal satisfaction were incentives for women to enter the workforce, men had little incentive to leave wage-paying jobs in order to take up the unpaid task of child care.<sup>66</sup>

Although the 1980 U.S. census removed the term “head of household” in its questions to recognize greater shared responsibilities between men and women, men still felt social pressure



to fulfill this role.<sup>67</sup> By 1989, national opinion polls indicated that many men felt the women's movement had made life more difficult for them at home, as a result of their increased responsibilities (without decreased responsibilities at work).<sup>68</sup> Social commentary tried to reconcile this sense of men's growing discontent with women's economic self-sufficiency, though there is no simple, singular explanation for these changing social realities. In *The Hearts of Men*, published in 1983, Barbara Ehrenreich claimed men's complaints about the "breadwinner trap" preceded the women's movement, which she argued stemmed from the unpredictability of life dependent on a husband or father who was weary with his responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Social psychologist Carol Tavris called the book a "pleasure to read" despite analysis that "falters in its conclusions" because the relationship between men's and women's roles is too entangled for a simple cause-effect claim.<sup>70</sup> Susan Faludi's 1991 *Backlash* tied men's discontent and alleged problems resulting from the women's movement that shaped the 1980s to a calculated media backlash against feminism.<sup>71</sup> Some of the criticisms leveled by other feminists took umbrage with Faludi for oversimplifying issues of race and class. Peggy Phelan accused the book of being "drunk on its own feeling of superiority" and "terribly disappointing."<sup>72</sup> The controversies and criticisms faced by Ehrenreich and Faludi speak to the difficulties in established causality for inherent contradictions within an evolving social landscape. Many men wanted to support their wives, even as they resented women's engagements outside the home. Many wanted to be good fathers, yet they were driven to succeed at endeavors that took them away from their children.

Television was, in many ways, neatly equipped to grapple with these contradictory aims through week by week stories about participant fathers and their partners. As domestic sitcoms, the focus of Mr. Mom series was the home, which often foregrounded men's participation there

to the detriment of depicting women's virtuosity in both spheres, work and home. David Marc and Robert Thompson describe *The Cosby Show* as a "post-Watergate *Father Knows Best* family" in which "Dad and Mom have a bottomless pit of quality time for the children."<sup>73</sup> Although Elyse Keaton, Maggie Seaver, and Clair Huxtable were working professionals, Bonnie Dow argues that "viewers see only the mother's home life" to the detriment of representations of working women on primetime.<sup>74</sup> Susan Faludi similarly finds that the attention paid to women's jobs was negligent. "The wife in 'Family Ties' has a 'career,'" she writes, "but regular viewers would be hard pressed to name it."<sup>75</sup> By referring to Elyse as "the wife" without a name, Faludi duplicates the antifeminist agenda within the television industry that she is critiquing. Of *The Cosby Show*, she writes that Clair Huxtable "may be the first attorney to hold down a full-time job without leaving home; when she does ply her trade, it's only to litigate domestic disputes in the family living room."<sup>76</sup>

In fact, women's experiences at work do encompass the narrative for certain episodes. Moreover, the readiness with which their husbands take up family duties while the women are working is a sign that these participant fathers support the women's movement. For instance, in the first season of *The Cosby Show*, the plots of at least three of twenty-four episodes hinged upon Cliff managing the house and children while Clair has to work.<sup>77</sup> Instead of reading participant father series as a backlash against working women, I argue that their largely unexamined significance lies less in their representation of working mothers than in their depictions of greater flexibility for fathers' roles.

Participant fathers in Mr. Mom sitcoms tend to be fantasies of progressive egalitarianism, like Steven Keaton, or they try, comically, to participate. When Cliff Huxtable takes care of the children, the scene is usually played for laughs. Brandon Tartikoff celebrated Bill Cosby's

portrayal of Cliff as a return of strong masculinity to sitcoms, a testament to Cliff's authoritarian-style leadership that neglects his comedic failings, as well as his repeated submissions to wife Clair.<sup>78</sup> Ella Taylor likewise finds Cliff to be an authoritative variant of the 1980s sitcom dad "whose prodigious charm overlays a subtle menace: Father knows best, or else."<sup>79</sup> Outside the series' narrative, Bill Cosby touted the respect the child characters had for Cliff as one of the show's strengths. To be sure, Cliff attempts to wield more authority than *Family Ties*' Steven or *Growing Pains*' Jason, but his attempts are usually positioned as moments of comedy. In a 1985 episode of *The Cosby Show*, "Slumber Party," Cliff is in charge of a living room full of eight screaming children.<sup>80</sup> He corrals them by making them stand in line and answer questions.<sup>81</sup> His militaristic approach to child care in this scene reveals his lack of confidence and naturalness at serving as the primary parent, yet the children are soon having fun. In "Planning Parenthood," he takes daughter Rudi (Keisha Knight Pulliam) and her friends to dinner at a fancy restaurant.<sup>82</sup> He attempts to teach them manners and order around their dietary restrictions, all of which is played for laughs as the refined doctor wrangles the uncivilized children. Again, the point is that Cliff's effort, and the success of the outing is in the children's final enjoyment. Alongside Clair or in her absence, Cliff doles out advice, attends his children's sporting events, and baby-sits his grandchildren. Any comedic failings or stern exhibitions of masculinity are tempered and overcome by his sincere intentions and good humor.

Over the course of these series, participation changes as the family evolves. As Cliff's children grow, his role becomes more mentor than baby-sitter and playmate. By contrast, the Keatons and Seavers have late-in-life fourth babies – a plot development often used to "liven up an aging cast."<sup>83</sup> The Seavers hire a nanny for their new baby, a move which allowed the series to introduce a new character and new storylines but which negated the series' initial premise of

Jason serving as the primary parent. Although he is not responsible for tending to the baby all day, Jason, like Cliff, remains deeply involved in the lives of his three older children (whose problems, after all, are more compelling for the sake of television than a napping infant). Both series expedited the growth of the new babies into adorable toddlers, a move that allowed for stories of Steven and Jason flexing their participation muscles once their other children had grown. In the case of *Family Ties*, the additional child also fell under Alex's care, which enabled the ordinarily self-involved Alex to evolve closer to his father in his familial commitment – a new generation of participation.

Participant fathers on Mr. Mom sitcoms who encouraged their wives to be successful outside the home were television's response to changes within the American middle-class family. Their efforts at participating were not always easy and did not always result in success, and participant fatherhood on television remained as it did in middle-class America – more of an ideal than a reality. The examples described here are nevertheless an important marker of a shift in sitcoms wherein middle- and upper-class television dads became more engaged in household affairs as men and women off-screen grappled with the social and familial changes resulting from the women's movement.

#### Domestic Dads: Masculinizing Domestic Labor or Feminizing Men?

Further examining the implications of the women's movement on the American family, a second trend in Mr. Mom sitcoms emerged in the mid-1980s and positioned men as principally responsible for child care and household management. Rather than sharing responsibilities as the participant fathers did, these “domestic dads” assumed the position of the traditional (female)

homemaker. Beginning with the 1984-985 season, television executives made a conscious choice to depict more women in prominent roles in the workplace, building on the ratings successes of *Kate and Allie* and *Cagney and Lacey* with women ages twenty-five to fifty-four at the end of the 1983-84 season.<sup>84</sup> CBS' senior vice president Harvey Shepard described this trend as a deliberate attempt to reflect sociological changes.<sup>85</sup> The corollary to these prominent career women were domestic dads in series like *Charles in Charge*, *Who's the Boss*, and *Mr. Belvedere*. These series depicted a more extreme consequence the women's movement might have on masculinity: that men would take up the female role within the family.

The premises of these three series in particular are quite similar. Charles, Mr. Belvedere, and Tony of *Who's the Boss* are live-in domestic workers, hired by the family because of commitments the wife-mothers have made outside the home. In the case of Charles and Mr. Belvedere, having a male housekeeper/nanny affords the two working parents equal chances at professional success. Charles, a college student, benefits from free rent in exchange for caring for three children. Mr. Belvedere, a British immigrant, needs a place to live and a job to secure his visa. Both men serve as nurturing mothers and disciplinarian fathers to the children of the family far more often than the children's actual parents. Because of his young age, Charles is also a surrogate son to the family; Mr. Belvedere, by contrast, is as likely to mentor the parents as he is the children. Tony is a single father hired as the housekeeper for single mother Angela (Judith Light), and over the course of the series, they forge a new blended family together with their children.

The idea of a man responsible for the children and the home was not new to the 1980s. Prior to this period, however, men who performed domestic labor on television tended to be butlers, used to demonstrate the family's affluence and class privilege or to provide humor as

“fish out of water” characters performing women’s work. The British butler Alfred (Alan Napier) of *Batman* (ABC, 1966-68), for example, reinforces Bruce Wayne’s/Batman’s old money wealth while Aunt Harriet (Madge Blake) handles the more traditionally feminine tasks within the household, such as organizing dinner parties. On *My Three Sons* (ABC, 1960-65; CBS, 1965-72), widowed father Steven (Fred MacMurray) first relies upon his deceased wife’s father and later an uncle to take care of domestic duties. Uncle Charlie (William Demarest) is often seen wearing an apron while he cooks and does the dishes, and this visual is supposed to clash humorously with his gruff demeanor.<sup>86</sup> On *Family Affair* (CBS, 1966-71), Mr. French (Sebastian Cabot) is a personal valet, thrust into the role of nanny to the two small children who come to live with his employer. A well-mannered gentleman, Mr. French is often caught off guard by the chaos and exuberance the children bring to the household.

In the cases of *Family Affair* and *My Three Sons*, the death of a woman in the family necessitates a man’s fulfillment of the domestic role. Both series eventually added adult women characters to the narrative to restore the family to traditional gender roles. Steven of *My Three Sons* remarries, and his new wife shares household duties with Uncle Charlie. Horace Newcomb reads Mr. French in *Family Affair* as fulfilling the surrogate mother role while Uncle Bill plays the authority-father, but in the final season Mr. French’s duties are shared with a female housekeeper, thus restoring gender harmony.<sup>87</sup> These series demonstrate the necessity of *someone* managing the household, and in the absence of a wife-mother, a man may do it – but this arrangement is a comically unconventional and often impermanent one. Although these earlier sitcom examples offered images of men cooking and cleaning, narratives and themes subtly reinforced traditional gender roles.

The male domestic worker was present throughout the long 1980s, beginning with the character Benson (Robert Guillaume) from the satirical sitcom *Soap* (ABC, 1977-81) and its spinoff *Benson* (ABC, 1979-86). As a reluctant African-American butler to the Tate family on *Soap*, Benson might be read as a perpetuation of the stereotype of the shiftless slave. When patriarch Chester asks for minute eggs for breakfast, Benson serves him a nearly raw egg that has only been cooked for one minute. When the doorbell rings, Benson asks if anyone is going to answer it. However, Benson genuinely cares for at least some members of the family. The Tates' grown daughter Corinne (Diana Canova) even calls Benson her best friend. Additionally, he is continually shown as more clever and rational than the Tates, in the vein of other domestic workers of color like the eponymous *Beulah* (ABC, 1950-52).

During *Soap*'s third season, the Benson character was given a spinoff. Capitalizing on the comedy produced from Benson being more intelligent than his employers and more efficient in spite of appearances, the premise of *Benson* was that the character had become head of household affairs at the governor's mansion; by the series' conclusion, he also served in the state government.<sup>88</sup> Over the course of the series, Benson "quickly established himself as a kind of power behind the throne" who went on to rule.<sup>89</sup> Despite Benson's rise to power, many television scholars find *Soap* and *Benson* to reiterate negative racial stereotypes. Lahn S. Kim acknowledges that the "storylines and the character poke fun at the incompetence of those in positions of wealth and power" but argues that "the portrayal of an African American man as a butler remains a strong stereotype that serves to uphold racial power relations."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Herman Gray finds that series like *Benson* and *Soap* make racial difference and race relations explicit but do so from a subject position of whiteness that renders any social conflict "benign and contained."<sup>91</sup>

While Benson has been studied in terms of race, his masculinity is often neglected, as if the character's blackness is his singular characteristic. Benson's move from domestic servant to a particular family to head of household for the governor exemplifies the masculinization of domestic labor in sitcoms of the long 1980s. While not a domestic dad, in that child care was rarely, if ever, part of Benson's duties on either series, Benson is a key television example of how domestic duties began to fall under the purview of masculine responsibilities. Correspondingly, the ease with which Benson transitions from managing a household to managing affairs of the state vindicates his labor.<sup>92</sup>

The domestic dad version of Mr. Mom sitcoms shed light on these changes to gender roles and family dynamics. In particular, domestic dads on television served as extended studies into the persisting social question of whether men's participation in household labor masculinized domesticity or domesticated their masculinity.<sup>93</sup> As Ralph LaRossa and Margaret Marsh have shown, domesticity was not always considered contradictory to masculinity.<sup>94</sup> With the rise of the market economy in the nineteenth century, a gendered division of labor emerged in American society, and, according to John Gillis, having "too intimate a relationship with one's children had become unmanly, likely to call into question not only a fellow's masculinity but also his maturity."<sup>95</sup> By tending to the affairs of the home, domestic dads are outside the usual boundaries of adult hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, domestic dads function as household managers, rather than subservient employees. They perform their masculinities in their leadership of the household, in securing the children's obedience and in their expertise at chores like cooking and removing laundry stains. The work of domestic dads is depicted as a combination of managerial leadership and technical proficiencies. Assessing gender roles in advanced capitalist societies, R.W. Connell observes how "forms of masculinity organized



around direct domination (e.g. corporate management, military command)” have been challenged by and currently coexist alongside “forms organized around technical knowledge (e.g. professions, science).”<sup>96</sup> In the case of domestic dads on television, these expressions of masculinity coincide with unwavering nurturing and love. Existing between gender polarities, domestic dads masculinize domestic labor as much as they are feminized by the performance of it.

Their masculine approach to domestic duties leads Alice Leppert to note that the title of the series *Who's the Boss* suggests “Tony Micelli’s role as employee of Angela Bower does not mean that he is not ‘the boss’ of the household.”<sup>97</sup> She similarly contends that the title *Charles in Charge* refers to Charles’ role as the Pembroke children’s nanny but also to his responsibility for overseeing and ensuring domestic bliss for Mr. and Mrs. Pembroke as well.<sup>98</sup> In the 1984 episode “War,” Charles is asked to show the ropes to Megan (Meg Ryan), who has been hired by the neighbors as their own live-in nanny.<sup>99</sup> Her laid-back attitude toward child care clashes with Charles’ more involved style. Because he is attracted to her and wants to get along, Charles defers to her belief that children should solve their own problems until the children are engaged in an all-out battle that turns the house into a mess. At this point, Charles reasserts his managerial authority and restores order, impressively solving one problem after another. The episode’s conclusion has Megan and the Pembrokes admitting that Charles’ hands-on style of authority is the most effective way to ensure domestic tranquility. Neither father nor mother knows best here; it is Charles who does.

In a departure from sitcoms in previous decades with men in the domestic role, it is not the absence or death of women in the family that leads to the employment of these domestic dads. The need for domestic help arises from the strain of a wife-mother trying to “have it all.”

Since a certain amount of affluence is necessary to hire these domestic workers, domestic dad characters solve the middle- and upper-class problem of who will tend to the children when both parents work outside the home. In the 1980s, day care centers, professional baby-sitters, and “latch-key children” (children who came home from school to an empty house) all increased, often with concerns over children’s well-being.<sup>100</sup> Popular media gave alarming accounts of day care being hazardous to children’s psychological and emotional development and placing them in jeopardy of being physically or sexually abused.<sup>101</sup> Reagan’s administration played into these fears and further accused working women of abandoning their children. One military official declared that mothers who sent their children to day care were “weakening the moral fiber of the Nation.”<sup>102</sup> Later research indicated that many of these claims were exaggerated, if not fabricated, and that children who attended day care tended to be better socialized, less at risk for domestic violence, and more socially progressive.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, television’s domestic dads were an attractive fictional alternative who could be trusted to care for children in their own homes with the same devotion as their parents.

Concerns about the potential risks posed to children by their absent, working mothers were expressed in domestic dad sitcoms and nearly always allayed through the domestic dad’s deep love for the family, of which he is a member. In a Christmas episode of the first season of *Charles in Charge*, the Pembroke family’s grandmother visits and intends to stay in Charles’ bedroom while he visits his family for the holiday.<sup>104</sup> When a winter storm prevents his travels, Charles is initially dejected at the thought of having nowhere to go and no loved ones to spend Christmas with – until Mrs. Pembroke (Julie Cobb) invites him to stay with them. The grandmother, played with acerbic comedy by Rue McClanahan, is openly hostile toward Charles for his role in the family.<sup>105</sup> She asks her son how he can be married to a woman who neglects

her own children and leaves them in the care of a stranger. The Pembrokes insist that Charles is a member of the family, an assertion that resolves both conflicts. In spending Christmas with the Pembrokes, Charles *is* spending Christmas with his loved ones. His role as child care provider is not a negative reflection on Mrs. Pembroke but a positive addition to the family dynamic.

However, Rue McClanahan's outside voice of criticism calls attention to common interpretations of the women's movement as selfish. Mrs. Pembroke jogs in the morning while Charles makes her children breakfast and attends social functions in the evenings while Charles helps the children with their homework. Because the series' premise positions the viewer on the side of Charles, we are rarely asked to question or criticize these choices on the part of Mrs. Pembroke – or, for the sake of equality, on the part of Mr. Pembroke. Instead, the series repeatedly reminds viewers Charles is a beloved addition to the family and, because of his young age, better equipped to respond to the children's personal problems.

After flagging ratings forced NBC to cancel the series, *Charles in Charge* resumed in first-run syndication with a revamped cast. The Pembrokes were gone, though Charles and the house remained. A new family moved into the house, this time a single mother and elderly grandfather, along with three children. These changes to the series resolved many of the problems within the NBC run, since a single mother “deserves” help around the house more than a married working mother. In a gimmick to reiterate the familial bond across television intertextuality, Ellen Travolta, who had previously played the mother of Scott Baio's character Chachi on the popular sitcom *Happy Days* (ABC, 1974-84), was added to the cast as Charles' mother.

While *Charles in Charge* began with Charles already tending to the needs of the family, the pilots to *Mr. Belvedere* and *Who's the Boss* depict the moment at which the male domestic

worker is hired to the relief of a family in crisis. On *Mr. Belvedere*, the Owens family is in turmoil as mom Marsha (Ilene Graff) begins law school. Daughter Heather (Tracy Wells) must interrupt her teenage gossip sessions on the phone to make dinner for the family, and son Kevin (Rob Stone) is told to get his driver's license so he can take his younger siblings to school and sports practices. Both teens find this unfair, but their unhappiness is not intended to make us angry at mom Marsha for her selfish desire to have a career outside the home. The obvious solution is to hire a full-time, live-in domestic. While Marsha and her husband George (Bob Uecker) work, Mr. Belvedere cooks, cleans, and offers friendship and counsel to the children. Hiring Mr. Belvedere brings about domestic harmony. Alice Leppert sees this in the opening credits to *Mr. Belvedere*, which visualize the character's role as the glue that holds the family together. While the Owens family sits on the sofa, Mr. Belvedere stands behind them, his arms outstretched, bringing them together "at a time when many socioeconomic factors were pulling the nuclear family apart" [Figure 3.5].<sup>106</sup>



*Figure 3.5. As seen in the opening credits, Mr. Belvedere may stand behind the Owens family, but he is the glue that holds them together.*

In the pilot to *Who's the Boss*, easygoing, loving father Tony from Brooklyn arrives on the suburban Connecticut doorstep of Angela, a single mother.<sup>107</sup> Tony, whose dream of playing professional baseball was thwarted by injury and his wife's death, announces he has arrived to begin work as the housekeeper. Angela is a woman in a man's world: she is vice-president at a large New York advertising firm, and she describes her skills by saying, "What I lack in the kitchen I make up for in the board room." Nevertheless, Angela is initially hesitant to accept a man in the woman's world of housekeeping. Tony has left his home in Brooklyn after his daughter Samantha (Alyssa Milano) has gotten into fights with other children in the neighborhood. He recognizes that life in Connecticut, even with him working as a second-class domestic, will be better for her. Angela's mother Mona (Katherine Helmond) has hired Tony, and she accuses Angela of being sexist for not recognizing Tony's capacity to perform domestic labor. She persuades Angela of his fit for the job by listing his many redeeming qualities, including involvement in his church and his commitment to single fatherhood. More importantly, Tony can serve as a role model for Angela's son.

Once Angela accepts Tony in the role of housekeeper, Tony and Samantha become part of the family. Samantha and Jonathan, Angela's son (Danny Pintauro), develop a sibling-like relationship in which they squabble and Jonathan looks up to Samantha. Although in the first few episodes Samantha struggles to fit into the refined culture of suburban Connecticut, she is included in family plans. Mona, for instance, takes her and Jonathan out to dinner, on camping trips, and to the mall. Angela treats the growing Samantha to shopping trips in New York to update her wardrobe. In the final season of the series, Tony and Angela become romantically involved, and the surrogate step-family becomes a legitimate one.

The theme of many episodes of *Who's the Boss* is the difficulty Tony and Angela have in their respective jobs because of their genders. In the pilot, Angela is promoted to president of the advertising firm, but later her promotion is at risk when she is accused of receiving it because she was sexually involved with the CEO who appointed her. Tony initially feels like an outcast because he is the only male domestic worker in the neighborhood. Eventually, like Michael Keaton's Jack in the film *Mr. Mom*, Tony befriends the neighborhood housewives and maids, who find his physique and personality appealing.

Because Angela is a single mother, Tony's role in the home is man of the house in addition to employee. But the series often reiterates that Tony replaces Angela as an at-home mother more than he replaces an absent husband-father. When Angela's estranged husband Michael (James Naughton) briefly returns home, he becomes jealous of Tony's close relationship with Angela and Jonathan.<sup>108</sup> He asks Tony to leave, since Tony's position in the home is unnecessary and inappropriate if a husband-father is present. Tony finds employment in a wealthier household where he serves as a supervisor to the rest of the domestic staff – a job that is more masculine than his “hands on” role dusting and cooking for Angela. The rekindled nuclear family arrangement proves temporary, and Angela and Michael decide to divorce for good. Michael, who likes to travel to exotic locations for research, embodies the Darwinian male sex role of wanderer – but son Jonathan needs and deserves stability, and Angela does not want to forfeit her own career. With Michael gone, Tony, who is skilled at nesting and nurturing, returns to the house. Instead of replacing Michael, as Michael feared, Tony brings about domestic harmony by replacing those motherly duties Angela is unable or unwilling to perform herself. The two-part episode must conclude with Michael's departure to restore the narrative to its original premise, yet this conclusion has interesting repercussions for family order. First, in

choosing Tony over Michael, Angela attests that what working women want is not a masculine husband but a wife. Furthermore, a traditional nuclear family has lost its value to the obvious, better family unit. The gender-swapped surrogate family Tony and Angela have forged is better and happier than a family in which mother and father's marriage is rocky and father is seldom involved in his son's life.

Although these domestic dads can be hired because of the family's disposable income, socioeconomic class continues to be a source of tension between the domestic dad and the family. In the case of *Who's the Boss*, Tony and Samantha's working class roots in a rough Brooklyn neighborhood are at odds with their new affluent Connecticut suburb. Their Italian heritage is played for its ethnicity in contrast to the vanilla, WASPish identities of their new neighbors. Shortly into the first season, Samantha feels like an outcast at her new school and runs away to Brooklyn.<sup>109</sup> Angela accompanies Tony to find her and is as out of place in Brooklyn as Tony and Samantha are in Connecticut. By the episode's conclusion, she is shouting and getting into a physical altercation at a bar, signs that she has adapted to the rougher environment. Over the course of *Who's the Boss*, Samantha adapts to Connecticut as she comes to favor shopping over sports and loses her tomboy physique. This character growth is class evolution, but, along with Tony's switch from aspiring athlete to housekeeper, it situates Connecticut and Brooklyn as spaces divided by gender and social class.

This relationship between gender and class also colors *Charles in Charge* and *Mr. Belvedere*. Since Charles is a poor college student, he is not yet an economically self-sufficient man. The distinction in class between Mr. Belvedere and the Owens family is the inverse of that of the Micellis and the Bowers. Mr. Belvedere is British and has worked as a butler for heads of state; the Owens family, by contrast, a relatively ordinary Midwestern, middle-class family. Mr.

Belvedere is off-put by father George's crass nature just as George finds Mr. Belvedere snooty. Indeed, the family members nearly always refer to him as "Mr. Belvedere," a somewhat unusual use of an honorific in the casual Midwest that speaks to their reverence for his higher cultural status. It becomes Mr. Belvedere's unspoken project to civilize the Owenses. But his different cultural and class background colors how George, among others, perceives his gender: Mr. Belvedere is effete and therefore closer to feminine than masculine. (The character's rarely used first name, Lynn, attests to this.) His in-between gender preserves the nuclear family in that he is not a rival for Marsha's affections nor is his place in the family emasculating to George. At the same time, his continued presence in the family home does affect George, who grows more tolerant of those characteristics of Mr. Belvedere's that he initially finds disconcertingly feminine. As the family's domestic dad, Mr. Belvedere enables Marsha to pursue a career, ensures that the children have a loving presence to take care of them, and gently coaxes open George's mind.

Domestic dads on Mr. Mom sitcoms therefore challenged traditional gender roles within the home while also reiterating masculine authority as manager of the household. For Tony and Charles, the tension between love for domestic duties and the need to maintain their status as handsome, desirable men is often mitigated through the sincere affection and appreciation they receive from their adoptive families. The "problems and uncertainties" domestic dads experienced could be, for Amanda Lotz, "predominantly traced to difficulties in negotiating women's changing gender roles."<sup>110</sup> The sitcom's neat narrative resolution ensured that the tensions were secondary to domestic harmony. Reflecting a conservative, traditional emphasis on the family, domestic dads foregrounded gender problems but solved them through a sometimes



overly simplistic reassurance of love and understanding among the family, which included the domestic dad.

By 1985, domestic sitcoms saturated the primetime market, usually formulated to sell in syndication, so that comedies aired in afternoons, when children typically watched, and primetime, when entire families did.<sup>111</sup> These sitcoms helped fill the schedules of independent stations in need of programming and provide appropriate family entertainment before primetime, though the glut of sitcoms on primetime and in reruns by the late 1980s concerned some within the industry.<sup>112</sup> As predicted by ABC's vice-president of marketing and research, Marvin S. Mord, these domestic sitcoms were a necessary response by networks to the changing structure of the American family and, by extension, changing markets for advertisers.<sup>113</sup> Non-traditional families, like those in Mr. Mom sitcoms, filled the television landscape, encouraging Americans to find Mr. Moms an appealing new part of the family structure. The flood of Mr. Mom sitcoms was at least partly responsible for NBC president Brandon Tartikoff's assertion in 1986 that "the fathers in sitcoms were wimps."<sup>114</sup> Citing the prevalence of male hard body action heroes in Hollywood cinema as an indication of audience desire, Tartikoff touted NBC's own *The Cosby Show* as bringing masculinity back to sitcoms; its popularity, he argued, signified that "the audience has shifted in its taste from Alan Alda-esque heroes, who wore their sensitivity on their shirt-sleeves."<sup>115</sup> In fact, market research indicated that "men in domestic roles" were "universally attractive to women in the 19-54 bracket, regardless of [the women's] occupational status."<sup>116</sup> Additionally, Tartikoff's comments ignore the potential reading of sitcom fathers like Cosby's Cliff Huxtable as new men and neglect the reality that variations on Mr. Mom sitcoms stretched across primetime and syndication. A generation of American children grew up

watching domestic dads on television exhibit a range of masculinities that helped foment family bliss.

### Lead Dads and Helper Dads: Manning the Alternative Family

While participant fathers and domestic dads persisted on television through the long 1980s, a third trend in Mr. Mom sitcoms began to emerge later in the decade. Sitcoms with “lead dads” and “helper dads” further reiterated the tension between the performance of masculinities Tartikoff wanted to see and the changing family structure of audiences Mord argued television needed to address. Like the participant fathers who began the Mr. Mom sitcom trend, lead dads worked both inside and outside the home. On series like *Silver Spoons* (NBC, 1982-86; first-run syndication, 1986-87), *Rags to Riches* (NBC, 1987-88), and *Empty Nest* (NBC, 1988-95), the lead dads were single fathers balancing career and family. On series like *My Two Dads* (NBC, 1987-90) and *Full House* (ABC, 1987-95), the lead dads were aided by “helper dads,” friends and partners in child-rearing and household management. Although the presence of “helper dads” in some ways conveys the idea that men can’t raise their children alone, the message across lead dad sitcoms is that men can do it without women. Lead dad sitcoms are in some respects the logical extension of television’s response to working mothers: from taking care of the household alongside her, to doing it for her, and finally to doing it without her. Herein lies the most illuminating aspect of Mr. Mom sitcoms for men and masculinities – and the most regressive for feminism. With women liberated from the home, men can broaden their gender roles to manage the household; in doing so, however, they render the wife-mother superfluous to the family unit.

The male-led household, already non-normative in its composition, lends itself to queer readings when the lead dad lives alongside helper dads. Male domesticity can be read as queer for its eschewing of traditional hetero-masculine roles (man as breadwinner, for instance, or Darwinian wanderer). The case of Mr. Belvedere, whose in-between gender is conveniently explained by his Britishness, is one example of subtextual queerness in Mr. Mom sitcoms. The homosocial environment of the male-centered households in *My Two Dads* and *Full House* furthers possible queer readings, since the family arrangement challenges heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. One of the cornerstones of hegemonic masculinity is, for Mike Donaldson, “about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process.”<sup>117</sup> The lead dads on Mr. Mom sitcoms are less interested in organizing their home lives according to hierarchies of power; instead, their relationships with helper dads are better described by values of cooperation and collaboration. Additionally, Donaldson argues that within hegemonic masculinity “fathers do not have the capacity or the skill or the need to care for children,” since nurturing and care-giving behavior “is simply not manly.”<sup>118</sup> Outside the bounds of traditional heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, the father figures on *My Two Dads* and *Full House* are better described as having “queer masculinities,” which Robert Heasley suggests as an “expansion of the conceptualization of straightness and masculinity” rather than a queer (or homosexual) sexuality.<sup>119</sup> None of the characters serving as lead or helper dads identify as homosexual or queer, but their repeated, often fervently asserted claims of heterosexuality, in an attempt to mitigate their unconventional living arrangements, call attention to the sexuality in ways that open up possibilities for questioning. They celebrate familial bonds while exposing a generation of television viewers to the normalcy of the non-normative. The audience can read them queerly as part what Alexander Doty describes as a

“reception space that stands simultaneously beside and within that created by heterosexual and straight positions.”<sup>120</sup> Through their assumption of responsibilities that were traditionally the province of women, their qualities of character that defy hegemonic masculinity’s emphasis on authority and competition, and their homosocial living arrangements, lead dads and helper dads be read as queering fatherhood and the domestic sitcom.

An early version of the “lead dad” premise did expressly avow the homosexuality of the dad to much controversy. *Soap*’s Jodie Dallas (Billy Crystal) was an openly gay character whose brief affair with a female friend results in the birth of a daughter. Much has been written about the flawed portrayal of Jodie’s gay identity and the subsequent backlash from both gay advocacy organizations and the New Right.<sup>121</sup> Far less has been written about the cultural significance of Jodie’s role as father and primary caregiver to his daughter Wendy. When Wendy’s mother abandons the baby, Jodie quits his job as a director of television commercials to become a full-time father. As a gay man who sometimes wears dresses, Jodie perhaps struggles less to accept the gendered discourses of being a primary caregiver for a child; he is repeatedly shown in the series denouncing machismo. His desire to be an active father, however, is reflective of the times and of desires openly expressed by heterosexual men as well. During several episodes of the third season, Carol sues for custody, and she and Jodie find themselves in court. When it is his turn to testify, Jodie poignantly, earnestly explains to the courtroom how much he loves being a father and how devoted he is to Wendy’s happiness. He wins full custody.<sup>122</sup>

While this plotline is noteworthy for being one of primetime’s first examples of gay parenting, it is equally noteworthy for being one of the first times a father of any sexuality is awarded custody of a child over a mother on television. By the mid-1970s, many states had abandoned “maternal presumption” for custody, instead allowing judges to award custody based

on a subjective assessment of the “child’s best interests.”<sup>123</sup> The film *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979, dir. Robert Benton) grappled with this same social problem a year before the provocative episode of *Soap*. Thrust into the role of primary parent when his wife leaves, dad Ted (Dustin Hoffman) at first struggles with but comes to adore participant fatherhood. When his wife sues for custody, Ted, like Jodie, expresses his love for fatherhood and says to the court, “I’d like to know what law it is that says a woman is a better parent by virtue of her sex.” Unfortunately, the judge awards custody to mom Joanna (Meryl Streep). In the film’s final moments, Joanna recognizes that sometimes a father is the best nurturer and agrees to let Ted keep their son. Both *Soap* and *Kramer vs. Kramer* position the viewer on the side of a loving dad; in the case of *Soap*, the narrative positions the law in his favor as well.

Single fatherhood proves too costly and difficult for Jodie, who moves back into his parents’ house in order to share expenses and responsibilities. This narrative contrivance reinforces the bond between Jodie and his mother, who instigates the move, and puts Jodie back into the center of dramatic action, which mostly occurs in the parents’ home. The move also demonstrates how challenging it is to juggle a career with parenthood. Watching *Soap* in hindsight, it is easy to see how Jodie’s life would be different with a committed, loving partner – a plot element that was not possible on primetime during *Soap*’s run.

Following *Soap*’s run, the NBC sitcom *Love, Sidney* (1981-83) featured a gay man in the role of surrogate father to a young girl, Patti (Kaleena Kiff) and friend to her single mother. The homosexuality of Sidney (Tony Randall) was downplayed for much of the series in response to concerns from affiliates and advertisers over protests from the Moral Majority and other conservative action organizations.<sup>124</sup> The series began with a two-hour movie, *Sidney Schorr: A Girl’s Best Friend* (dir. Russ Mayberry), on NBC in 1981, in which Sidney’s sexuality was more

explicit. The episodes for the series run were written to identify Sidney's sexuality through code. *The New York Times* review of the series, for instance, makes no mention of homosexuality but describes Sidney as a "fussy, lonely man" whose main traits are his "sweetness, his fastidiousness, and his incorrigible desire to meddle in everyone else's affairs."<sup>125</sup> This description draws upon stereotypes for gay men (as neat freaks) and Jewish mothers (as meddlers), making Sidney less hetero-masculine than queer. Because of the subtlety of the codes used in the series and the requisite knowledge to identify them, Lawrence Gross argues that Sidney's sexuality was "readily misunderstood by the innocent" viewer.<sup>126</sup> Although Sidney was a doting father figure, he served this role in the presence of Patti's mother. On the surface, at least, they resembled a traditional heteronormative nuclear family with two parents of opposite sexes [Figure 3.6].



*Figure 3.6. The March 6, 1982 TV Guide cover featuring the cast of Love, Sidney resembles a traditional nuclear family portrait.*

Television's first openly gay father figures had short life spans in which their homosexuality was downplayed or erased. Jodie Dallas' narrative on *Soap* ended with his declaration of love for a woman. A picture of an unknown man was the only reference to Sidney's (now abstinent) past life, a reference never fully explained. Jodie's biological fathering was reinterpreted and tempered in Sidney's adoptive parenting. Jodie's openness about his homosexuality was mitigated through his procreative heterosexual parenting and, finally, his conversion to bisexuality (if not heterosexuality). Sidney's sexuality was expressed via absence which leaves room for readings of Sidney's queerness through codes of behavior. Though historically important, neither dad fared well in ratings. *Love, Sidney* was not renewed for a third season, and by the time the custody storyline on *Soap* aired, the series had fallen in ratings out of the top twenty. It slipped out of the top thirty in its fourth and final season, when Jodie fell in love with a woman.<sup>127</sup> In the long 1980s, portrayals of fatherhood were contested, masked, or disavowed until cancellation.

In contrast, lead dads in the series that followed pledged their heterosexuality, especially when leading a family with other adult men in it. The queerness underpinning their family composition was able to flourish in ways it hadn't for openly gay characters like Jodie and Sidney. Sitcoms with lead dads and helper dads elucidate the tensions between the women's movement and women's fantasies about men's involvement in home life. Lead dads cook, clean, serve as both nurturer and disciplinarian to the children, provide financially for the family, and are unafraid of exhibiting emotions and sensitivity, and they run households in which women are no longer necessary. The success of lead dad sitcoms on primetime and in syndication meant women characters were sidelined within a television genre that had historically been dedicated to depicting feminine labor. Lynne Joyrich sees *My Two Dads* and *Full House* as examples of

domestic sitcoms that “promote male homosociality as their ultimate goal and reveal a disturbing desire on the part of men to appropriate women’s reproductive and maternal roles.”<sup>128</sup> Like Faludi, Joyrich sees these series as “sinister fantasies,” disturbing celebrations of patriarchy, the “negation of the feminine,” which become “the cause for both enjoyment and applause.”<sup>129</sup> While I do not dispute the reading of these series as a denial of women’s value in the domestic sphere, I argue the affirmation of broader interpretations for masculinity and invitation for men’s greater participation in the home indicate cultural value to Mr. Mom sitcoms beyond the simplistic labels of “feminist” or “anti-feminist.”

The premise of *My Two Dads* is that a dead woman has left custody of her daughter Nicole (Staci Keanan) to be shared by two heterosexual men, past lovers whose friendship to each other was fractured by their rivalry for her. Michael (Paul Reiser) is a successful financial advisor with the means to provide for Nicole while Joey (Greg Evigan) is an artist with the sensitivity to care for her. Nicole may be the biological child of either man – or neither of them – but as they raise her together, in the same household, the three form a family unit. With their different personalities, jobs, and income levels, the two men fall into heteronormative patterns, with Joey as the “wife” to Michael’s breadwinning “father.” Their persistent interest in dating women asserts their heterosexuality and, by extension, their masculinity. This is especially true for Joey, whose lesser economic status frames him as the more potentially feminized dad. Joey and Michael’s former rivalry over Nicole’s mother is mitigated by their mutual love for Nicole. Their nurturing and affection for Nicole, especially on the part of breadwinner Michael, demonstrates their flexibility with gender roles. Here a female lover’s interference into a male-male friendship is potentially toxic, but a female child brings the men back together. Without the child’s mother present (as in *Love, Sidney*) or some other maternal figure in the home, NBC was



initially concerned about the potential scandal – not from any queer readings of Michael and Joey but from Nicole’s nascent puberty in a home with two single men.<sup>130</sup> One of the series’ regular characters is the female judge who oversees the custody arrangement. Her presence affirms the unconventionality of the family but ultimately proves the arrangement innocuous, and so nontraditional families and fathers in nontraditional roles are granted approval from the American judicial system (and, by extension, America).

*My Two Dads* was initially given a plum position on NBC’s Sunday night lineup, placed after the successful *Family Ties*. The series won a People’s Choice Award in 1988 for favorite new comedy and sustained itself on primetime for three seasons. In the final episode, the narrative remedied the nontraditional arrangement.<sup>131</sup> Joey moved away to marry a woman while Michael assumed the role of lead (and single) dad. Although this ending alters the original, important premise of two men sharing custody, the show’s after-life in syndication and its sixty episodes sufficiently reiterated this theme for a young generation of television viewers.

*Full House* furthered explored the theme of all-male parenthood to tremendous success. The narrative similarly capitalizes on the death of a mother to create an alternative family, this time a lead dad with two helpers. Though the two-father household in *My Two Dads* may have been unsustainable by the series’ finale, *Full House* utilized heterosexual couplings to add to the family’s queerness, rather than subtracting Mr. Moms. Following the premise of *My Three Sons*, widower and lead dad Danny Tanner (Bob Saget) asks his deceased wife’s brother Jesse (John Stamos) and his good friend Joey (Dave Coulier) to move in to help raise his three daughters. This arrangement allows Danny to continue his job as a television host while Jesse and Joey, a struggling musician and comedian, respectively, serve as the helper dads who are primarily responsible for the children. In an important difference from *My Three Sons*, the children on *Full*

*House* are girls; as with *My Two Dads*, some of the humor stems from watching grown men help girls through adolescence and its myriad gender-encoded problems. Danny, though the breadwinner, is the most emotionally expressive and sensitive of the three men. Despite his day job outside the home, Danny remains involved in his children's personal problems. Because of the sentimentality and expressiveness within the chaotic household, Dave Coulier describes the Tanners as a "G-rated dysfunctional family."<sup>132</sup> But the Tanners do function, extraordinarily well.

Danny is able to balance work and home through helper dads Jesse and Joey. Jesse, who is the most outwardly macho, initially lives in one of the girl's bedrooms, which still has pink bunnies on the wall [Figures 3.7 and 3.8]. Like Joey on *My Two Dads*, Jesse is an artistic type (here, a musician) who initially, aggressively pursues heterosexual relationships. *Full House*'s Joey, a stand-up comedian, is skilled at using humor as a parenting technique. Jesse and Joey exist to serve and aid the Tanners. When they start a company that records advertising jingles, they build the recording studio in the home's basement so they are never away from the family.<sup>133</sup> Jesse marries and moves out in the fourth season, but he is so sad that his new wife Becky (Lori Loughlin) moves with him back into the Tanner mansion, folding their new family and the twins they will eventually have into the larger family unit.<sup>134</sup> Although this move was necessary to retain the series' original premise, it also denies Jesse any life of his own outside Danny and his daughters. Jesse and Joey's lack of independence in the face of their desire to help Danny makes them parental versions of the "helper homosexual," a term Alexander Doty applies to outwardly gay characters whose narrative life is limited to the ways they can serve or develop the main (and heterosexual) characters in a story.<sup>135</sup> Although explicitly heterosexual, Jesse and Joey have a life mission that enables Danny. This, along with Jesse's unwillingness to preside

over his own nuclear family, enable queer readings of these characters, and the Tanner household by extension.



*Figure 3.7. Uncle Jesse's masculinity in Full House is complicated by a background of pink bunnies and posters of Elvis and Sinatra.<sup>136</sup>*



*Figure 3.8. A cut reveals he is working out with baby Michelle.*

*My Two Dads* and *Full House* depict the anxieties and joys men experience when they are thrust into the role of primary parent. Both coincided with the release of *Three Men and a Baby* (1987, dir. Leonard Nimoy), a film in which three friends care for a baby that one of them has fathered. As with the lead dad sitcoms, *Three Men and a Baby* finds its humor in how initially befuddled the men are [Figure 3.9]. As with all the Mr. Mom sitcoms I describe in this

chapter, as well as films like *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the three men rise to the challenge and fall in love with fatherhood. By the film's conclusion, the baby's mother has returned to take her child away, but the men ask her instead to forge an alternative household together. *Three Men and a Baby* became the biggest box office success of 1987, proving that American audiences liked the combination of comedy and sentimentality that engaged fatherhood could produce.<sup>137</sup>



Figure 3.9. Peter (Tom Selleck) can't figure out how to put on a diaper in *Three Men and a Baby*.

Although *My Two Dads* was only broadcast for three seasons, it would be difficult to overestimate *Full House*'s impact on a generation of American families, especially children, beyond the success of *Three Men and a Baby*. The series lasted eight seasons, and following a slow start, was consistently within Nielsen's top twenty programs.<sup>138</sup> For much of its run, *Full House* was one of the principal shows on ABC's "TGIF" lineup, a two-hour programming block on Friday night that reiterated themes of familial love across a variety of family units.<sup>139</sup> *Full House* continues to be rerun on cable, the network Lifetime aired a fictionalized behind-the-scenes account of the series' production in 2015, and the first season of a sequel series, appropriately titled *Fuller House*, was released on Netflix in 2016.<sup>140</sup>

By depicting family units made of multiple men taking care of children, *My Two Dads* and *Full House* argue that “strong family values” can be found in many forms. Indeed, by 1980, the traditional two-parent nuclear family constituted only about two-thirds of all living arrangements in the United States.<sup>141</sup> A generation of young Americans growing up in the 1980s and 1990s was exposed to the non-traditional family unit as a locus of love, warmth, and comedy. While lead dad and helper dad sitcoms did demonstrate that women were superfluous to the family unit, these series also presented a range of masculinities that stretched beyond traditional gender roles. In doing so, their legacy lies in forging new ground for male parenting and male homosocial bonds. Non-normative families in 1980s sitcoms were early prototypes for contemporary sitcom families with gay parents, the most enduring of which are Mitch and Cameron on *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009– ). Rather than a simplistic condemnation of these series’ exclusion of women, I want instead to emphasize the myriad possibilities for men and masculinities presented within the narratives as emblematic of a new era of fatherhood on television and in American society.

“A New Boy in the Neighborhood Lives Downstairs”:  
Sitcom Sets and Physical Proximity as Indications of Familial Intimacy

Television’s Mr. Moms are able to be active in the family because of close physical proximity. Like many domestic sitcoms, Mr. Mom series principally use two sets, the living room and the kitchen, to keep the narrative contained within the domestic sphere. Entire episodes of *Charles in Charge* and *Mr. Belvedere* took place on these two sets exclusively, though most Mr. Mom series, like other domestic sitcoms, featured scenes in bedrooms and occasionally other

locations like workplaces. Largely, however, the action takes place in the home, which serves as a residence and a workplace for Mr. Mom.

Physical proximity and set design are important considerations in understanding how Mr. Mom sitcoms folded masculinity into domesticity, since physical space on the sitcom has often served an important, gendered function. Writing in the mid-1970s, Horace Newcomb argues that on traditional domestic sitcoms “rooms are defined by function and by personality, used for certain purposes, commanded by certain individuals.”<sup>142</sup> Of the two principal sets, the kitchen is traditionally the mother’s domain, and Newcomb refers to the living room as the “father’s throne room.”<sup>143</sup> Mary Beth Haralovich finds that within suburban domestic sitcoms of the 1950s, as well as in mid-twentieth century suburban architecture, the father “could have his own space in a den or workroom and a detached garage for his car.”<sup>144</sup> The homes seen in many early suburban domestic sitcoms, like *Leave It to Beaver*, have dedicated offices or dens for the fathers, a space where children must ask permission to enter. In these rooms, men can enjoy peace and quiet away from their family, they can socialize with other men, or they can finish projects they have brought home from the office. The existence of Dad’s den in these series demonstrates how the average suburban father needed and deserved space away from the challenges of serving as head of the household.

In 1980s Mr. Mom sitcoms, however, the presence of an office in the home ensures Dad’s greater involvement in family life, not his absence. Because Dad does not have to leave the home to go to work (at least, not always), he can participate in family quality time and watch the children when Mom goes out. This was not new to the 1980s. Alex Stone of *The Donna Reed Show* (ABC, 1958-66), for example, ran his pediatrics office out of the home. What was new were the expectations for participation this physical proximity placed on men whose wives had

careers outside the home. Jason Seaver of *Growing Pains* has a psychiatric practice located in an office immediately adjacent to the front door, near the living room. *The Cosby Show*'s Cliff Huxtable runs his obstetrics practice out of the lower level of the family home; he is often seen going up and down the stairs between the living room and his office in the course of a day. Although tending to patients does take Cliff's and Jason's attention away from family on occasion, the proximity of the office ensures they are never completely absent from the family dynamic.

By contrast, women married to participant fathers struggle to keep work and family separate. In the pilot to *Family Ties*, Elyse Keaton works on blueprints at a desk stationed in a corner of the kitchen. While the family eats breakfast, Elyse works, reminding us that she is a career professional in addition to being a wife and mother. She is situated between worlds by working *in* her own home, where she is both "at work" and still on duty as mother and wife, and working *on* homes, which she, as an architect, designs for clients. She spends the pilot episode attempting to design a "dream home" for a couple who do not wish to have to see each other.<sup>145</sup> While only a small part of the plot, the humor of the "dream home" is that it is at odds with the domestic harmony and close physical proximity the Keatons clearly value.

Crowded living arrangements reinforce familial bonds and challenge the presumed gendering of domestic spaces. As the theme song to *Charles in Charge* reminded viewers each week, Charles is the "new boy in the neighborhood" who "lives downstairs" from the rest of the family. His bedroom is located off the living room, which puts him close to the center of action. Like Charles, Mr. Belvedere lives in the family home, but upstairs in a tiny bedroom under the eaves. Tony of *Who's the Boss* and his daughter Samantha occupy traditional bedrooms on the second floor of the home, next to Angela and Jonathan, an arrangement that erases the class

distinction between employer and employee. In the first season, Angela converts the space over her garage into an apartment, but not for Tony and Samantha's privacy. Instead, Angela's mother Mona moves in. Mona, who is the biological family member, is the outsider while the surrogate, pseudo-nuclear family resides together in the house as the "real" family in the series. In addition to their bedrooms, the kitchen and living room are also the domain of domestic dads, sites where they cook meals for the family and offer their counsel. Helper dads Jesse and Joey of *Full House* move into breadwinner Danny's home, where the children are already comfortable, despite the fact that Joey must sleep in an alcove under the stairs that offers no privacy. None of these Mr. Moms seems unhappy with these arrangements. Mr. Mom sitcoms undo the gendering that Newcomb sees as so natural to the domestic sitcom. In particular, the absence of women in the household, in the case of lead dad series, means the entire home is now the domain of men and masculinity, and masculine labor serves to ensure domestic tranquility.

#### Conclusion: The New Family Values

By the end of the long 1980s, most Mr. Mom sitcoms had left primetime. *Family Ties* concluded its run in 1989 to speculations that Michael J. Fox wanted to leave the show, though Fox himself said the series' end was a wise choice before it dropped in ratings.<sup>146</sup> *Charles in Charge* and *Mr. Belvedere* ended in 1990, and in 1992 *Who's the Boss*, *Growing Pains*, and *The Cosby Show* followed suit. Despite its high ratings, *Full House* concluded its run in 1995 due to mounting production costs in addition to a shifting target demographic for networks.<sup>147</sup> Mr. Mom sitcoms flourished in the long 1980s when the working women's demographic was prized and primetime targeted them and family viewing. By the advent of the Clinton era, networks and



advertisers began to capitalize on the growing number of young single people of any gender, a demographic they believed favored hipper, edgier programming than the family-focused Mr. Mom sitcoms.<sup>148</sup>

The domestic sitcom's turn to wholesomeness in the long 1980s after the scandalous, sex-filled 1970s was reflective of American culture as the "political activity of the New Right and the threat of AIDS seemed to augur a retrenchment in the behavior of many Americans."<sup>149</sup> Yet it is unfair to say Mr. Mom sitcoms were wholly embracing of Reagan-era family values, since "family values" of the New Right in the 1980s included favoring two-parent (heterosexual) married households and skepticism at the benefits to women's work outside the home – values that many Mr. Moms series certainly did not depict. Although Ronald Reagan proclaimed National Single Parent Day on March 21, 1984, he also cut budgets to programs that many single parents relied on, like public housing, food stamps, and Medicaid. In his February 15, 1986, radio address, he described a "crisis of family breakdowns" that "threatened to become a permanent scar" on American society: namely single parenthood.<sup>150</sup> Actor Michael Gross attributed the popularity of *Family Ties* to its contrast from Reagan's unfulfilled promises to the America family. He claims the show's success "was directly proportional to how poorly the American family was actually doing, at a time when the country was beset by economic and social hardship, divorce, drugs, you name it. I think the Reagan Era helped the show a lot."<sup>151</sup> On television, Mr. Mom sitcoms offered shining examples of single fathers, domestic workers supporting single mothers, and other alternative family constructions whose bonds were unshakable, though their family compositions did not match Reagan's ideals.

In spite of 1980s political and social discourses that threatened the women's movement and marked a return of cowboy ethos to the political sphere, the new man of the 1970s persisted

on domestic sitcoms, where week after week Mr. Moms demonstrated their willingness to share in household responsibilities, take care of children, and respond to a changing world order with aplomb. John T. Caldwell describes *Full House* as “awkwardly linking multiple parents of the same sex together as surrogate parental figures” to preserve the “very myth, viability, and survival of the nuclear family.”<sup>152</sup> But the real cultural significance of Mr. Mom sitcoms lies in how they liberated men from their entrenched gender roles as emotionally absent breadwinners and valorized qualities like nurturing, embracing the feminine while also subsuming it into masculinity.<sup>153</sup>

With few exceptions, Mr. Moms were white, and their families were middle- to upper-class. This economic and racial privilege afforded greater flexibility for men to engage in household affairs, but it meant a reinforcement of stereotypes that men of color and of the working class are not as invested in their children and families. Bill Cosby’s Cliff Huxtable remains the most prominent example of a non-white Mr. Mom, but by and large, the new man ideology espoused on Mr. Mom sitcoms remains something of a privilege among men who can afford to have “progressive” values because they are at little risk for losing the means to support their families.

Despite these pitfalls – or perhaps because of them – Mr. Mom sitcoms are an important part of television history, beyond chronicling what was on screen in the long 1980s. First, Mr. Mom sitcoms helped grow American perceptions about what marriage and family entailed on television. A study published by the National Institutes of Health in 1982 found that on television “marriage and family belong to the women...Men, on the other hand, do not have much home life on television.”<sup>154</sup> The sitcom has always been a genre that evolves in different social contexts, and its reconfiguration during the 1980s to increase the role of men in family life

changed how the television family unit could be structured and which characters could inhabit certain duties (like cleaning and child care) and certain spaces in the home (like the kitchen).

Mr. Mom sitcoms also revealed how masculine domesticity “served as a male reply to the feminists’ insistence that women had as much right to seek individual achievement as did men.”<sup>155</sup> Mr. Mom sitcoms reflected the reality of more women entering the professional workplace, increased network interest in those women as audience members (by depicting fantasy versions of men who support working women and thrived at child care), and the changing nature of American masculinity in response to the women’s movement. While many of these sitcoms did not survive beyond the long 1980s, they nonetheless enjoyed successful runs during that period, and their cultural influence has persisted in syndication, DVD sales, and streaming video. Writing about primetime serial dramas, Jane Feuer claims that the 1980s “appear to have been a golden age, especially since most of eighties programming is still available in the form of syndicated reruns.”<sup>156</sup> The same is certainly true of Mr. Mom sitcoms, whose cultural legacy remains today.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Lallach, “Big Baby,” *Spy*, January 1993, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Ebert, “Review of *Mr. Mom*,” last modified August 22, 1983, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mr-mom-1983>.

<sup>3</sup> *I Love Lucy*, “Job Switching,” CBS, September 15, 1952.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Spelling was already known for his work as writer and producer, including serving as executive producer for the ABC melodrama *Dynasty* (1981-89), which had reached the top ten in ratings by the time *Mr. Mom* was released in theaters. Hughes, who was working with Spelling at the time, reportedly wrote the script based on his own disastrous experiences taking care of his children. See Steven Prigge, *Movie Moguls Speak* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 90-91.

<sup>5</sup> Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 55-72.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Rotundo, “Patriarchs and Participants: A Historical Perspective on Fatherhood in the United States,” in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Power, Pleasure, and Change*, ed. Michael Kaufman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 74-76.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Desjardins, “Gender and Television,” in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 674.

<sup>8</sup> Lynne Joyrich, *Re-viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 102.

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- <sup>9</sup> George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 82. Lipsitz is referring to the episode of *I Remember Mama* entitled "Mama's Birthday Present," CBS, September 10, 1954.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>11</sup> Lynn Spigel, "From Dark Ages to the Golden Age: Women's Memories and Television Reruns," *Screen* 36, no. 1 (1995): 19. Donna Stone was Reed's character in *The Donna Reed Show* (ABC, 1958-1966).
- <sup>12</sup> Benjamin Genocchio, "The Place We Call Home," *The New York Times*, February 12, 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Michael Ray Fitzgerald, "Sitcoms and Suburbia: The Role of Network Television in the De-Urbanization of the U.S., 1949-1991" (Master's thesis, University of Florida, 2007), 18.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>15</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and the Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York: Praeger Books, 1989), 60.
- <sup>16</sup> J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation under Television* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 170.
- <sup>17</sup> Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post-War America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 111.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 184.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.
- <sup>21</sup> Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 111.
- <sup>22</sup> Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), 50-51.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 38.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-49.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>27</sup> For more on women as primary targets of television advertising historically, see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 73-98; Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
- <sup>28</sup> Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert H. Deming, "Kate and Allie: 'New Women' and the Television Audience's Archive," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 201-214.
- <sup>31</sup> Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case for Cagney and Lacey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
- <sup>32</sup> D'Acci, *Defining Women*, 64.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.
- <sup>34</sup> Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 140. Kompare uses as his primary example the first-run syndication series *Small Wonder*, which I describe briefly in this chapter.
- <sup>35</sup> James P. Forkan, "Family Ties Shift Sets up Key Fall Fight," *Advertising Age* May 25, 1987, 3.

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- <sup>36</sup> Ronald Reagan, State of the Union address, January 25, 1984.
- <sup>37</sup> Amanda Lotz, *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 7.
- <sup>38</sup> Richard Butsch, "Class and Gender in Four Decades of Television Situation Comedy: Plus Ça Change...," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9, no. 4 (1992): 387-399.
- <sup>39</sup> Erica Sharrer, "From Wise to Foolish: The Portrayal of the Sitcom Father, 1950s-1990s," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 45, no. 1 (2001): 23-40.
- <sup>40</sup> Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 137.
- <sup>41</sup> Rotundo, "Patriarchs and Participants," 74-76.
- <sup>42</sup> Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 161.
- <sup>43</sup> Andrea Press and Terry Stratham, "Work, Family, and Social Class in Television Images of Women: Prime-Time Television and the Construction of Postfeminism," *Women and Language* 16, no. 2 (1993), 8.
- <sup>44</sup> "Facts of Life Ratings History," TelevisionHits.com, accessed May 1, 2017.  
<http://www.televisionhits.com/factsoflife/ratings.html>
- <sup>45</sup> Kenneth MacKinnon, *Representing Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media* (London: Arnold Press, 2003), 13.
- <sup>46</sup> Even Steven's hairstyle situates him as a 1970s new man: it is the same gray hair with a side part worn by Alan Alda.
- <sup>47</sup> Michael Saenz, "Family Ties," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 593.
- <sup>48</sup> For more on the ideological shift, see Jane Feuer, *Seeing through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 125; David Hagland, "Reagan's Favorite Sitcom: How *Family Ties* Spawned a Conservative Hero," *Slate*, March 2, 2007.
- <sup>49</sup> *Family Ties*, "Pilot," NBC, September 22, 1982.
- <sup>50</sup> Neil Genzlinger, "Alan Thicke's Dr. Seaver Didn't Know Best. That Was His Charm," *New York Times*, December 14, 2016.
- <sup>51</sup> Feuer, *Seeing through the Eighties*, 12.
- <sup>52</sup> Brandon Tartikoff and Charles Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride* (New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1992), 98.
- <sup>53</sup> Thom Patterson, "What Would Alex P. Keaton Do?," CNN.com, November 1, 2006.
- <sup>54</sup> Alice Leppert, "Lessons in the Labors of Love: Situation Comedies and Family Governance in the 1980s" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012), 70.
- <sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 163.
- <sup>56</sup> Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You?: How Public TV Failed the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
- <sup>57</sup> David Marc and Robert J. Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1992), 91.
- <sup>58</sup> Gayle Kaufman, *Superdads: How Fathers Balance Work and Family in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 8.
- <sup>59</sup> Gail Sheehy, "Introducing the Postponing Generation," *Esquire*, October 1979, 29.
- <sup>60</sup> Mary Johnson, "Cooking, Cleaning, Shopping - The Manly Things to Do," *The Progressive Grocer*, July 1983, 19.
- <sup>61</sup> Julie Connelly, "How Dual-Income Couples Cope," *Fortune*, September 24, 1990, 129.

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- <sup>62</sup> Kaufman, *Superdads*, 14; William V. Thomas, "Two-Income Families," in *America in the 1980s*, ed. Hoyt Gimlin (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1980), 65.
- <sup>63</sup> Buddy Portugal, as quoted in Connelly, "How Dual-Income Couples Cope," 130.
- <sup>64</sup> Rotundo, "Participants and Patriarchs," 76, emphasis in original.
- <sup>65</sup> Kaufman, *Superdads*, 2.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.
- <sup>67</sup> Harriet B. Pressier, "Decapitating the U.S. Census Bureau's 'Head of Household': Feminist Mobilization in the 1970s," *Feminist Economics* 4, no. 3 (1998): 145-158.
- <sup>68</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991), 61.
- <sup>69</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983).
- <sup>70</sup> Carol Tavris, "Who Started This?," *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.
- <sup>71</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*.
- <sup>72</sup> Peggy Phelan, "Radical Democracy and the Woman Question," *American Literary History* 5, no. 4 (1993): 750-763.
- <sup>73</sup> Marc and Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers*, 102.
- <sup>74</sup> Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*, 158, 100.
- <sup>75</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*, 153.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> *The Cosby Show* episodes: "Rudy's Sick," NBC, December 13, 1984; "Clair's Case," February 21, 1985; "Slumber Party," NBC, March 28, 1985.
- <sup>78</sup> Brandon Tartikoff, as quoted in Faludi, *Backlash*, 154; Peter J. Boyer, "TV Turns to the Hard-Boiled Male," *New York Times*, February 15, 1986.
- <sup>79</sup> Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 162.
- <sup>80</sup> *The Cosby Show*, "Slumber Party," NBC, March 28, 1985.
- <sup>81</sup> The scene is in many ways a precursor to Cosby's role as host of *Kids Say the Darndest Things* (CBS, 1998-2000).
- <sup>82</sup> *The Cosby Show*, "Planning Parenthood," NBC, April 30, 1987.
- <sup>83</sup> Yvonne Villarreal, "Baby Talk on Sitcoms: Good or Bad?," *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 2010; Judy Kutulas, "'Do I Look Like a Chick?': Men, Women, and Babies on Sitcom Maternity Stories," *American Studies* 39, no. 2 (1998): 14.
- <sup>84</sup> Peter Kerr, "Women in Take-Charge Roles Stride into TV's Limelight," *New York Times*, September 16, 1984.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>86</sup> William Demarest's character Uncle Charlie was a replacement for grandfather Bub, played by William Frawley, who appeared as the domestic (grand)dad in the first five seasons of the series before he was too ill to continue.
- <sup>87</sup> Newcomb, *TV*, 50.
- <sup>88</sup> Benson served as state budget director and lieutenant governor before the series concluded on a cliffhanger during an election in which Benson was running for governor.
- <sup>89</sup> Marc and Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers*, 89.
- <sup>90</sup> Lahn S. Kim, "Benson," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 60-61.
- <sup>91</sup> Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for 'Blackness'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 79.

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- <sup>92</sup> Benson's ability to participate in running the state government, though his training is in household management, makes sense, given longstanding arguments that the two require many of the same managerial skills. See Aristotle, *The Politics* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981), trans. T.A. Sinclair.
- <sup>93</sup> Anna Gavanas, "Domesticating Masculinity and Masculinizing Domesticity in Contemporary U.S. Fatherhood Politics," *Social Politics* 11, no. 2 (2004): 247-266.
- <sup>94</sup> Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Margaret Marsh, "Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870-1915," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1988): 167.
- <sup>95</sup> John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 193.
- <sup>96</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 165.
- <sup>97</sup> Leppert, "Lessons in Love," 14.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup> *Charles in Charge*, "War," CBS, October 24, 1984
- <sup>100</sup> William V. Thomas, "Two-Income Families," 78.
- <sup>101</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*, 41-42.
- <sup>102</sup> "End of Year Issue," *Eleanor Smeal Report*, 1987, 4, as quoted in Faludi, *Backlash*, 42.
- <sup>103</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*, 43-45.
- <sup>104</sup> *Charles in Charge*, "Home for the Holidays," CBS, December 19, 1984.
- <sup>105</sup> Coincidentally, in the following season Rue McClanahan would star in *The Golden Girls*, another sitcom about a non-traditional living arrangement, and in that series her character Blanche often asserted the familial nature of her relationship with her three roommates.
- <sup>106</sup> Leppert, "Lessons in Love," 107.
- <sup>107</sup> *Who's the Boss*, "Pilot," ABC, September 20, 1984.
- <sup>108</sup> *Who's the Boss* episodes: "Angela's Ex, Part One," ABC, February 5, 1985, and "Angela's Ex, Part Two," ABC, February 12, 1985.
- <sup>109</sup> *Who's the Boss*, "Angela's First Fight," ABC, October 23, 1984.
- <sup>110</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 87.
- <sup>111</sup> "Sitcoms in Syndication," *Broadcasting*, May 29, 1989, 48-50.
- <sup>112</sup> "Half-Hour Sitcom Glut No Laughing Matter," *Broadcasting*, November 23, 1987, 49; "Sitcoms in Syndication," *Broadcasting*, May 29, 1989, 48-50.
- <sup>113</sup> Marvin S. Mord, "Webs Look at New Demos: Research on TV Values," *Variety*, January 13, 1982, 170.
- <sup>114</sup> Brandon Tartikoff, as quoted in Boyer, "TV Turns to the Hard-Boiled Male."
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid. For an analysis of the 1980s action film hard body, see Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993). Jeffords argues that readings of action film characters as "hard" without greater nuance paid to the complexity and potential queerness of their gender performances, the kind of reading Tartikoff is doing here, is a neglectful misreading.
- <sup>116</sup> Leppert, "Lessons in Love," 54.
- <sup>117</sup> Mike Donaldson, "What is Hegemonic Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (1993): 645.
- <sup>118</sup> Ibid, 650.
- <sup>119</sup> Robert Heasley, "Queer Masculinities of Straight Men," *Men and Masculinities* 7, no. 3 (2005): 311.
- <sup>120</sup> Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

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<sup>121</sup> Many popular press and trade publication articles in the 1970s also followed the developments and protests over Jodie's homosexuality. For a condensed chronicle of interaction between various advocacy groups and ABC, see Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema, 1992); Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cartoons to Cop Shows in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>122</sup> *Soap*, episode 70, ABC, March 27, 1980. At this point in the narrative, Jodie was celibate, and he would later have a love affair with a woman. It is possible then to see the court's awarding of custody less as a vindication of gay fatherhood than an affirmation of his newfound normativity. The emphasis on Jodie's sexuality at the custody trial, however, makes it difficult not to see his success in court as a triumph for gay fatherhood.

<sup>123</sup> Joan B. Kelly, "The Determination of Child Custody," *Children and Divorce* 4, no. 1 (1994), 122.

<sup>124</sup> David Bianculli, "Tony Blasts Network Censors for Fearful Reaction to *Love, Sidney*," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 16, 1982, 76.

<sup>125</sup> Janet Maslin, "TV: Love, Sidney," *New York Times*, October 10, 1981.

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence Gross, *Up from Invisibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 84.

<sup>127</sup> *Nielsen Report on Television* (Northbrook, IL: A.C. Nielsen and Co., 1982).

<sup>128</sup> Joyrich, *Re-viewing Reception*, 105.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>130</sup> Angela Blessing and Rick Holmstrom, "For Staci Keanan of TV's *My Two Dads*, Hollywood Can Be Two-Faced," *People*, November 23, 1987.

<sup>131</sup> *My Two Dads*, "See You in September?," NBC, April 30, 1990.

<sup>132</sup> Staff, "*Full House*: 1987-1995," *People*, June 26, 2000.

<sup>133</sup> *Full House*, "Oh Where, Oh Where Has My Little Girl Gone," ABC, October 8, 1991.

<sup>134</sup> *Full House*, "Fuller House," ABC, February 22, 1991.

<sup>135</sup> Alexander Doty, "The Homosexual and the Single Girl," in *Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style, and the 1960s*, eds. Lauren M.E. Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert A. Pushing (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 296.

<sup>136</sup> *Full House*, "Joey Gets Tough," ABC, November 25, 1988.

<sup>137</sup> "1987 Domestic Grosses," Box Office Mojo, accessed May 1, 2017.

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1987&p=.htm>.

<sup>138</sup> Daniel Howard Cerone, "'Full House' Not Enough for ABC Pot," *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1995.

<sup>139</sup> In 1988-89 season, ABC's TGIF lineup featured *Perfect Strangers*, *Full House*, *Mr. Belvedere*, and *Just the Ten of Us* (1988-90), a spinoff of *Growing Pains* with a more conventional nuclear family. Later seasons of TGIF included *Step by Step* (1991-98), a modern version of *The Brady Bunch* that starred *My Two Dads*' Staci Keanan, and *Baby Talk* (1991-92), a series about a single mother, among others. TGIF lasted beyond the long 1980s, though it ended in 2000 to falling ratings for family comedies. It was briefly revived from 2003 to 2005, again with a lineup of family comedies.

<sup>140</sup> Brian Lowry, "TV Review: *The Unauthorized Full House Story*," *Variety*, August 19, 2015.

<sup>141</sup> John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freeman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1988), 331.



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<sup>142</sup> Newcomb, *TV*, 45.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11, no. 1 (1989): 65-67.

<sup>145</sup> *Family Ties*, "Pilot," NBC, September 22, 1982.

<sup>146</sup> Susan Schindehette and Michael Alexander, "Going out on Top," *People*, May 15, 1989, 74-76; Daniel Cerone, "Cutting the 'Family Ties,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1989.

<sup>147</sup> Lowry, "TV Review."

<sup>148</sup> For a more sustained examination of the prized younger demographic in the 1990s, see Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006). Becker calls this the "slumpy" demographic: socially liberal, urban-minded professionals.

<sup>149</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*, 337. For an extended analysis of network strategies to use sex and sexuality to attract audiences, see Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*.

<sup>150</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," February 15, 1986.

<sup>151</sup> Cerone, "Cutting the 'Family Ties.'"

<sup>152</sup> John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>153</sup> In his global study of manhood, David Gilmore finds that the one consistent aspect of masculinity is nurturing. See Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 229. Susan Faludi finds that within American society, the shift from industry to a service economy is often written as "symbolically a move from the traditional masculine to the traditional feminine," yet certain qualities associated with motherhood, such as sacrifice and protectiveness, have long been associated with masculinity as well. See Faludi, *Stiffed* (New York: Perennial Books, 1999), 38.

<sup>154</sup> National Institutes of Health, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties" (Washington: United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1982), 55.

<sup>155</sup> Gavanoas, "Domesticating Masculinity," 181.

<sup>156</sup> Feuer, *Seeing through the Eighties*, 150.

## Chapter Four

### “Girlie Men”: Late-Night Comedy, Gender, and Humor Across Ideological Lines

As I have demonstrated in the first two chapters, broadcast networks aggressively targeted the new quality audience of working women in the long 1980s, but they did so while attempting to maintain a hold on audiences of men. Often these two audiences were hailed within the same programs. But primetime wasn't the only part of the broadcast schedule where audiences of men were sought or where viewers could see examples of complex masculinities. Off-peak programming had historically operated on the assumption that men who worked during the day and watched television with their families after dinner would finally gain control of the remote during late-night hours. Late-night programs, whether talk shows like long-time staple *The Tonight Show* (NBC, 1962- ) or sketch variety newcomer *Saturday Night* (later *Saturday Night Live* [NBC, 1975- ]), were designed to appeal widely. Even so, creative control of these programs mostly belonged to men, often with men in the starring roles. Russell Peterson adds the centrality of non-Jewishness as well, citing the long history of successful Jewish performers in American comedy: “the straight, white, goyische male-ness of late-night hosts...is a story of exclusion and excuses: our southern affiliates will never go for this; she's funny, but she's not 'relatable'; he makes our advertisers nervous.”<sup>1</sup> Despite claims and often earnest attempts to target audiences based on factors other than gender (such as age), late-night comedy was largely created by heterosexual white men for heterosexual white men.

Throughout the long 1980s, however, as networks began demographically-based narrowcasting, various attempts were made to create comedy programming for women and people of color. The fourth network, Fox, began its own experiments with late-night talk and sketch variety programs to poach audiences who might not see themselves and their humor

reflected in NBC's late-night comedy shows. At the same time, the success of certain broadcast programs had spawned feature films and paid cable programming, thereby channeling this heterosexual white male audience into other, often more lucrative, forms of entertainment. The creation of cable network Comedy Central in 1991, for instance, attested to the value of comedy programming at all hours, not just late-night, and demonstrated that viewers were willing to pay subscription fees specialty cable programming. Feature films like *Wayne's World* (1992, dir. Penelope Spheeris) extended the value of broadcast programs like *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) into box office revenues while at the same time cementing SNL's status as the television variety juggernaut of the era. Thus, late-night comedy's influence branched out to new networks, cable, and film.

At the end of the long 1980s, after thirty years of serving as host of *The Tonight Show* and late night's foremost personality, Johnny Carson retired. Host David Letterman of NBC's *Late Night* (1982-92), which was broadcast immediately following Carson, was the presumptive replacement host. When the job went instead to comedian Jay Leno, Letterman left NBC and began hosting *The Late Show* (1993- ) on CBS in the same competing timeslot. While Carson's era of *The Tonight Show* had been a ratings giant, Leno and Letterman found themselves competing for audience shares. At the same time, new programs on the fourth network Fox and in first-run syndication foregrounded performers of color to target more specific audiences. All of these developments meant late-night comedy ended the long 1980s in a tumult. Instead of one supreme host like Carson, comedy had splintered into many different programs, each with their own way of addressing the genre's masculinized tendencies.

This occurred as news events forced Americans to reconcile with some very unfunny realities resulting from Reagan-era policies regarding race and gender. Civilian Rodney King

was signaled to pull over for speeding by the California State Patrol in 1991. On probation for another offense, King fled, and a high speed pursuit began, eventually involving the Los Angeles police as well. When the officers were able to stop King, they deployed a taser and beat him as a nearby civilian videotaped the assault [Figure 4.1].



*Figure 4.1. A still image from the home video recording of the assault on Rodney King.*

The videotape was sent to a local news station, but soon clips were aired around the nation during nightly news broadcasts. When the officers involved were acquitted of assault and use of excessive force in 1992, riots broke out in South Central Los Angeles. Images of looting and burning for nearly a week served as televisual evidence of tense relations between blacks and whites.

Only a few months after King's beating, President George H.W. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to the United States Supreme Court. If confirmed, Thomas would be the second black man ever to serve on the Court. His confirmation hearings were rocked, however, by leaked information about allegations Thomas had faced over sexual harassment in one of his previous positions. Anita Hill, an African-American lawyer who had made the allegations, was

called to testify before the Senate in a highly televised session that was broadcast live during the daytime, with recaps on the nightly news. Like the trial against the officers who had assaulted King, the Thomas-Hill hearings raised questions about abuses of power and the character of men. Although Thomas was also black, the image of Anita Hill, the lone black woman, in front of a skeptical Senate committee comprised of all white men, was a stark visual metaphor about the disenfranchisement of women of color.

In newspapers, news programming, and even fictional television series, Americans debated whether Hill's claims were sincere and whether King had been culpable in his own beating. Incidents like these at the end of the long 1980s forced issues of racial and gender inequalities into the open, where Reagan-era promises of wealth and security had sought to obscure some of this bleak reality. This chapter examines Carson's retirement alongside *Saturday Night Live's* many rebirths in the long 1980s. Carson's retirement symbolically concluded an era in late-night comedy at the same time as the Rodney King and Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill news events. The balkanization of late-night comedy alongside greater attention to the ways Reagan-era policies failed on their promises meant divided audiences, ripe for new narrowcasting practices that targeted audiences based on demographics instead of households.

Race was a crucial factor in this divide, but so was gender. The second aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how conditions within the television industry shaped the kind of gender-based humor featured within late-night comedy. The success of *The Tonight Show* is in many ways attributable to Carson's avuncular style and broad appeal. Variety newcomer *SNL* intended to follow Carson in his appeal across gender lines, but where Carson was also watched by audiences of different ages, *SNL* was conceived as a program for hip, young adults. Despite

the program's claim to narrowcast based on age, *SNL*'s content and business practices resulted in building up a male audience. The opposing strategies of *The Tonight Show* and *SNL* (broadcasting and narrowcasting, respectively) affected representations of masculinities within these programs and clashed with creative and executive practices behind the scenes. *Saturday Night Live*'s initial conceit may have been an edgy humor to target a more sophisticated, young audience. The same humor, though, borders on offensive to women and people of color, and the creative and production practices behind the scenes at *SNL* mirrored the same lack of concern for non-whites and women. Yet, as I describe here, many of its successful sketches and characters throughout the long 1980s challenged dominant assumptions about men and masculinity. On the other hand, Carson, though broadly appealing with his unassuming personality, was ruler of his own empire. His departure from NBC opened the door to more diverse, younger personalities on the late-night scene. Following Carson's retirement and *SNL*'s rise, humor for mostly white, straight men created by white, straight men was challenged on multiple fronts, but often with the contradictory message that these challenges were to be short-lived, token gestures.

### Competing with Carson

For many Americans, late-night television was synonymous with Johnny Carson, the host of *The Tonight Show* on NBC. Carson was the singular top late-night personality in the 1980s and had been for nearly thirty years, after assuming the role of host of *The Tonight Show* from Steve Allen (who hosted from 1954-57) and Jack Paar (1957-62). Under Carson, *The Tonight Show* solidified its style and format. Episodes began with a monologue by Carson, followed by interviews with celebrity guests, plus occasional comedic sketches performed by Carson with

help from his sidekick Ed McMahon and guest comedians performing stand-up sets. When Carson was absent, celebrity guest hosts would fill in for him.

Carson had hit his stride in the 1970s when network television as a whole was experiencing its “jiggle” era. As Elana Levine describes, television executives in the 1970s began to strategically use sex and sexuality in programming as a way of attracting viewers and garnering high ratings.<sup>2</sup> In the pervasive sexual atmosphere of the 1970s, Carson’s reserved style on television, in which chaos happened around him without ruffling him, could seem old-fashioned. He mildly flirted with female guests and attended the 1973 premiere of the pornographic feature film *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano), which mainstream media covered.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, though, Carson preferred to remain distant from the press and tried to keep the more intimate aspects of personal life private. On *The Tonight Show*, innuendo was typically the limit of sexual expression. In 1974 young newcomer Burt Reynolds appeared on the show in a tight leather suit, only to have Carson spray whipped cream all over Reynolds’ body – including the genital area [Figure 4.2]. Reynolds responded by spraying the whipped cream down the back of Carson’s shirt.<sup>4</sup> The juvenile and homoerotically charged moment dissipated as the two laughed and cleaned up to begin their interview in earnest.



Figure 4.2. Johnny Carson provocatively sprays whipped cream onto Burt Reynolds’ crotch in a 1974 episode of *The Tonight Show*.

Moments like these were diffused through Carson's affable style, which many television historians, as well as Carson's contemporaries, credited for his appeal to a broad range of audiences. Grant Tinker, serving at the time as NBC's chairman, attributed Carson's popularity and staying power to the fact that he was "totally acceptable in everyone's home" and so never wore out his welcome.<sup>5</sup> Although funny in his own right, Carson was keen to let guests do most of the talking and just listen to them. His "well-stocked supply of facial expressions and gestures" helped him to salvage a boring interview or put a nervous guest at ease, giving the impression that the guest was funnier than he or she probably was, and often funnier than Carson himself.<sup>6</sup> When he did talk, he was "more emotionally detached and less political" than his predecessor Jack Paar, and so his jokes ran little risk of upsetting viewers.<sup>7</sup> Dick Cavett, who was a writer for the show during Carson's time, described Carson's style as "a kind of sly, witty innuendo."<sup>8</sup> He also performed humility. In his opening monologue for each show, he often commented on the audience's lack of laughter at his jokes and allowed them to heckle him. Sidekick Ed McMahon was repeatedly asked by fans if Carson deliberately told bad jokes to elicit an audience response, but McMahon avows in his memoir that Carson's humility at acknowledging a failed punchline was sincere.<sup>9</sup> Carson's combination of Midwestern niceness and Hollywood aloofness were, according to Carson's friend and lawyer Henry Bushkin, responsible for his high ratings and long-term success.<sup>10</sup>

*The Tonight Show* was so successful that Carson was able to demand more and more accommodations from host network NBC without a decrease in salary. The president of NBC's entertainment division, Brandon Tartikoff, recalls that when he arrived at the network in 1977, people joked the network's initials stood for "Nothing But Carson" because *The Tonight Show* earned more profits than any other series at NBC.<sup>11</sup> His tremendous success put Carson in prime



position to negotiate the terms for his continued contract.<sup>12</sup> The network did not see the script for his opening monologue in advance of the show's taping because, in Carson's words, he did not want "somebody sitting up in an office and making capricious judgments on what he thinks is funny or not funny."<sup>13</sup> By 1980, Carson had arranged to take off every Monday while a guest host filled in for him, and the program length had been cut from ninety minutes to sixty. On weekends network affiliates aired reruns, rather than new material.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1980s, though, the weekend reruns of *The Tonight Show* were becoming less viable for affiliates and Carson himself. Both parties were concerned with audience fatigue; Carson also wanted to withhold reruns on weekends so he could take additional time off during the week. He favored giving the weekend timeslot to a new program, so long as it wouldn't be a "pretender to his throne."<sup>15</sup> Because of the perceived low value and low ratings of the weekend reruns, advertisers were often given time as a free incentive with other paid spots, so affiliates didn't make much money directly from the *Tonight Show* reruns.

NBC's vice-president for late-night weekend programming, Dick Ebersol, believed that a new program could potentially capture greater advertising revenues than reruns and create an audience, where Carson reruns potentially bored them and inspired them to change the channel. In particular, a weekend series could target a youthful audience demographic over Carson's wide, household appeal. This kind of narrowcasting to particular sub-groups was becoming more popular and more necessary to remain competitive in ratings. Because weekend late-nights already had low audience numbers and ad revenues, a new series wouldn't pose much financial risk if it failed to capture this audience, but it had the possibility of earning greater ratings and more advertising dollars if successful.<sup>16</sup> Together with Lorne Michaels, a comedian from Canada

whose work in television included writing for comedian Lily Tomlin's specials, Ebersol pitched affiliates the idea of a late-night variety show.

Ebersol and Michaels named the series *Saturday Night*, which was a reference to ABC's *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell* (1975-76). Howard Cosell had become well known for as a sports broadcaster for ABC for more than twenty-five years. The *Saturday Night Live* series was his attempt to break into other forms of television. Ebersol and Michaels' *Saturday Night* was not direct competition, since Cosell was on during primetime (8pm), but clearly Michaels and Ebersol were building upon the concept of the program. Cosell's repertoire of actors, for instance, were called the Prime Time Players. Once Michaels had cast his *Saturday Night*, he dubbed his ensemble the Not-Yet-Ready for Prime Time Players in reference to their later timeslot and his vision of them as a cast of renegades. Cosell and his executive producer Roone Arledge hired Bill Murray, his brother Brian Doyle-Murray, and Christopher Guest, all of whom had worked for *The National Lampoon Radio Hour* (1973-74). The Murray brothers had also worked at the improvisational comedy club the Second City in Chicago. Ebersol and Michaels similarly hired several *National Lampoon* and Second City performers and writers: Gilda Radner, John Belushi, and Dan Aykroyd were hired for the cast, and Michael O'Donogue was hired as the head writer.

ABC's *Saturday Night Live* and NBC's *Saturday Night* were similarly structured and drew from the same talent pool, but NBC's series proved far more successful, even taking the title *Saturday Night Live* in its second season. While the NBC *Saturday Night* team contributed to "establishing new pop culture norms every week," Cosell's troupe were "being buried in a blizzard of lame, anachronistic glitz two and a half hours earlier in prime time."<sup>17</sup> Cosell's short-lived program was widely panned by critics; its run only lasted a year. By contrast, NBC's

*Saturday Night* found its audience and became a star-making machine that has to date been on the air for forty years.

Though Howard Cosell's *Saturday Night Live* inspired *SNL*'s talent pool and structure, it did not provide a roadmap for successful sketches. For that, Lorne Michaels turned to *The Carol Burnett Show* (CBS, 1967-78). Carol Burnett's eponymous sketch variety series had been popular with household audiences. It had moved to Saturdays at 10pm in the mid-1970s, and so, like Cosell's variety series, provided humor to weekend audiences and gave them something fresh outside weekday primetime. Burnett and her ensemble had established themselves as leaders in television comedy by the time Ebersol and Michaels created *SNL*.

Understanding that *Saturday Night* would inevitably be compared to *Carol Burnett* by audiences and critics, Lorne Michaels gave his writing staff very few rules except not to be like Carol Burnett's, whose comedy he found "too broad, too bourgeois, and too smug!" [Figure 4.3]<sup>18</sup> To appeal to the 18-49 year old demographic in particular, *Saturday Night*'s writers created sketches that were edgier and more political than Burnett's. The use of a different celebrity guest host each week would mitigate dependence on a lone star, such as Cosell, who could not carry a series, or Burnett, whose clown humor may not have appealed to the desired young adult demographic.



Figure 4.3. Carol Burnett does a parody of Queen Elizabeth II on *The Carol Burnett Show*.<sup>19</sup>

Johnny Carson, who was well aware of his dominance within late-night programming, was open to the possibility of a new series replacing weekend reruns of *The Tonight Show*. However, Carson stipulated that the new series meet certain conditions, since he foresaw that a comedy-variety program with rotating guest hosts might present conflicts with his own celebrity guest interviews. NBC and Carson were able to reach an agreement that the comedy-variety program would adhere to a “21 and 8” policy, in which guests could not be scheduled to appear on *Saturday Night Live* less than twenty-one days before or eight days after their *Tonight Show* appearance.<sup>20</sup>

This arrangement privileged *The Tonight Show* over the possibility of giving the new comedy-variety program every advantage to succeed. *SNL*'s place at NBC had been secured through the idea that the series was standing on the shoulders of Carson and *The Tonight Show*. NBC president Herb Schlosser granted *Saturday Night* the use of *The Tonight Show*'s studio in New York, since Carson and the program had moved to Los Angeles. Additionally, Schlosser wanted *Saturday Night* to be broadcast live, in fear that affiliates might choose to air a pre-recorded program after *The Tonight Show* reruns. The later timeslot, especially with a less exciting rerun as a lead-in, would have given *SNL* less chance at succeeding. If *SNL* were live, it would encourage scheduling unity and, presumably, help the series find its regular audience.

Another way in which *SNL* would emulate *The Tonight Show* was in its veneration of celebrity and its attempts to cultivate new television stars. Carson usually interviewed several top-tier celebrities, as well as newcomers, in each episode. *Saturday Night* was to be a vehicle for developing new television personalities by featuring lesser known performers as cast members and guest hosts. Similar to Carson's occasional guest comedians, who were up-and-

coming on the stand-up circuit, *Saturday Night* would have an ensemble of newcomer comedians and young, fresh, exciting guest hosts.<sup>21</sup>

Ebersol's original vision for *Saturday Night* was a program that would attract a youthful audience, the "television generation" who embodied the spirit of the freewheeling 1970s – a much narrower audience than *The Tonight Show* drew. In its first few years, *Saturday Night* actively designed itself to capture this audience through writing and casting, in addition to its late timeslot at 11:30pm. The series debuted to low ratings as it struggled for recognition with audiences. By the time the first Nielsen report of the season was released, however, it became clear that while the *Saturday Night* audience was small, it was on target. Seventy-five percent of the audience were between the ages of 18 and 49, exactly what Michaels and Ebersol had hoped for.<sup>22</sup> This percentage was higher than any other series at any other timeslot, and it persuaded NBC to keep *Saturday Night* on the air despite the low ratings, since NBC was eager to court that youthful demographic.

By the start of the long 1980s, *Saturday Night Live* had begun to receive more critical attention and, by extension, inspire similar programs. In 1980, ABC launched its own sketch comedy program called *Fridays* (1980-82), which only lasted two seasons. The series featured Larry David and Michael Richards, who would both later work on the tremendously successful NBC sitcom *Seinfeld* (1989-98). In later years, other networks would offer their own modified competitors. Fox's two sketch shows *In Living Color* (1990-94), which I discuss later, and *MadTV* (1995-2009) were pre-recorded. *In Living Color* was broadcast on primetime, but *MadTV* aired on Saturday nights at 11pm, slightly before *Saturday Night Live* began, in a clear attempt to poach *SNL*'s audience.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the rural-themed variety show *Hee Haw*, which had been on CBS from 1969-71, continued in first-run syndication until 1992.

Beyond sketch programs, late-night also blossomed in the number of talk shows that were born in the years leading up to and immediately following Johnny Carson's long-dreaded retirement. In 1982, NBC also launched *Late Night*, a comedy talk show similar in structure to *The Tonight Show* and hosted by David Letterman, who had been unsuccessful at a morning talk show on the same network. *Late Night* was broadcast immediately following *The Tonight Show* and kept most of its audience. While other networks tried to compete with their own weekday late-night offerings, none could really stay on the air or offer much competition in terms of ratings shares. For Michele Hilmes, this demonstrates how "a variety of would-be competitors," like ABC's *Fridays*, would "meet with defeat at the hands of NBC's *Tonight/Late Night* juggernaut."<sup>24</sup> Hilmes sees the success of the talk show format over the sketch program a sign that *Saturday Night Live* "marked more of a dead end than a revitalized tradition: the last of the long line of live comedy-variety shows."<sup>25</sup> Soon after Carson's retirement, the late-night scene fractured, offering new avenues for niche audiences that were segmented by age, race, and various ideological positions.

*SNL* becomes then not a death knell for late-night comedy but a compelling case study in how, when the late-night talk show began to further narrowcast, *SNL* managed to stay on the air for so many years. This is a particularly important question given the series' multiple rebirths during the long 1980s. It is my argument here that despite *SNL*'s stated goal of addressing a youthful audience, the program was really invested in a *male* youth audience. But it accomplished its goal of attracting that audience through representations of flexible gender and challenges to heteronormative masculinity than the more broadly appealing – and more narrow in portrayals of gender – programs like *The Tonight Show*.

## Cautionary Tales of Women in Comedy

Late-night comedy programs with a talk format were largely conceived and developed by their comedian-hosts. Johnny Carson's company, Carson Productions, was credited as producing *The Tonight Show* and *Late Night with David Letterman*, which was also produced by two of Letterman's own companies.<sup>26</sup> Even variety series like *The Carol Burnett Show* were the brainchild of the named star; Burnett had a team of writers and producers who contributed to her show, but her own husband was the executive producer who made final decisions about the cast. *Saturday Night* was conceived as an ensemble series, but there was no question that its original concept was wholly Ebersol and Michaels', with Michaels assuming vision once the series was in production.

That changed in 1980 when Lorne Michaels left the series due to clashes with NBC over renewing his contract. Upon his departure, associate producer Jean Doumanian took over day to day operation of *SNL*. Doumanian's one season tenure as executive producer is largely remembered as a failure that resulted from her overhaul of the series. One of the chief complaints about the 1980-81 season was the departure of cast members whom fans had come to love watching. While this is sometimes inaccurately attributed to Doumanian firing them, in reality the contracts for the entire cast were due for renewal, and none of them opted to return to the series.<sup>27</sup> Faced with a need to replace the entire ensemble before the fall premiere, Doumanian opted to hire stand-up comedians over the veteran improvisation players that Lorne Michaels had preferred. Doumanian is also accused of producing low quality work, but NBC slashed the series' budget by more than half. Upset by these swift changes and loyal to Michaels, nearly all of the writing staff quit, leaving Doumanian no choice but to revamp the program. With a new

cast and writing staff and a much smaller budget, Doumanian hardly inherited conditions under which the program could succeed. As Hill and Weingrad report, the 1980 fall season premiere was delayed as the series was retooled, and internal NBC memos indicating concerns about the series leaked in newspapers with headlines that asked, “Is the all-new *Saturday Night Live* not even ready for air time?”<sup>28</sup>

At last, Doumanian’s season premiered on November 15, 1980, and was not well received [Figure 4.4].<sup>29</sup> Only days later, the *Washington Post* reported that Doumanian had gathered the cast and writers together to blame the failure of the premiere on the writers, prompting backlash from at least one member of the writing team.<sup>30</sup> Doumanian’s season floundered along until the February 21 episode hosted by Charlene Tilton of *Dallas* (CBS, 1978-91). The episode featured a sketch that parodied the “Who Shot J.R.?” plotline on *Dallas* by having the cast voice their grievances toward ensemble member Charlie Rocket before he was “shot.” During the final moments of the episode, when the cast and guest host traditionally assemble on stage to bid the audience farewell, Rocket said of his stage murder, “I’d like to know who the fuck did it.”<sup>31</sup> His use of this expletive, coupled with the season’s bad critical reviews and low ratings, caused NBC president Fred Silverman to demand Tartikoff fire Doumanian.<sup>32</sup> Rocket was also summarily fired.



*Figure 4.4. “It was either the election or the erection”:* The 1980 season premiere of *Saturday Night Live* depicted a sex-starved Rosalynn seducing lame-duck President Jimmy Carter in the Oval Office.



Doumanian's final episode as executive producer was the subsequent one, which featured Bill Murray as host. Murray began the episode by encouraging the audience not to worry about the fate of the series and announced the next week's host.<sup>33</sup> That episode did not happen, as Dick Ebersol stepped in as executive producer, replacing Doumanian. A writer's strike truncated what was left of the season, resulting in only one more episode. The break, however, gave Ebersol time to revamp the series once again, which he accomplished by firing many of the writers and actors Doumanian had hired. Al Franken, one of the staff writers who left with Michaels, returned along with veterans like Chevy Chase for a "comeback" episode. During the "Weekend Update" segment, Franken declared that "No English-speaking person could do a worse job than Jean."<sup>34</sup> Following Ebersol's assumption of the role of executive producer, the series was given a new theme song, title sequence, and cast members. The extent to which Ebersol sought to retool the series gives the impression that Doumanian had done nothing but make bad decisions. Ebersol remained at *Saturday Night Live* until 1985, when he departed to spend more time with his family, citing that production of a series on videotape would be easier. At that point, Lorne Michaels returned and has remained at *SNL* for thirty years.

Doumanian's legacy as executive producer of a late-night comedy series has two overlapping interpretations: failure as a result of a woman stepping into a man's role in a largely sexist environment and failure as a result of inexperience and naïveté. I am not disputing that the quality of *Saturday Night Live* changed under Doumanian's guidance or that audiences lost interest as well (as ratings bear out). The common perception that Doumanian "ruined" the series because she didn't know what she was doing, however, oversimplifies the reality of systemic misogyny at *SNL*, as well as the complicated context under which Doumanian assumed her

leadership role. She managed to rise to a position that women in television still struggle to achieve in equal numbers to men, and she did it for a masculinist comedy series as opposed to a “women’s series” like a soap opera. Her swift failure can be attributed to television’s often discriminatory environment. Indeed, following her brief stint at *Saturday Night Live*, Doumanian went on to serve as producer for numerous films directed and written by Woody Allen, and her later successes attest to her capabilities.

By other accounts, Doumanian’s failure at *SNL* can be attributed to the fact that she was wholly unprepared and inexperienced for the role of executive producer, absent any gender implications. Television scholars often cite *Saturday Night Live*’s ratings drop in the 1980-81 season as testimony that Doumanian lacked the ingenuity and power to helm the series. Jeffrey S. Miller, for instance, describes the decision to name her as executive producer “a decision all would soon regret” because Doumanian “could exert little control over either the day-to-day production or the overall quality of the series.”<sup>35</sup> The departure of original cast members like Jane Curtin and Gilda Radner is often waved as proof of Doumanian’s incompetence. The *New York Times*, for instance, painted her desire to give a long-running, beloved program a fresh look and feel as proof of her inexperience; she should not have tampered with a formula that was working.<sup>36</sup> Doumanian’s claim that the program needed freshness was one echoed by Lorne Michaels, who cited it as a reason he was leaving: “As everyone became more and more successful and got other offers, [the show] was harder to do. The show was purer in the first three years. I don’t think it became decadent, I just think it became successful.”<sup>37</sup>

Failure of a series is more common in the television industry than success. Though Michaels is regarded in popular culture as a titan of comedy programming, the series he created during his absence from *SNL* was a flop, despite having writers like Al Franken and Tom Davis

who had been a part of his *SNL* team. Michaels' *The New Show*, which premiered in January of 1984, aired on Fridays at 10pm opposite *Falcon Crest* (CBS, 1981-90), a serial melodrama that arguably tapped into a different audience than the sketch variety program was targeting. Despite its cancellation after only nine episodes, *The New Show* is rarely waved as proof of Michaels' inadequacy as producer as Doumanian's *SNL* stint is for her.

Jean Doumanian left a lasting legacy on *SNL* and American film and television: she hired nineteen-year-old Eddie Murphy as a featured player. Halfway through the season, recognizing Murphy's star quality, she promoted him to full cast, one of the few choices she made as executive producer that Ebersol did not undo after replacing her. Doumanian's choice to hire Murphy is often cited as an exception (or fluke) in an otherwise dismal tenure as producer. On the contrary, her choice to hire Murphy and stand-up comedian Joe Piscopo, who was the only other cast member to survive into the 1981-82 season, demonstrates vision to see rising star potential.

The cultural memory of Jean Doumanian as a failure is but one example of how systemic gender bias plagued *Saturday Night Live* in the long 1980s. Despite the claim by NBC and Lorne Michaels that "women could nevertheless succeed in this environment by proving their individual abilities," in fact, Caryn Murphy argues, the "entrenched system seemed to reward sexist behavior and aggressive bullying."<sup>38</sup> Cast members, too, experienced the gender bias that was built into the *SNL* engine. Original cast member Jane Curtin remained with the series until its retooling in 1980, but she has been outspoken about what a "harsh environment" the show was for women due to sexual harassment and lack of cooperation on the part of male cast members. In recent years, Curtin revealed that John Belushi deliberately tried to sabotage

sketches written by women because he believed women weren't as funny – one of the same claims used to discount Jean Doumanian as showrunner.<sup>39</sup>

In 1990, singer Sinead O'Connor and *SNL* cast member Nora Dunn both refused to appear in an episode with guest host Andrew Dice Clay, a stand-up comedian known for his racist and sexist humor [Figure 4.5].<sup>40</sup> The year before, Clay had performed “adult nursery rhymes” at the MTV Video Music Awards and was subsequently banned from MTV for life.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence for her refusal to appear in Clay's episode, Nora Dunn did not get a contract renewal for the following season. Dunn's dismissal, like Doumanian's swift unseating, was another example of how the series punished women and, as Caryn Murphy argues, “belies the claim that *SNL* was an environment in which women could establish themselves simply by working harder.”<sup>42</sup>



*Figure 4.5. Andrew Dice Clay's opening monologue was met with protests before hecklers were ushered out of the studio by security.*

As *Saturday Night Live* indisputably struggled with matters of gender equality among the treatment of cast members, elsewhere in late-night comedy women found themselves alternately undervalued and appreciated. Comedian Joan Rivers auditioned seven times for *The Tonight*

*Show* before her first appearance in 1965, but by 1983 she had been appointed by Johnny Carson to serve as his permanent guest host. In an op-ed for *People* magazine in 1986, Rivers expressed her gratitude toward Carson, who had mentored her through the world of comedy.<sup>43</sup> After three years of serving as the substitute host of *The Tonight Show* in Carson's absence, during which she was courted by other networks, Rivers signed a deal for her own series in 1986. The deal with Fox offered Rivers a series which would be broadcast during Carson's timeslot and reportedly promised her ten million dollars over three years. At the time, Carson was earning five million per year from NBC, but the offer from Fox was a coup for Rivers, considering the fledgling network had far fewer owned and operated stations and affiliates than the "big three" networks.<sup>44</sup> This boon to her career caused a rift with Carson, who felt betrayed by her departure from *The Tonight Show* and choice to compete for his timeslot. Rivers was "banned for life" from *The Tonight Show*, and she and Carson never managed to make amends.<sup>45</sup> *The Late Show with Joan Rivers* lasted only a season but remains historically significant for being the first late-night series with a woman host.

The difficulties Rivers encountered with Fox and her rupture with Johnny Carson exemplify the problems women comedians faced on the road to success. Women were given opportunities to infiltrate late-night comedy in the long 1980s, but they were often held to different standards that stymied their success. Carson's snub was echoed in Lorne Michaels' later dismissal of Nora Dunn, two incidents in which men "punished" women for having their own convictions and ambitions. Rivers serves as an example of women's access to late-night in the 1980s: the permanent guest host of the most successful late-night talk show and for being the first woman (and one of few still) to have her own. She hosted an episode of *Saturday Night Live* in April of 1983 and co-hosted the 1983 Emmys with Eddie Murphy. This was in addition to

publishing books and going on tour with her stand-up routine. After *The Late Show with Joan Rivers* moved to new hosts, Rivers served as the host of her own daytime program, for which she won a Daytime Emmy in 1990. Rivers may have ended the long 1980s off late-night, but her career was thriving.

“If I get drafted, who’s going to be the token black on *Saturday Night Live*?”

By some accounts, the 1980s were an exciting time for performers of color. Eddie Murphy had been hired by Jean Doumanian to work on *SNL* and, unlike his predecessor Garrett Morris, rose to stardom while calling attention to racial inequalities. By the end of the 1980s, late-night had a black talk show host, Arsenio Hall, and the fourth network Fox had begun to strategically target black audiences by featuring programs that were performed, written, and produced by people of color. These examples indicate ways in which late-night and comedy programs were beginning to open up to non-white talent and humor, though these efforts were neither wholly progressive nor wholly successful.

Late-night’s fracture from the monolith of Johnny Carson to multiple programs and networks should have meant there was room for everyone. In practice, however, the examples cited above turned out to be exceptional cases. The experiences of people of color largely paralleled women’s experiences. For every “success” story like Eddie Murphy, there were many for whom late-night remained impossible to penetrate or, at best, was accessible only through constant references to the performer’s race.

Among the original “Not Yet Ready for Prime Time Players” of *Saturday Night*, Garrett Morris was the singular person of color. In sketches, Morris performed as a butler, a Dominican

baseball player, and a street-wise neighbor, roles stereotypical for performers of color. He also performed in drag as famous black women, thus cementing the notion that race was a more logical connector between actor and character than gender. (Ironically, what fixed Morris' blackness – that, is drag performances – would come to exhibit *SNL*'s pliable relationship with gender and its unfixity that I describe later in this chapter.)

Histories of *SNL* largely remember the giants of comedy that emerged from its first few seasons, especially those who went onto successful film and television careers: John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Chevy Chase, Bill Murray, and Jane Curtin. Morris is often overlooked; when he is mentioned, it is to note that he was not of the same comedic caliber as his cast mates. For instance, in Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad's history of the series, Morris is described as less bold than Belushi and more likely to drop character mid-sketch. They write that, unlike Aykroyd and Chase, Morris was "not a strong enough performer or writer to impose his own sensibilities on *Saturday Night*" – an idea that presupposes a certain amount of power and agency on the part of Morris.<sup>46</sup> A Juillard-trained musician, Morris was an outlier in a cast largely composed of improv players. Relegated to performing roles for which blackness was a central quality, however, he rarely got a chance to demonstrate any matching virtuosity as an actor. Hill and Weingrad concede that "*Saturday Night* imposed its sensibilities on him, and they were cruel at best, at worst racist."<sup>47</sup> Morris' feelings on the subject of his portrayals of race for *SNL* are historically mixed. In an interview with Tom Shales and James Miller, Morris humbly describes himself "desperately learning the technique that [the other cast members] were masters at" but also as a risk-taker willing to experiment with jokes about race for a good laugh: "If stuff was on the line racially or sexually, I didn't give a damn. You want to try it, let's try it."<sup>48</sup> For many years after his departure from *SNL*, Morris was outspoken about the problems with racial representation on

the show, though in later years he began to speak graciously about how being a part of the cast gave him financial security and made him nationally famous.<sup>49</sup>

Morris left the cast in 1980 during the upheaval that came with Jean Doumanian's retooling of the series. Keeping her cast to the same racial composition as had Lorne Michaels, Doumanian hired only one black performer, stand-up comedian Eddie Murphy. Within his first season on *SNL*, Murphy was promoted from featured player to regular cast member. He quickly became the breakout star among the new cast and was one of only two performers (along with Joe Piscopo) to keep his job after Doumanian's departure. As the centerpiece of the series, Murphy even hosted an episode of the show in 1982 although he was part of the regular cast. In his cold open, in lieu of the traditional phrase, "Live from New York, it's Saturday Night," Murphy fittingly declared, "Live from New York, it's the Eddie Murphy show!"<sup>50</sup>

Eddie Murphy is indisputably one of *SNL*'s greatest success stories, particularly among its performers of color. His star persona was predicated on humor surrounding issues of race above gender, class, and other characteristics. To accomplish this among *SNL*'s largely white cast and writing staff was a noteworthy accomplishment. But, as Bambi Haggins notes, the lack of attention to matters of social class and politics within Murphy's humor was indicative of how his "stardom was a product of the eighties – a time when progressive and regressive representations of blackness were intertwined in the rhetoric of Reagan America" and "truly contentious sociocultural critique did not play well in mainstream popular culture."<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Murphy had begun to receive other, more lucrative offers that interfered with the need to be in New York for a live broadcast each week. Murphy released his first film, *48 Hours* (dir. Walter Hill) in 1982, after which he signed a three-picture deal with Paramount.<sup>52</sup> In 1983 he hosted the Emmy awards show with Joan Rivers and starred in the film



*Trading Places* (dir. John Landis) with *SNL* alumnus Dan Aykroyd. After the success of *Trading Places*, Paramount signed a contract with him for an additional five movies.<sup>53</sup> His biggest film to date, *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984, dir. Martin Brest), was in production as *SNL* was stalled for renewal for its 1983-84 season. Dick Ebersol, along with other NBC executives, feared that *SNL* could not survive without Murphy. Murphy and Ebersol came to an agreement that Murphy could tape half of the sketches in which he appeared before the live broadcast, an agreement that enabled him to continue as part of the cast and that resulted in the immediate renewal of the series.<sup>54</sup>

During his time on *SNL*, Murphy, like Garrett Morris, performed in sketches that called attention to his black identity. His greater success can be attributed to many factors, such as the synergy of a different cast and writing staff or a changing American culture. For many, the fact that his race seemed secondary to his comedic talents was what drove his success. Wesley Morris remembers Garrett Morris as “black and proud,” someone who “winked and was cool,” but describes Murphy as a “constellation that stood out against the canvas of white actors around him” not because he was black but because he was “incandescent.”<sup>55</sup> Likewise, in a profile of Murphy’s movie successes, Fred Rothenberg repeatedly refers to Murphy as “self-taught,” and quotes Dick Ebersol testifying to Murphy’s natural comedic instincts, as well as his commitment to what was best for any particular character or sketch.<sup>56</sup>

But Murphy’s blackness did factor into the success of his movie career and four seasons with *SNL*. His skill at knowing when to play into jokes about race and when to appear unthreatening to white audiences was the real key to his success. For Racquel Gates, Murphy was a “hybrid figure who blended the brash social satire of comedians like Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor with the more affable, safe, storytelling persona of Bill Cosby.”<sup>57</sup> Bambi Haggins

likewise draws comparisons to *Cosby*, seeing Murphy's humor as positioned in direct opposition "positivist constructions of black comedy" like *The Cosby Show*.<sup>58</sup> Murphy's hybrid identity resulted in the performance of blackness that white audiences could read and understand, but that felt politically tinged enough to satisfy the edgy humor *SNL* audiences desired. The repeated sketch "Mr. Robinson's Neighborhood," for instance, was a ghettoized version of the beloved PBS series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (1968-2001). Murphy's character, Mr. Robinson, talks to children in the same way that Fred Rogers did, but he speaks about the poor economy, takes packages from drug dealers, and dodges his landlord because he doesn't have rent money [Figure 4.6].<sup>59</sup> As social satire, "Mr. Robinson's Neighborhood" was critical of Reagan's domestic policies that disenfranchised minorities and the working class, and so liberal white audiences could laugh at the sketches in appreciation of the critique. At the same time, "Mr. Robinson's Neighborhood" makes humor out of ghetto life, and part of the pleasure in watching comes from the titillation of laughing at black misfortunes.



*Figure 4.6. Mr. Robinson (Eddie Murphy) teaches the boys and girls important vocabulary for surviving ghetto life.*

Another popular repeated sketch was a spoof of *Our Gang/The Little Rascals*, a series of short films that were syndicated as a television comedy in the 1950s and which had been adapted as a Saturday morning cartoon in the 1980s.<sup>60</sup> In the *Saturday Night Live* version, Murphy played an adult version of the character Buckwheat. For Bambi Haggins, the Buckwheat character exemplifies that “when Eddie Murphy did engage with representations of African Americans in popular culture, his impressions were encased in routines that only halfheartedly confronted the media mechanisms that perpetuated minstrel archetypes.”<sup>61</sup> Buckwheat wore his hair in an Afro and spoke with the speech impediment of the child version of the character, infantilizing this new adult version. As with his portrayal of Mr. Robinson, Murphy’s performance of Buckwheat was as much a critique of black stereotypes as it was a reiteration of them.

Murphy was aware of his position as the black man who needed to be unassuming to white audiences but also politically edgy. In a 1981 *Weekend Update* segment about eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds registering for the draft, Murphy, who was nineteen at the time, appeared as a commentator. Candidly calling attention to Doumanian’s casting policy, he asked, “If I’m drafted, who’s going to be the token black on *Saturday Night Live*?”<sup>62</sup> Murphy then asks who will perform as other famous black men and briefly offers his impressions of Ray Charles and Bill Cosby. Murphy concludes by holding up a picture of Garrett Morris and suggested that he would make a better draftee since, unlike Murphy, he had plenty of free time – implying that Morris’ career had been nonexistent after his departure from the show [Figure 4.7]. The comment calls attention to *SNL*’s tendency toward tokenism while pitting one black actor against another in competition for the role of the token.



*Figure 4.7. Eddie Murphy suggests Garrett Morris is more suitable to be drafted into military service.*

After Murphy departed in 1984 to concentrate on his growing film career, *Saturday Night Live* continued its troubling legacy of racial exclusion. In the 1985-86 season, both Damon Wayans and Danitra Vance were among the cast; both left after only a season. Wayans was reportedly fired for performing a character as gay against the written script.<sup>63</sup> After Wayans and Vance departed, the series did not feature another African-American performer until 1990, when stand-up comedian Chris Rock became a series regular.

While performers of color struggled to find work on *SNL*, the fledgling network Fox offered them new opportunities.<sup>64</sup> After Damon Wayans left *SNL*, he and his brother Keenan Ivory Wayans created a sketch variety show for Fox's primetime lineup.<sup>65</sup> In many ways, *In Living Color* (1990-94) patterned itself after *Saturday Night Live* with a regular cast, musical acts, and the repetition of popular sketches. The Wayans brothers were keenly aware that the primary distinction between *In Living Color* and *SNL* was the former's showcasing of performers of color for Fox's targeted urban, racially diverse audience. Its racially and ethnically diverse cast and production team enabled the series to call attention to race in ways unprecedented on

*Saturday Night Live*. After hearing the race-driven comedy examining the plight of black men being performed by Paul Mooney, producer Keenan Ivory Wayans reportedly instructed the writing staff of *In Living Color* to infuse similar racially-driven humor into the show's sketches.<sup>66</sup> Mooney, who was also hired as a writer for the show, claims that the popularity of this kind of humor was that it relieved both white and black audiences to talk so candidly about race.<sup>67</sup> Mooney also describes his brand of humor as a "nuclear bomb" and argues that – perhaps because of its taboo and sensitive nature – race is the funniest subject for American comedy.<sup>68</sup>

Sketches tried to portray a range of black experiences by foregrounding race and race-related social consequences. Recurring sketches included Homey D. Clown, a black man on a prison release program working as a clown, who often resorted to simply hitting children when he lost patience with them and who popularized the catchphrase "Homey don't play that."

Another repeated sketch was "Men on Films" (later "Men on" a variety of cultural subjects), in which two flamboyantly gay men offered critical reviews of films largely based on the sex appeal of various actors [Figure 4.8]. While Damon Wayans' improvisation of a gay character had created tension with Lorne Michaels at *SNL* that eventually led to his dismissal, his portrayal of the flamboyant, lisping Blaine Edwards of "Men on Films" was one of *In Living Color*'s more popular and frequently repeated sketches. The "Men on..." segments begin with the Weather Girls' pop song "It's Raining Men." Wayans' Edwards, along with David Alan Grier's Antoine Merriweather, discuss facets of culture (such as "Men on Football" and "Men on Television"), and their evaluations always hinge upon the sex appeal of men involved in these cultural pursuits. For instance, in the first "Men on Films" sketch, Antoine Merriweather approves of *Karate Kid III* (1989, John Avildsen) because "it's all about men working out their problems in a very physical way."<sup>69</sup> Blaine Edwards thinks the film has too much violence and

missed an opportunity to be “a beautiful picture about a special relationship between a mature, masculine, older man and a tender, ripening, younger man.” The lines are delivered to make the innuendo clear to the audience. In his review of the series, John O’Connor notes that the “Men on...” hosts have great potential to come off as offensive through their portrayals of gay male stereotypes. However, he concedes that the talents of Wayans and cast mate David Alan Grier make Antoine and Blaine “two of the more likable regular characters on the show.”<sup>70</sup> Through the combination of likeability and provocation, sketches like “Men on Films” show the investment *In Living Color* had in courting young, urban audiences and rejecting the safe, middlebrow humor of *SNL* (a mission that was not unlike *SNL*’s original mission to contrast itself from *The Carol Burnett Show*). The differences between *In Living Color* and *SNL* also call attention to how *SNL*’s understanding of middlebrow humor is a white, straight, male humor.



*Figure 4.8. Blaine and Antoine discuss the merits of recent films in front of a backdrop of men in the first “Men on...” sketch.*

*In Living Color* helped solidify Fox as the fourth broadcast network and the network most committed to racially diverse audiences. Many of its performers went onto successful film and television careers.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, *In Living Color* was much less successful than *Saturday Night Live*: it never reached the top fifty programs, and its run was a mere five seasons. Its broadcast during primetime reiterated the notion that African-American representation was changing on television, though late-night remained largely out of bounds.

New ground was being gained in late-night in other arenas. After Joan Rivers was fired from her late-night talk show on Fox in 1987, Arsenio Hall was tapped to as one of several temporary hosts. This led to him landing his own series, *The Arsenio Hall Show* (1989-94), for first-run syndication. As the first black person to host his own late-night series (and still one of few), Hall provided much needed visibility for African-Americans on the late-night circuit. While *The Tonight Show* aimed for mass appeal with popular celebrity guests and middle-class, middle-brow humor, Arsenio Hall's talk show distinguished itself as one with a "hip and casual approach" and guests who were "not usually invited to participate on other talk shows" in an attempt to capture a narrower, but lucrative, youth demographic.<sup>72</sup> The most remembered moment on the program was the appearance in 1992 of Bill Clinton, then the Democratic nominee for president.<sup>73</sup> Wearing sunglasses, Clinton played his saxophone, a moment that reiterated his coolness as well as his comfort at being in a racially mixed environment [Figure 4.9]. The appearance was also "information-rich, making generational and racial points simultaneously."<sup>74</sup> Clinton's willingness to appear on the program lent legitimacy to Arsenio Hall as host and in particular, demonstrated an understanding that Carson's successor, Jay Leno, would have been "too square" to boost Clinton's image with young voters.<sup>75</sup> (Even NBC's Brandon Tartikoff described Leno as the "Dutiful Son" and Arsenio Hall as the "Smart, Funny

Guy in the Back of the Class.”<sup>76</sup>) It also lent legitimacy to first-run syndicated programming in the midst of a changing television landscape.



*Figure 4.9. Arsenio Hall points to a very cool Bill Clinton on the June 3, 1992, episode of his syndicated show.*

*The Arsenio Hall Show* was canceled in 1994 due to declining audiences, a result of several changes to television at the end of the long 1980s. First, growing cable networks like MTV and Comedy Central offered other programming options for hip, urban, diverse audiences. For a brief period of time, Arsenio Hall was the singular representation of blackness on late-night, but he was also a representation of youth and the anti-mainstream. The cancelation of *The Arsenio Hall Show* also left viewers without cable the classic dilemma of weekday late-night in the early 1990s: Leno or Letterman? At a time when comedy programming was trying to diversify, comedy by white men and mostly for white men continued to dominate.

While comedians of color had varying degrees of success within late-night during the long 1980s, Eddie Murphy remains the biggest success story. His success on *Saturday Night Live* and in feature films is tempered by the contradictory experiences all African-American cast



members have had on *SNL* across late-night programming in the long 1980s. Like Joan Rivers, Murphy is one example of the ways in which comedy was open to the successes of those who were not white men of certain means. But also like Rivers, Murphy's star power is in many ways the exception that proves the rule – comedy and race in the long 1980s were, for most other performers, a troubled marriage.

### “Girlie Man”: Complicating Masculinities through Virtuoso Performances

While matters of race and gender equality in late-night programming remained ambivalent, performances of gender were complicated by the virtuosity of late-night comedians, who performed effeminate heterosexuals, hypermasculine twerps, and gender non-binary persons. All of these performances were further complicated and informed by the performers' own identities. Continuing the reworking of gender roles that happened in primetime domestic sitcoms and dramas, comedy programs enabled men to laugh at their own and other men's feelings of emasculation through images of hypermasculinity, cross-dressing, and gender indecipherability.

President Jimmy Carter's lack of masculine bravado provided an easy target for jokes about the relationship between men and success. In one of his opening monologues on *The Tonight Show* in 1978, Johnny Carson began with the self-deprecating introduction, “I'm Johnny Carson, the Jimmy Carter of comedy. What I mean by that is I promise you laughter, but you got to remember I can't do everything in one year.”<sup>77</sup> Carson's monologue continued with an emphasis on Carter's lack of success as president, with the prediction that he would not be reelected (and, indeed, he was not).

Other jokes simultaneously mocked women and men who felt threatened by women's competence. One of the repeated sketches that had helped make *Saturday Night Live* popular in its first seasons, "Point/Counterpoint," featured Jane Curtin and Dan Aykroyd recapping the week's news and debating about it. The structure of the segment is that one of the two relays a current event, after which Curtin offers insightful but acerbic commentary. Aykroyd immediately dismisses her with the line, "Jane, you ignorant slut," which results in audience laughter. The humor is as much about cutting down Curtin as an intelligent woman as it is mocking Aykroyd's feelings of emasculation that propel him to slander her sexuality. By the 1980s, Curtin and Aykroyd had both left *SNL*, but the series continued to use similar jokes that insulted both women and men who felt insulted by women.

Mockery of hypermasculinity was common on *Saturday Night Live* despite backstage accounts that the series itself was run in a masculinist, if not outright misogynist, fashion. It was assumed, and even expressed aloud by at least some members of the cast and writing staff, that women weren't as funny as men.<sup>78</sup> But on screen, sketches mocked the overcompensation some men felt necessary in response to the changing social dynamic that gave women more power and access in society. The 1987-90 sketch "Pumping Up with Hans and Franz," for instance, lampooned Arnold Schwarzenegger's fame as bodybuilder. Hans and Franz were performed by Dana Carvey and Kevin Nealon in sweatsuits stuffed with padding to make them look muscular. The characters were two Austrian bodybuilders who claimed to be Schwarzenegger's cousins and who attempted to sell home training videos to strike it rich. Their repeated pledge, "We want to pump you up," comprised the bulk of their sketches with little actual physical training featured. As Hans and Franz say, no one wants to be a "girlie man." The need for "pumping up" comes

from anxieties about losing masculine power, using the body to supplement a decline of cultural and political power men experienced in the 1980s.

The characters Hans and Franz, their Austrian accents, and their unabashed adoration for their famous cousin draw upon Schwarznegger as the “icon of muscular masculinity” in the 1980s.<sup>79</sup> Although Schwarznegger entered American popular culture as the image of a foreign national with a thick accent, his star quality, Ellexis Boyle argues, soon shifted to personify American masculinity and manhood, rather than foreign other.<sup>80</sup> Schwarznegger campaigned for George H.W. Bush during his presidential run in 1988, lending the more languid Bush his muscle and might. When Hans and Franz celebrate Schwarznegger, they are, on the surface, praising this Republican view in which masculinity, muscles, and nationhood become entangled. Yet the “Pumping Up” sketches encourage the audience to laugh at Hans and Franz’s obsessions (body-building and Schwarznegger), and the characters are played by Nealon and Carvey, neither of whom was very muscular, as their stuffed sweatsuits attest. Carvey stands nearly a foot shorter than Nealon, making him look more like a boy desperately trying to prove his manhood than a formidable, formed macho man.

In a 1991 installment of “Pumping Up,” Hans and Franz travel with their cousin Arnold on his national tour to promote physical fitness among young people, but Schwarznegger (who plays himself in the sketch) grows frustrated that Hans and Franz only want to show off their muscles instead of talking about exercise [Figure 4.10].<sup>81</sup> Schwarznegger chastens the two bodybuilders, but the sketch concludes with him joining them in flexing their pectorals. Nealon and Carvey pull poorly concealed strings underneath their sweatsuits that move the padding, but Schwarznegger uses his own muscle as the audience cheers. The sketch reveals the complexity of *Saturday Night Live*’s relationship to hypermasculinity. While the conclusion is a celebration

of muscular prowess, the bulk of this sketch and other “Pumping Up with Hans and Franz” sketches encourage men to laugh at the desperation of hypermasculinity.



*Figure 4.10. Arnold Schwarzenegger tells Hans and Franz to stop showing off.*

This does not mean *SNL* was patently accepting of other masculinities; in many sketches, queerness and non-normativity are laughed at. However, the ambivalence with which *SNL* depicted masculinity in the long 1980s ultimately comes to signify a lack of certitude about the place of hegemonic masculinity in American culture. Just as “Pumping Up” mocked machismo, “Sprockets,” a sketch seen from 1989-93, mocked male androgyny. Like “Pumping Up,” “Sprockets” used the veil of foreign characters with thick accents to allegorize American masculinity. Mike Myers performed as Dieter, a West German who wore tight, all-black clothing and had a pet monkey named Klaus. “Sprockets” intended to lampoon the West German art scene through its use of music from the electronic band Kraftwerk and Dieter’s fashionable disinterest in the world around him. As an American take on German culture, “Sprockets” implies the inherent queerness of the foreign other. Dieter, for instance, describes being happy as

feeling “like a little girl,” a point he makes visual by pinching his shirt to simulate small breasts [Figure 4.11].<sup>82</sup> He offers guests the chance to “touch his monkey,” a double entendre catchphrase indicating his arousal as well as Klaus’ physical presence on stage. Each “Sprockets” sketch concludes with Dieter and friends dancing to electronic music in peculiar, jerky motions. As the audience laughs at “Sprockets,” they are assured that American men have not become as feminized as Dieter. By asserting the queerness of Germans, *SNL* reifies the heterosexuality and machismo of American masculinity.



*Figure 4.11. Dieter equates happiness with femininity and visualizes this relationship through protruding breasts.*

Although, like “Pumping Up,” “Sprockets” is ostensibly a parody of other cultures, it can be read as a commentary on American masculinity through its place on American television and its casting of an American comedian. Myers’ willingness to play Dieter – indeed, his efficacy at it – shows a flexibility in his own performance of masculinity that would be further highlighted in his portrayal of Linda Richman, an exaggerated New York Jew on the “Coffee Talk” sketches (1991-94). Myers based Linda Richman on his mother-in-law, even giving her the same name, but his performance in drag exceeds a simple homage. He executes with precision a

quintessential New York Jewish accent, peppering Linda’s speech with Yiddish. He wears fake nails, which he shows off while fluffing his permed and teased hair.

This double performance of Jewishness and drag hearkens back to television’s earliest days to Milton Berle’s performances. *The Texaco Star Theatre* (NBC, 1948-56) was a vaudeville-style program that, like *SNL*, featured various performers and sketches. Its star, Milton Berle, a Jewish comedian whose career had begun in radio, often played with gender on the program and at times performed in drag. In a 1951 episode, Berle portrayed a newlywed bride who swished her hips and batted her eyelashes.<sup>83</sup> A publicity photograph in 1962 features Berle in drag as Cleopatra [Figure 4.12]. Berle’s drag performances were such a part of his vaudeville television series that he was featured on the cover of *Newsweek* in Carmen Miranda-style drag in 1949; that same week, he was featured on the cover of *Time* in a bow tie and men’s straw hat.<sup>84</sup> As one of the most popular early television stars, Milton Berle (“Uncle Miltie”) was a “fifties patriarch” whose masculinity, Susan Murray argues, was tempered through coded references to his Jewish identity – above all, repeated expressions of love for his mother.<sup>85</sup>



*Figure 4.12. Publicity photo of Milton Berle.*  
*Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, NYWT&S Collection, LC-USZ62-130907.*

Although Mike Myers is not Jewish, the character is a loving but funny tribute to the Jewishness of his mother-in-law. His performances as Linda Richman and Dieter from the “Sprockets” sketches play on the humor of the outsider. Following in the grand tradition of virtuosic television comedians like Milton Berle, Mike Myers’ own masculinity becomes complicated by his performances of Dieter and Linda Richman. The exaggerated characteristics, like Myers’ waving of Linda Richman’s perfectly manicured hands, call as much attention to the underlying masculinity of the performer as they do to the outlying femininity of the character. For Steve Cohan, writing about Danny Kaye, the mixing of “urban humor from stage or vaudeville, gender role-playing from burlesque, and a feminized male persona” has the effect of producing a reading of a performer as “personally heterosexual but culturally queer.”<sup>86</sup> Cohan sees this enacted through Danny Kaye’s manic performances in musicals; for Myers, I argue, it is the range of characters and character types that sketch comedy allowed him to embody that results in this sense of doubled gender and sexual identity.

Other drag performances on *SNL* were used to deflect the actor’s masculinity for the sake of political commentary. Dana Carvey’s “Church Lady,” Enid Strict, was featured multiple times from 1986-1990.<sup>87</sup> The Church Lady was the host of a fictional religious talk show called “Church Chat” that mimicked many popular 1980s televangelist programs on local and small cable networks. In mockery of the Moral Majority, the Church Lady sets out on an overzealous quest to prove that nearly everything in American popular culture is somehow the work of Satan. Sketches point out the often troubling hypocrisy of the religious right as the Church Lady herself often becomes sexually aroused by the very things she is condemning.

In a 1987 installment, the guests on “Church Chat” were evangelical pastor Jim Bakker and his wife Tammy Faye (played by *SNL* regulars Phil Hartman and Jan Hooks).<sup>88</sup> As the real-

life Bakkers faced exposure of their scam to collect money for a religious-themed hotel chain that was never built, while taking millions in bonuses for themselves, the Church Lady exposes their hypocrisy through a line of questioning that catches the Bakkers in their lies [Figure 4.13]. In real life, Jim Bakker was also accused of drugging and raping a secretary some twenty years younger than himself; on “Church Chat,” the Church Lady forces Bakker to rehash the details of this encounter in order to declare herself morally superior to him. The Bakker installment of the Church Lady sketch levels a poignant critique at Bakker’s “prosperity theology,” a particularly Reagan-era notion that excess wealth must be the result of God’s beneficence (as opposed to the reality that it was the result of the Bakkers’ scamming of millions of trusting Americans).<sup>89</sup>



*Figure 4.13. Saturday Night Live parodies the Bakkers remorse: a mascara-streaked Tammy Faye sobs while Jim pleads the audience for forgiveness after the Church Lady’s interrogation.*

A sketch that complicates the Church Lady’s own identity – and by extension Carvey’s – featured actor Rob Lowe as the guest. In 1989 a videotape of Lowe having sex with a sixteen-year-old girl, as well as having a group encounter that included another man, had become publicly available, and copies of the tape and blown-up stills were being sold around the world.<sup>90</sup> A year later, while hosting *Saturday Night Live*, Lowe submitted to the Church Lady’s questioning of his complicity in what she deems an act incited by Satan.<sup>91</sup> At the conclusion of



the sketch, the Church Lady offers corporal punishment as penance; she then proceeds to paddle Lowe while becoming visibly aroused. The sketch condemns Lowe for his non-normative sexuality, but through that condemnation the Church Lady's own sexuality becomes exposed. It is a moment in which Dana Carvey's portrayal of the Church Lady complicates Carvey's own heterosexual masculinity by exposing the Church Lady's/Carvey's interest in Rob Lowe's sex appeal and in the more illicit act of spanking as a sexual practice.

Dana Carvey also performed two sketches called "Lyle, the Effeminate Heterosexual" that interrogate the line between affect and sexual identity. Lyle is a heterosexual man who is married with children, but his lisping speech and flamboyant gestures lead his friends and even his own family to presume he is gay. In both "Lyle" sketches, Lyle partakes in a masculine activity (playing poker with friends and watching a football game). In the first, Lyle is having an affair with another married woman (Jan Hooks), who arrives unexpectedly at his home. His wife (guest host Chris Evert) walks in on Lyle talking to his mistress but does not think anything of it because she assumes Lyle is gay. In the second installment, Lyle receives the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue in the mail and is eager to look at the women's bodies featured within it. Later, his wife (this time played by Julia Sweeney) surprises him with a singing telegram for his birthday. The singer, a black man (Tim Meadows), strips down to a red swimsuit; Lyle's wife has hired a male stripper for her presumed gay husband. Throughout both sketches, Lyle becomes angry when he is accused of being gay and vehemently denies it.<sup>92</sup>

Carvey's performance of Lyle is a form of gender-crossed performance that calls attention to the way sexual identity is read through gender expression. Despite having many of the outward signs of heterosexuality – a wife and children he has sired – Lyle is not read as heterosexual by others. His lisp, cadence, and tendency to examine his fingernails are understood

in the sketches as cultural signs that equate effeminacy with homosexuality, and these signs are more important than Lyle's self-identification or the reality of his marriage to a woman. But the "Lyle" sketches also show a watershed cultural moment. In contrast to the trope of the gay men masquerading in the safety of heterosexual suburbia, Lyle's family and friends are largely supportive of his (mistaken) gay identity. When Lyle's wife hires a stripper for him, she does not see a conflict between their heterosexual marriage and her belief that her husband is gay; disavowal and distaste have evolved into quiet acceptance. Although the "Lyle" sketches trade on stereotypes of the effeminate gay man, they also reveal the ways American society was changing in its attitudes toward homosexuality.

By the end of the long 1980s, *SNL*'s use of drag reached a fever pitch. Taken to its logical end, *SNL*'s depiction of pliable gender culminated in Julia Sweeney's creation of the character Pat, a person of indecipherable gender, in the "It's Pat" sketches (1990-93). Similar to the "Lyle" sketches, "It's Pat" interrogates gender, but there is no gender to correlate with a particular sexuality. Pat's indeterminate gender is a source of constant consternation for others. Julia Sweeney describes developing the character to be an amalgamation of annoying traits she witnessed in both men and women; she insists that she "didn't observe people who were androgynous and then make an androgynous character."<sup>93</sup> For Sweeney, Pat's defining quality was supposed to be Pat's "weirdness" and not Pat's gender presentation.

Within the sketches, Pat's coworkers and neighbors try to determine whether Pat is a man or woman by asking leading questions, but Pat never answers in the expected way. The central source of humor in the Pat sketches is not, as one might expect, Pat's lack of intelligible gender. The real humor comes from the way Pat is able to deflect questions that attempt to decode Pat's gender, whether done knowingly or not. (Sweeney insists that the character is oblivious, not

cunning.<sup>94</sup>) In a 1991 sketch, Pat joins a gym, where the personal trainer, played by guest host Linda Hamilton, must ask a series of questions to complete Pat's enrollment form, including age, height, and finally sex, to which Pat responds, "Yes, please!" [Figure 4.14].<sup>95</sup>



*Figure 4.14. Signing up for a gym membership is difficult for the gender non-conforming Pat.*

While the other characters in the Pat sketches are frustrated by Pat's unreadability, the sketches call into question our cultural obsession with the gender binary. As with the "Lyle" sketches, a theme song sets up the central problem. Images of Lyle throwing a football badly are seen over singers announcing, "he's swishy, yes, it's true / but he's as straight as me and probably you" – thus solving the mystery. No one knows why Lyle is effeminate, but we do know that he is heterosexual. Pat's theme song never answers the central question, "A ma'am or a sir? A him or a her?" The question can only be answered, "It's Pat," which affirms Pat's existence is outside this either/or line of questioning.

In his work on gender and queer theory, J. Halberstam argues that "virtually no body fits the definition of male and female," yet we refuse to recognize new genders, clinging instead to this binary system.<sup>96</sup> For Halberstam, anxieties surrounding Pat's identity could be easily

resolved, not through calculated questions designed to figure out what Pat *is* but through asking what Pat *prefers*.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps Pat prefers to identify as male or female – or perhaps Pat prefers to identify as genderqueer, trans, intersex, or another non-binary position. Because the entirety of each Pat sketch is comprised of others trying to decode Pat, the sketches bring to light anxieties surrounding gender non-fixity in a changing social order. Because Pat always thwarts being defined, the sketches never alleviate these anxieties and gender remains caught in between the binary, as a literal and visual example of a “girlie man.”

### Cross-Media Strategies: Growing the Late-Night Audience

In 1995, a lengthy article in *New York* magazine declared that at twenty years old *Saturday Night Live* wasn't funny anymore.<sup>98</sup> The piece quoted several writers expressing their acknowledgment and dissatisfaction at the show's lack of humor; one unnamed writer even likened *SNL* to the *Titanic*. Worse than these acknowledgements, though, the article claimed many writers and performers remained unaware that the show wasn't funny: “the insularity of the place creates a kind of echo chamber, where they all tell one another the show is funny, and soon they're beyond rationalization and long gone into denial.”<sup>99</sup> The article understandably enraged many involved with *SNL*, including longtime writer and occasional performer Al Franken, frequent host Alec Baldwin, and former cast member Rob Schneider, all of whom wrote letters to the editor in rebuttal. In another letter, Doug Hill, who co-authored a history of *Saturday Night Live* for its tenth anniversary, highlighted the importance of “Lorne Michaels' withdrawal [from the writers' room] and ascension to legend-in-residence” as exemplary of how *Saturday Night Live* had changed. While Hill felt Michaels had already risen to legend at the

time of his own book, Michaels' status apart from the writers and performers certainly demonstrated that, after gaining widespread popularity, *SNL* necessarily lost the renegade quality for which it had originally been created.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the *New York* magazine article's claims, *Saturday Night Live* was not a case study in how comedy, once institutionalized, struggled to find humor; it was a case study in how the television landscape had profoundly changed from the beginning to the end of the long 1980s. Recounting the article and the firestorm it created some ten years later, Marx, Sienkiewicz, and Becker note that while the article "wistfully yearns for the edginess of the original Not Ready for Prime Time Players," what it unknowingly taps into is *SNL*'s "carefully managed edginess" in the "face of growing competition from more demographically attuned outlets on cable, such as HBO and Comedy Central."<sup>101</sup> By the end of the long 1980s, *Saturday Night Live* had survived several turnovers in executive producers, casts, and writers. The series had lived through periods of low ratings and critical disappointments, as well as rebounds during which new cast members were hailed as saving the show. When Lorne Michaels originally created the series with Dick Ebersol, broadcast networks were competing for young, hip viewers on weekends and late nights by throwing together relative outsiders to the television industry who would flout the standard rules of operation in the hopes of creating a program that was unique and edgy. The repetition of sketches with successful characters helped solidify the audience, but once certain characters had become popular, Michaels tended to increase the frequency with which they would appear, rather than allowing the writers and performers to create new material. He assured writers and performers that the audience wasn't as tired of old material as they were. This premise of repetition of proven success demonstrates how *SNL* had

begun to stray from its original mission to be bold, daring, and fresh and had taken up a new mission to remain consistently popular.

By the early 1990s, *Saturday Night Live* was as much an institution as the network on which it was broadcast. Its first season was carried by 144 stations and was seen by approximately 7.5 million people per week.<sup>102</sup> Season five, by contrast, was carried by 215 stations and seen by 18 million per week.<sup>103</sup> The cost of a thirty-second advertising spot during the program had skyrocketed from \$7,500 to \$50-60,000. Michaels had become a major player in television production. Performers selected for the *Saturday Night Live* ensemble understood that a successful stint with the series could lead to lucrative film deals. In fact, the show “not only was the most productive star-maker for a new generation of movie heroes, it was the most imitated and influential program in television comedy.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, those involved in creating *Saturday Night Live* had begun to depart from the audience they originally identified with.

Despite the series’ famed declaration that “Live from New York, it’s Saturday night,” the real success of *SNL* was its recirculated and marketable commodities, which included the ensemble players themselves and favorite sketches turned into feature-length films. By the time they wrote their history of the series in its tenth year, Hill and Weingrad declared that *SNL* was “the most productive starmaker for a new generation of movie heroes.”<sup>105</sup> Justin Whalley sees the box office success of *Animal House* (1978, dir. John Landis), which featured John Belushi among a largely unknown cast, as one of the major developments in *SNL*’s early history that demonstrated its ensemble players were bankable across media.<sup>106</sup> The film’s success contributed to an increase cost for a thirty-second ad spot from \$7,500 to more than \$50,000.<sup>107</sup> A few years later, *Ghostbusters* (1984, dir. Harold Ramis) did the same thing for Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd. Though the characters they played in *Ghostbusters* were not *SNL* characters, Whalley

argues that the film successes of *SNL* actors contributed to further success of *SNL* the television series, and vice versa and ultimately resulted in crafting a star persona for Bill Murray that has led to numerous other profitable project.<sup>108</sup>

As for favorite *SNL* sketches, John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd's "Blues Brothers" sketches were an important first example of how to transition from *SNL* to other profit-making enterprises. Belushi and Aykroyd toured as the Blues Brothers characters in a series of concerts before starring in the eponymous 1980 feature film (dir. John Landis) created out of those performances.<sup>109</sup> It is likely Belushi and Aykroyd would have continued their Blues Brothers concerts and films, had Belushi not died suddenly from an overdose of cocaine and heroin in 1982.

In the growing multichannel landscape, Lorne Michaels "turned *SNL* into a brand that could be flexibly leveraged beyond broadcast."<sup>110</sup> By the end of the long 1980s, it was expected that popular characters and sketches from *Saturday Night Live* would be developed into feature films and that cast members who left the show could expect starring roles in film and television. The sketch "Wayne's World," performed by Mike Myers and Dana Carvey, was turned into a film of the same name and was the eighth most successful film in 1992 for box office revenues. At the time of writing, the film, which cost approximately twenty million dollars to make, had grossed nearly two hundred million worldwide.<sup>111</sup> After *The Blues Brothers*, *Wayne's World* remains the second-highest grossing film based on a *Saturday Night Live* sketch to date.<sup>112</sup> Although the original youth market for *Saturday Night Live* were in their forties by the time *Wayne's World* was released, the film attempted to entice that audience with myriad references to classic rock by Queen and Led Zeppelin; Lorne Michaels thought the 1990s obsession with the 1970s would resonate with audiences the way *American Graffiti* (1973, dir. George Lucas)

had idealized the early 1960s.<sup>113</sup> Advance promotion also demonstrated that youth were still being targeted as audiences: Mike Myers and Dana Carvey appeared as their characters Wayne and Garth for a one-hour special on MTV.<sup>114</sup> This appearance also reveals an integrated approach to media platforms: “Wayne’s World” was about a cable-access show produced in a basement, featured on a late-night comedy series for NBC, turned into a feature-length film that was being advertised on cable.

Lorne Michaels and Brandon Tartikoff reportedly saw *Wayne’s World* as the first new entry in a lineup of films based on *SNL* sketches.<sup>115</sup> Myers’ talent and the success of *Wayne’s World* indeed led to development of other films, including “Sprockets” and “Coffee Talk,” but those films never made it to production.<sup>116</sup> Although some of the movies that did get made were panned by critics, Nick Marx notes that it is the interaction between the “small screen aesthetics of *SNL* and the aesthetics of feature film comedy” that provides the audience “pleasures unavailable in each medium by itself.”<sup>117</sup> Al Franken’s character Stuart Smalley, a self-help guru with queer affect, became the centerpiece of the 1994 film *Stuart Saves His Family*, directed by Harold Ramis. Even Julia Sweeney’s genderqueer Pat got a film deal; *It’s Pat* (dir. Adam Bernstein) was released in 1994.<sup>118</sup> In each case, the goal of the feature film was to expand the audience with a longer narrative and larger budget than the sketches themselves had.

Even *It’s Pat*, which was written by Sweeney and her collaborators to be a quirky indie film for an “upscale, hipper audience,” was given a nationwide release by distributor Buena Vista Pictures.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the unconventional gender presentation Pat brings to light, the film did not succeed with a mainstream audience. Film critic Kevin Thomas finds the intention behind the film heart-warming, observing that the film offers “a simple message of self-acceptance, asserting that what counts is who you are rather than what your



gender may or may not be.”<sup>120</sup> But for Thomas, the downfall of the narrative is Pat’s determination to be “unduly coy” about Pat’s gender “in these forthright times.”<sup>121</sup> Writing for *Variety*, Joe Leydon declares Julia Sweeney “has almost perversely turned the relatively harmless TV character into a boorish, egotistical creep for the bigscreen [sic].”<sup>122</sup> Both Thomas and Leydon note the possibility for *It’s Pat* to demystify gender androgyny but cite a lackluster screenplay rooted on the simple gag that Pat cannot be read as a major part of the film’s failure (along with critiques of the acting and directing).<sup>123</sup>

The failure of *It’s Pat* at the end of the long 1980s marks the intersection of *SNL*’s success at sketches depicting gender non-conformity and *SNL*’s business model to spin characters into their own films and drive audiences out of the living room and into the movie theater. *SNL*’s masculinity in the long 1980s was complicated, challenging heteronormative ideals through performances of supremely talented men. Sweeney, the lone woman ensemble member who played with gender in such a way, was given a much smaller film budget and a much more complicated premise to sell to mainstream America than the Blues Brothers’ capers through Chicago or Wayne and Garth’s adventures breaking into television. *Saturday Night Live* began to ease up on sketches involving cross-dressing or complicating masculine ideals after the long 1980s while the movies that came from the series stuck to the simple formula of depicting machismo and encouraging the audience to laugh at it without much deep critique.

Many of the ensemble members had blossoming film and television careers apart from characters and sketches they had created on *SNL*. In the early 1990s there was a frenzy to make films with veterans of sketch variety shows like *In Living Color* and *SNL*. Damon Wayans, Jim Carrey, and Dana Carvey all ended the long 1980s with movie deals, and early *SNL* cast members like Bill Murray and Chevy Chase continued to crank out feature film hits.

## Conclusion: Late-Night Clashes with Politics

As these veterans of a handful of television series on broadcast networks scattered to new outlets, Johnny Carson announced that he would retire from *The Tonight Show* after thirty years. Many had anticipated his retirement for years, but Carson carried his status as the king of late-night to the end of the long 1980s. His announcement coincided with two key changes that Bill Carter sees as shaping his sense of dissatisfaction. First, Brandon Tartikoff had left NBC for Paramount, which meant Carson's next round of contract negotiations would be handled by an executive he was less intimate with.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, affiliate stations had for years requested more time for the evening news, and NBC finally responded in 1991 by pushing back the start time of *The Tonight Show* five minutes.<sup>125</sup> Although the move prevented stations from dropping the show all together for cheaper sitcom reruns, for Carson it meant his program would begin five minutes later than ABC's *Nightline* (1980-2013) and *CBS Late Night/The CBS Late Movie* (1972-1993).<sup>126</sup> Carson commented on his displeasure with the five-minute delay in his opening monologue. Carson's *Tonight Show*, and later the back-to-back lineup of *The Tonight Show* and David Letterman's *Late Night* had made NBC the locus of weekday late-night viewing. (The broadcasting of *SNL*, of course, meant NBC captured late-night viewers all week.) After Carson's retirement, viewers had a variety of comedy show forms and comedy styles to watch, from Jay Leno's *The Tonight Show* to rival David Letterman's *Late Show* on CBS to Arsenio Hall's syndicated talk show, from *In Living Color* on broadcast primetime to *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1989-96) on the newly formed pay cable channel Comedy Central, from *Saturday Night Live* to the movie theater. This plethora of options meant more precise demographic

targeting. Where once Carson had been the late-night everyman who was welcomed into every American home, by the end of the long 1980s, comedy forms across television became less concerned with making everyone laugh and granted the freedom to target certain audiences through particular kinds of humor that may have been offensive to others. “Political correctness” became a household phrase in the early 1990s, thanks in part to a several articles in the *New York Times* that introduced the idea as cultural sensitivity or cultural policing.<sup>127</sup> As the long 1980s dwindled to a close, Carson’s everyman style, much like Reagan’s simplification of “America,” seemed less inclusive than exclusive.

At the same time, Bill Clinton’s campaign for president was closely shadowed by aspiring First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. With her equal years’ experience at law and activism and her own legislative agenda to pursue, Rodham Clinton was feared by many conservatives as an unelected co-president.<sup>128</sup> Where the Clintons seemed to work in tandem as a couple, the battle of the sexes was playing out in 1991 with Supreme Court justice nominee Clarence Thomas and the accusations Anita Hill brought of sexual harassment. Hill’s claims brought sexual harassment to the media foreground, with Americans declaring themselves on one side of the accusations or another. This was especially emblemized by an episode of the CBS sitcom *Designing Women* (1986-93) in which the central characters appear at their workplace in t-shirts reading “He did it” and “She lied” [Figure 4.15].<sup>129</sup>



*Figure 4.15. Designing Women's Mary Jo (Annie Potts) wears a shirt declaring Clarence Thomas' guilt.*

1991 also marked the year that African-American taxi driver Rodney King was beaten by police officers, an event caught on videotape and disseminated across national news. Several officers involved were charged with use of excessive force and assault, but all were acquitted. In 1992, following the acquittals, King's hometown of Los Angeles exploded into riots that left more than forty people dead, over two thousand injured, and an estimated one billion dollars in property damage over six days.<sup>130</sup> The riots were only finally suppressed when the National Guard entered the scene. Later, in a federal trial, two of the officers were found guilty of violating King's civil rights, a verdict that mitigated some of the violence and tensions in Los Angeles. In total, however, the damage to King and to the city of Los Angeles – not to mention to race relations in the United States – had already been done.

In a 1993 episode of *Saturday Night Live*, African-American comedian Chris Rock portrayed a character named Nipsey Russell, decked out in a 1970s-style leisure suit. Nipsey visits "Weekend Update" to comment on the federal civil rights trial, in which two of the officers responsible for assaulting King were found guilty.<sup>131</sup> Within the poem, Russell/Rock finds it convenient that a civilian managed to videotape the police officers beating King, so that King

could become a national celebrity, implying that King had intentionally gotten himself beaten for the later fame he would receive. The poem concludes with Russell/Rock's lament that because two officers were found guilty (although two others were not), there would not be another round of riots in Los Angeles, and he would not be able to benefit from the looting to get himself a new television. The caricature of a black person out of fashion and time, excited by the potential boon of looting and criticizing King as the face of racial tensions, leaves an ambiguous message about the King incident. If King's brutal beating and the subsequent media coverage of King and the officers' trial served, as Metcalf and Spaulding claim, as "palpable evidence of racialized police brutality, stereotyping of African Americans, and unsanctioned racial segregation," then Chris Rock's/Nipsey Russell's poem commemorating the event certainly did little to discount that evidence.<sup>132</sup>

It is noteworthy that two of the biggest media events at the end of the long 1980s involved the suffering of African-Americans. Rodney King's assault by white police officers called national attention to the fractures in race between community and civil servants. It further highlighted the difference in the way American men had seen their place evolve in the Reagan era. Much of the angst and ennui white (and heterosexual) men experienced resulted from their own misgivings about a changing social order, rather than legitimate dethroning from their position of power. King's arrest, beating, and the riots that ensued reminded Americans that the experiences of black men, as well as men of other racial and ethnic minorities, were legitimately second class – and thus reiterated the privileged position from which white men were able to complain about being left behind by society. Both Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas were African-American and highly educated, granting them certain privileges in society not afforded to those with lesser educations and incomes. Thomas' position as Supreme Court nominee

contrasts King's lowly position as taxi cab driver, a separation further reiterated by the claims of sexual harassment (since one must be in a position of power in order to sexually harass). Hill's experiences as someone sexually harassed by a superior and, more so, as a woman whose accusations were laughed at, denied, and disbelieved by a large segment of the American media and population again reify the masculine position of power. To disbelieve Anita Hill is to assert men's power and privilege through disavowal and denial.

Sexual harassment, a distinctly unfunny situation, was a subject that late-night comedy exploited. In one of the shows in the final season before his retirement, Johnny Carson mentioned the Thomas-Hill incident in his nightly stand-up monologue.<sup>133</sup> To position himself as neutral and sympathetic to women viewers, Carson quickly notes that sexual harassment is "serious business" and asks women in the audience to applaud if they have also been sexually harassed. There is a loud round of applause from the vast number of women in the audience who have. But Carson quickly makes a joke about how men are routinely harassed by women in the workplace, showing no real understanding of what Hill claimed to have experienced. *Saturday Night Live* was less interested in remaining in good taste. A sketch featuring Ellen Cleghorne as Hill and Tim Meadows as Thomas in a 1991 episode depicts the entirely white Senate committee investigating him as more interested in learning his pick-up techniques than censuring his inappropriate (and illegal) behavior [Figure 4.16].<sup>134</sup> Later in the same episode, Chris Rock offers his commentary on the "Weekend Update" segment: that Clarence Thomas' real crime was that he did not attempt to seduce someone more attractive than Anita Hill.<sup>135</sup> Both *The Tonight Show* and *Saturday Night Live* positioned themselves from a male point of view, further contributing to a culture that disbelieves and mistrusts women who make claims about sexual harassment.



*Figure 4.16. A stoic Thomas patiently explains to a committee of lustful senators how to ask women on dates.*

Like the Los Angeles riots, the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings serve as a fitting end to comedy in the long 1980s. While series like *Saturday Night Live* had initially been making strides at targeting audiences based on age, rather than sex or gender, the Thomas-Hill incident serves as a cold reminder that late-night comedy favored white, straight men and their experiences. Nielsen reports on television viewing habits by gender indicated that late-night was the least watched “daypart” (division of the daily schedule) for both non-working and working women, and the content of sketches like SNL’s interpretation of the Thomas hearings reveals how late-night was much less sensitive to women’s experiences.<sup>136</sup> Although drag performances that encouraged men to laugh at hypermasculinity and accept gender non-conformity presented new possibilities for masculinities, responses to significant social and political crisis like the L.A. riots or the Thomas hearings equally reiterated the privileged viewing position of the white man.

And so the long 1980s concluded in a firestorm of events that called attention to the disparities between men and women, between whites and blacks, through prolonged televisual coverage of events that were not funny. Comedians were forced to either seek humor in these quite serious and controversial events, risking criticisms of “going too far” or taking sides, or to

ignore them all together and potentially seeming out of touch with current events. Each choice, however, helped to fracture audiences based on racial, gender, or ideological lines. As part of television's investment in masculinity in the long 1980s, late-night comedy serves as a critical example in how efforts to narrowcast resulted in examinations of complex and sometimes queer masculinities. The fracturing of audiences in the Leno/Letterman split that followed Johnny Carson's retirement reified white heterosexual masculinity on broadcast networks, both in front of and behind the cameras; however, challenges to this kind of masculinity were rearing their head in daily news and in new forms of entertainment, such as syndicated programs and new cable networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell L. Peterson, "Strange Bedfellows: The Politics of Late-Night Television Comedy," *Poroi* 5, no. 1 (2008): 66.

<sup>2</sup> Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *The Tonight Show*, "Episode 13.190," NBC, September 26, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Joel Sternberg, "Johnny Carson," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 319.

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Fry, "The Tonight Show," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 3, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1689.

<sup>8</sup> "A New Network Tries to Out-Fox NBC," *People*, May 26, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Ed McMahon and Carroll Carroll, *Here's Ed* (Toronto: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Bushkin, *Johnny Carson* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Brandon Tartikoff and Charles Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride* (New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1992), 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Timothy White, "Johnny Carson," *Rolling Stone*, March 22, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Carson's skillful negotiations with NBC are detailed in Bushkin, *Johnny Carson*, 104-119.

<sup>15</sup> Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad, *Saturday Night: A Backstage History of Saturday Night Live* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Ribowsky, *Howard Cosell: The Man, the Myth, and the Transformation of American Sports* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> *The Carol Burnett Show*, "Episode 9.6," CBS, October 18, 1975.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



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- <sup>21</sup> Memo from NBC president Herb Schlosser dated February 11, 1974, quoted in Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 31.
- <sup>22</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 103.
- <sup>23</sup> After its run on Fox, *MadTV* was syndicated on Comedy Central, a move that demonstrates the hunger comedy audiences had for sketch programs. In 2016, a reunion special aired on the CW, which later announced it was reviving the series for an eight-episode run; the broadcast seasons from Fox could be viewed via the CW's digital platform, CW Seed. See Tim Baysinger, "MadTV Is Coming Back to Television, but Not in Late Night and Not on Fox," *Ad Week*, April 11, 2016.
- <sup>24</sup> Michele Hilmes, "The Evolution of Saturday Night," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Siekiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 37.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Letterman's Space Age Meats was the production company for *Late Night with David Letterman* from 1982-90. This was followed by Worldwide Pants, his production company that also produced his CBS *Late Show* and popular television series like *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996-2005).
- <sup>27</sup> Tom Shales, "Michaels Leaving 'Saturday Night,'" *Washington Post*, June 14, 1980, D1-2. The idea that contract renewals might result in a cast upheaval was predicted a year earlier in John Mariani, "Saturday Night Moribund," *TV Guide*, August 25, 1979.
- <sup>28</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 415. Tom Shales reported on speculations that the retooled series under Doumanian would not be successful. See Shales, "Born-Again 'Saturday Night,'" *Washington Post*, November 15, 1980. It is worth noting that within the article, Bill Murray voices his confidence in Doumanian's abilities and dissatisfaction with the vitriol against her.
- <sup>29</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Elliott Gould/Kid Creole and the Coconuts," NBC, November 15, 1980.
- <sup>30</sup> John Carmody, "The TV Column," *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, November 19, 1980, E12.
- <sup>31</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Charlene Tilton/Todd Rundgren/Prince," NBC, February 21, 1981.
- <sup>32</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 415.
- <sup>33</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Bill Murray/Delbert Clinton," NBC, March 7, 1981.
- <sup>34</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Jr. Walker and the All-Stars," NBC, April 11, 1981.
- <sup>35</sup> Jeffrey S. Miller, "What Closes on Saturday Night: NBC and Satire," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 203.
- <sup>36</sup> Tony Schwartz, "'Saturday Night Live' Loses Cast and Producer," *New York Times*, June 17, 1980, C17.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Caryn Murphy, "'Is This the Era of the Woman?': SNL's Gendered Politics in the New Millennium," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Siekiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 177.
- <sup>39</sup> The Linster, "Jane Curtin Mince No Words about Sexism on 'Saturday Night Live,'" *AfterEllen*, April 13, 2011.
- <sup>40</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Andrew Dice Clay/Julee Cruise/Spanic Boys," May 12, 1990.
- <sup>41</sup> According to Andrew Dice Clay, the ban was lifted in 2011. See *Watch What Happens Live After Show*, "Kathy Walkile and Andrew Dice Clay," Bravo, September 15, 2013.
- <sup>42</sup> Murphy, "'Is This the Era of the Woman?'," 178.
- <sup>43</sup> Joan Rivers, "Can We Talk?," *People*, May 26, 1986.
- <sup>44</sup> "A New Network."

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<sup>45</sup> The ban did not last throughout Joan Rivers' life. Despite Johnny Carson's wishes, host Jimmy Fallon (2014- ) had Rivers appear in a brief cameo during his first episode as host on February 17, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Shales and James Andrew Miller, *Live from New York: The Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Geoff Berkshire, "Garrett Morris Talks Early Days with 'Saturday Night Live,' 'Bible Salesman,'" *Variety*, March 17, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Eddie Murphy/Lionel Richie," NBC, December 11, 1982. Murphy stepped in when the scheduled host, Nick Nolte, canceled due to illness. Nolte and Murphy starred together in the film *48 Hours* (dir. Walter Hill), which had premiered the day before.

<sup>51</sup> Bambi Haggins, *Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 75.

<sup>52</sup> "Murphy OKs a Fourth Season on 'Saturday Night Live,'" *Jet*, May 9, 1983, 56.

<sup>53</sup> Fred Rothenberg, "'Self-Taught' Comedian Hasn't Forgotten TV Roots," *The Town Talk*, October 1, 1983, 77.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Wesley Morris, "The Problem of the Black Cast Member on 'SNL,'" *Grantland*, August 26, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Rothenberg, "'Self-Taught Comedian,'" 77.

<sup>57</sup> Racquel Gates, "Bringing the Black: Eddie Murphy and African-American Humor on *Saturday Night Live*," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Siekiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 151.

<sup>58</sup> Haggins, *Laughing Mad*, 75.

<sup>59</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Michael Palin/The Motels," NBC, January 21, 1984.

<sup>60</sup> *Our Gang* began as short films released from 1922-1938. The films were syndicated on television under the title *The Little Rascals* beginning in 1955. The Saturday morning cartoon version, also called *The Little Rascals*, aired on ABC from 1982-84, the same time period as the *Saturday Night Live* spoof.

<sup>61</sup> Haggins, *Laughing Mad*, 71.

<sup>62</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Ray Sharkey/Jack Bruce and Friends," NBC, January 10, 1981.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with Wayans and other cast members indicate the problem was not the character's sexuality but that the sexuality was improvised, which sabotaged the other performers in the sketch who were not expecting this twist. See Shales and Miller, *Live from New York*, 327.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Jamal Warner (of *The Cosby Show*) hosted an episode of *Saturday Night Live* with Run DMC, a hip hop group, as the musical guest on October 18, 1986. Alyx Vesey sees this as *SNL*'s strategic attempt to respond to the launch of Fox that same month. See Vesey, "Live Music: Mediating Musical Performances and Discord on *SNL*," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Siekiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 112-129.

<sup>65</sup> In 1992, Fox aired a special live episode of *In Living Color* precisely during the halftime for Super Bowl XXVI, which was being broadcast on CBS. The episode included a "Men on..." sketch focusing on football that can offer an alternative reading of television's biggest sporting event as a homoerotic spectacle. The live broadcast during halftime resulted in a 9% increase in viewers for *In Living Color* while CBS' audience dropped during the halftime show. See Steve

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- Weinstein, "Fox Tackles Super Bowl with Sly Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1992; *In Living Color*, "Homeboy Shopping Network," Fox, January 26, 1992.
- <sup>66</sup> Paul Mooney, *Black Is the New White* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2009), 224.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> DeNeen Brown, "Paul Mooney 'The Godfather of Comedy' Dives into the Racial Divide," *The Washington Post*, July 12, 2012.
- <sup>69</sup> *In Living Color*, "Pilot," Fox, April 15, 1990.
- <sup>70</sup> John O'Connor, "Bringing a Black Sensibility to Comedy in a Series," *New York Times*, May 29, 1980.
- <sup>71</sup> While many of the cast continued careers in television and film as actors and producers, it is worth noting that white comedian Jim Carrey emerged as the series' biggest star. As of the time of writing, Carrey has starred in twenty-seven feature films.
- <sup>72</sup> Gilberto Blasini, "*The Arsenio Hall Show*," *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 89.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Arsenio Hall Show*, first-run syndication, June 3, 1992.
- <sup>74</sup> Edwin Diamond, Martha McKay, Robert Silverman, "Pop Goes Politics: New Media, Interactive Formats, and the 1992 Presidential Campaign," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 37, no. 2 (1993): 257.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.
- <sup>76</sup> Tartikoff and Leerhsen, *The Last Great Ride*, 108, 109.
- <sup>77</sup> *The Tonight Show*, "Episode 17.23," NBC, February 1, 1978.
- <sup>78</sup> Eve Kahn, "Women in the Locker Room at 'Saturday Night Live,'" *New York Times*, February 16, 1992, H30-31.
- <sup>79</sup> Ellexis Boyle, "The Intertextual Terminator: The Role of Film in Branding 'Arnold Schwarzenegger,'" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 1 (2010): 42.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Christian Slater/Bonnie Raitt," NBC, October 26, 1991.
- <sup>82</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Rob Lowe/The Pogues," NBC, March 17, 1990.
- <sup>83</sup> *Texaco Star Theatre*, "Episode 3.37," NBC, May 29, 1951.
- <sup>84</sup> *Newsweek*, May 16, 1949. *Time*, May 16, 1949.
- <sup>85</sup> Susan Murray, "Ethnic Masculinity and Early Television's Vaudeo Star," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 1 (2002): 97-119.
- <sup>86</sup> Steve Cohan, "The Manic Bodies of Danny Kaye," *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 3 (2017). 13
- <sup>87</sup> The Church Lady character was so popular that after Carvey formally left the cast, he returned several times in special appearances to reprise the role.
- <sup>88</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Charlton Heston/Wynton Marsalis," NBC, March 28, 1987.
- <sup>89</sup> For more on prosperity theology and televangelism, see Joe E. Barnhart, "Prosperity Gospel: A New Folk Theology," in *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions*, eds. Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1990), 157-164.
- <sup>90</sup> Michelle Green, "Rob Lowe's Tale of the Tape," *People*, March 19, 1990.
- <sup>91</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Rob Lowe/The Pogues," NBC, March 17, 1990.
- <sup>92</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Chris Evert/Eurythmics," NBC, November 11, 1989; "Mary Stuart Masterson/En Vogue," NBC, March 21, 1992.
- <sup>93</sup> As quoted in Helen Thorpe, "It's Pat," *Rolling Stone*, September 22, 1994.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>95</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, "Linda Hamilton/Mariah Carey," NBC, November 16, 1991.

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- <sup>96</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 27.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>98</sup> Chris Smith, "Comedy Isn't Funny," *New York*, March 13, 1995.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>100</sup> Doug Hill, letter to the editor, *New York*, April 13, 1995.
- <sup>101</sup> Nick Marx, Matt Sienkiewicz, and Ron Becker, eds., Introduction to *Saturday Night Live and American TV* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2013), 11.
- <sup>102</sup> J. Clawson, "Saturday Night Live 1975-2017 Ratings Through the Years," *TV Ratings Guide*, <http://www.tvratingsguide.com/2017/10/saturday-night-live-1975-2017-ratings.html>
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>104</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 478.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.
- <sup>106</sup> Justin Whalley, *Saturday Night Live, Hollywood Comedy, and American Culture: From Chevy Chase to Tina Fey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41-61. See also William K. Knoedelseder Jr., "Satire on TV - Don't Laugh, It's Serious Business," *Washington Post*, November 25, 1979.
- <sup>107</sup> Hill and Weingrad, *Saturday Night*, 314.
- <sup>108</sup> Whalley, *Saturday Night Live*, 62-90.
- <sup>109</sup> It is worth noting that *The Blues Brothers* film itself has important racial dimensions. In addition to the blues music performed by white brothers Jake and Elwood, the film featured a variety of famous black singers and musicians, including Ray Charles, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin.
- <sup>110</sup> Marx, Sienkiewicz, and Becker, *Saturday Night Live*, 10.
- <sup>111</sup> "Wayne's World," *Box Office Mojo*, accessed May 1, 2017. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=waynesworld.htm>
- <sup>112</sup> Hau Chu, "From 'Saturday Night Live' to the Big Screen: Movies Inspired by the Sketch Show," *New York Daily News*, December 10, 2015.
- <sup>113</sup> Richard Corliss, "Party On, Wayne," *Time*, March 2, 1992, 69.
- <sup>114</sup> Robert Marich, *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies Used by Major Studios and Independents* (New York: Focal Press, 2005), 128.
- <sup>115</sup> Mark Harris, "Citizen Wayne: 'Wayne's World' Goes Hollywood," *Entertainment Weekly*, February 28, 1992.
- <sup>116</sup> Bradford Evans, "The Lost Roles of Mike Myers," *Splitsider*, June 16, 2011.
- <sup>117</sup> Nick Marx, "Skits Strung Together: Performances, Narrative, and the Sketch Comedy Aesthetic in SNL Films," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Sienkiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 214.
- <sup>118</sup> *It's Pat* may have made it to theaters, but it had a cursed history. After the script was written, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox pulled out of production, and the film was produced instead by Touchstone Pictures. Once finished, the film was only released in select cities, and its low box office revenues resulted in it being pulled from screens after opening weekend. See Rick Marin, "Up from the Tube, But Then Down the Drain," *New York Times*, May 8, 1994.
- <sup>119</sup> Thorpe, "It's Pat."
- <sup>120</sup> Kevin Thomas, "'It's Pat' Takes an Ambiguous Look at Life," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1995.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>122</sup> Joe Leydon, "It's Pat," *Variety*, August 26, 1994.

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- <sup>123</sup> Julia Sweeney had left *Saturday Night Live* by the time the film was finally released. Sweeney cites the systemic sexism at *SNL* as one of her primary reasons for leaving, noting that the challenge of becoming successful in the face of adversity had lost its appeal. See Thorpe, “It’s Pat.”
- <sup>124</sup> Bill Carter, *The Late Shift: Letterman, Leno, and the Network Battle for the Night* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1996), 4.
- <sup>125</sup> Bill Carter, “NBC Moves Johnny Carson Starting Time by 5 Minutes,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1991.
- <sup>126</sup> Carson needn’t have worried about *The Tonight Show* becoming less competitive as a result of the five-minute delay; ABC soon pushed back the starting time of *Nightline*.
- <sup>127</sup> Richard Bernstein, “The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1990; Robert D. McFadden, “Political Correctness: The New Bias Test?,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1992.
- <sup>128</sup> Mike Royko, “Hillary Clinton Is Fair Game,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1992, 3; Jerry Carrier, *Hard Right Turn: The History and Assassination of the American Left* (New York: Algora, 2015), 268-276.
- <sup>129</sup> *Designing Women*, “The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita,” CBS, November 4, 1991.
- <sup>130</sup> The trial and riots were the featured story on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* from April 30, 1992, when the four officers were acquitted, to May 10, 1992, when the Army and Marine troops finally withdrew from Los Angeles. For an account of the damage immediately following the riots, see Louis Sahagun and Carla Rivera, “Jittery L.A. Sees Rays of Hope,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1992, 1; for an account reflecting on the aftermath and legacy, see *Los Angeles Times* Graphics Staff, “L.A. Riots by the Numbers,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2017.
- <sup>131</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, “Kirstie Alley/Lenny Kravitz,” NBC, April 17, 1993.
- <sup>132</sup> Josephine Metcalf and Carina Spaulding, eds., Introduction to *African-American Culture and Society After Rodney King* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.
- <sup>133</sup> *The Tonight Show*, “Episode 4401,” NBC, September 12, 1991.
- <sup>134</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, “Kirstie Alley/Tom Petty,” NBC, October 12, 1991.
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>136</sup> Leon Luxenberg, “The Viewing Habits of Working Women,” *Television/Radio Age*, April 25, 1983, 55.

## Chapter Five “For Men Only”: Sports, Video, and Private Viewing

In previous chapters, I have examined how shifting images of masculinity, including potentially queer images, served as a key example of television in the long 1980s. These images spoke to changing social dynamics as well as new network strategies to reach audiences of both men and women. Late-night comedy programming *Saturday Night Live* also strategized ways to convert the television audience to a source of box office revenue through feature films developed from its sketches. At the same time, the formation of new networks and the cultivation of new technologies enabled different modes of domestic viewing. As opposite ends of television’s engagement with masculinity, these two developments during the long 1980s show the significance of the male audience.

One of television’s advantages over the cinema is that it does not require the viewer to leave home. Even a viewer who prefers movies to television series can watch films broadcast on television. For this reason, Frederick Wasser describes the American film audience in the 1980s as oscillating between “going out” and “staying in.”<sup>1</sup> “Going out” primarily describes watching a movie in a theater, but “staying in” came with increasing options in the 1980s: made-for-TV movies, films broadcast on television, or videotape rentals. In addition to Wasser’s film examples, the “staying in” audience could enjoy an expanding number of cable channels and recordings of previous television broadcasts made through technologies that enabled the viewer to determine their own viewing schedule. Ann Gray sees the VCR (video cassette recorder) as “one more commodity which reduces the necessity for household members to seek entertainment outside the home.”<sup>2</sup>

When ESPN launched in 1979 as ESP-TV (Entertainment and Sports Programming Television), many executives at the big three networks thought the idea of an all-sports network aimed at audiences of men was “ill advised, if not simply goofy.”<sup>3</sup> A similar combination of apprehension and disbelief accompanied home video technologies like the Betamax and VCR that allowed the viewer to record programs. Akio Morita, the CEO of Sony, which produced the Betamax, dubbed this phenomenon “time-shifting” because it allowed the viewer to adjust the broadcast schedule to their own needs.<sup>4</sup> Time-shifting called into question copyright law, and Betamax found itself subject to a lawsuit by Universal Studios, Disney, and other producers and distributors of content. In 1984, the Supreme Court determined that recording a television program for personal use did not constitute copyright infringement. Writing the court’s opinion, Justice John Paul Stevens found that “the average member of the public uses a [video tape recorder] principally to record a program he cannot view as it is being televised and then to watch it once at a later time. This practice, known as ‘time-shifting,’ enlarges the television viewing audience.”<sup>5</sup> For this reason, the Court found that recording television programs for personal use posed no significant financial harm to the television industry. (In fact, as Stevens’ opinion suggests, it may have helped the industry.) Following the cast, both the use of the term and practice of “time-shifting” took off.

While the VCR was touted by *TV Guide* in 1977 as the “hottest new product” for home entertainment, readers were also cautioned: “There’s a brave new world out there in electronics land, but it could make a disaster out of your living room.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, both ESPN and the VCR proved successful innovations to traditional viewing habits. By the fall of 1980, ESPN had moved to twenty-four hours of programming per day, and by the mid-1980s, VCRs had entered over half of American homes.<sup>7</sup>

The question of what propelled the successes of cable networks like ESPN and home video has been attributed to numerous factors. Wasser, for instance, notes that more flexible forms of entertainment were necessitated by changing rhythms of the American family as more women entered the corporate workforce and American suburbia began to sprawl, requiring longer travel times to get to work or school and to run errands.<sup>8</sup> The “time flexibility” offered by the VCR’s ability to record television broadcasts made it “ideal for a new lifestyle of more work and shifting schedules” in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> The growth of cable is described by Eric Hirsch as a shift in cultural expectations for television from a form of recreation for the family to an individualized experience, in which television executives targeted particular demographics like gender and age over entire households.<sup>10</sup> David Gauntlet and Anita Hill cite studies in the late 1980s that revealed the generational divide created by television viewing as children watched in their bedrooms while their parents watched on the living room set.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-1980s, executives charged with audience research like David Poltrack from NBC and Marvin Mord at ABC readily acknowledged the importance of the shift from the “negotiated viewing environment” in which the family had to agree upon what to watch together to more individualized viewing as American homes began to feature more television sets.<sup>12</sup> Adult-themed cable channels like Playboy advertised themselves as being for the bedroom, thus cementing the notion that television was moving from the entertainment of the “family circle” to an individualized experience.<sup>13</sup>

Greater emphasis on individual experience was a hallmark of television in the long 1980s. The National Institute of Mental Health predicted in 1982 that cable programming and home video technologies “may gradually alter the content of entertainment television. They may also make it feasible to have different programming for various special populations.”<sup>14</sup> By the



time the study was published, television had already begun the process of changing from a broadcasting model, wherein reaching the widest possible audience was the goal, to a narrowcasting model in which audiences were constructed based on demographics. For audiences of men, sports programming on the fledgling network ESPN and the growth of the VCR and cassette tape availability were significant contributors to a mode of “staying in” that foregrounded access and the consumption of bodily spectacle in private. During the first half of the 1980s, pornographic and erotic movies rivaled, if not surpassed, Hollywood films in prerecorded cassette tape sales, making them the “first big genre for prerecorded cassettes.”<sup>15</sup> The proliferation of adult content encouraged the consumption of erotic pleasure in the privacy of one’s own home. At the same time, sports programming expanded as ESPN not only catered to but *developed* an audience eager to watch physical spectacle and action.

These two innovations of the long 1980s have been studied for their different impact on domestic viewing. ESPN’s early history and contemporary legacy as the juggernaut sports media franchise have received plenty of attention in the popular press, as evidenced by memoirs of its founders and early executives.<sup>16</sup> The VCR is often studied for its impact on the Hollywood film industry and new video culture with less attention paid to its effect on television viewing or on domestic viewing.<sup>17</sup> This chapter aims to study cable sports and video tape as intertwined developments that enabled scopophilic enjoyment.

The liveness of sports broadcasts and the prerecorded nature of video tapes are the most obvious distinguishing characteristics, but these are in many ways false antinomies. Video was, and continues to be, used to enhance live sports broadcasts. Meanwhile, pornographic video that seems frozen in time captures live sex acts on tape. Pornographic video and cable sports are interrelated in their juxtaposition of liveness and recordedness. Both promote access, whether

being able to spy upon intimate and sometimes taboo sexual encounters or being able to gain new perspectives on the sports field. This chapter will examine how pornographic video and cable sports foster a connection between domesticity and masculinity, granting new ways for men to look at bodies on screen. In many ways, this scopophilia presupposed a heterosexual gaze but, as I will demonstrate, it also opened possibilities for looking queerly, thus exhibiting how television in the long 1980s complicated presumptions about American masculinity.



*Figure 5.1. Panasonic's use of baseball player Reggie Jackson to advertise its Omnivision equipment in 1980 neatly demonstrates the link between sports and home video.*

### The VCR and VHS: Television When You Want It

Recording with home video technology was typically advertised and discussed among television critics as a strategy for extending primetime (by watching one network's lineup and recording another) or for granting the opportunity to watch daytime programming, like favorite

soap operas, that aired during the workday. As Joshua Greenberg points out, in the “frontier Betamax days” of the late 1970s, there was “essentially no mainstream prerecorded tape market.”<sup>18</sup> A series of ads for Betamax in *TV Guide* in 1977 “made no mention of renting or buying prerecorded tapes or, for that matter, watching home movies shot with a video camera.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, ads extolled the virtues of getting more sleep or watching two football games that were broadcast at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

Along with this emphasis on time-shifting came expectations for which kinds of programming appealed to which demographics. By 1990, Gemstar began making a supplemental unit, the VCR Plus, which connected to the VCR. Users would enter a special code associated with a particular television series as printed in a newspaper like the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>21</sup> The code would prompt the VCR Plus to program the VCR to record that show, thereby making the process of programming the VCR less complicated for the user. The codes were divided into five categories, revealing which kinds of programs Gemstar and the *Los Angeles Times* envisioned audiences recording: “prime-time, movies, sports, soap operas and children’s programming,” or programming for families, men, women, and children respectively.<sup>22</sup>

Recording technologies alleviated the agonizing decision of which program in a timeslot to watch, since one could be watched while another was being recorded for later viewing. But since many devices could only record one program at a time, a new anxiety about what to tape emerged and was exacerbated by the high cost of blank tapes themselves. The concept of a personal library had previously existed through 16mm and 8mm prints of films.<sup>23</sup> Although the Betamax, VCR, and accompanying blank tapes were pricy, they were less expensive and cumbersome than film projection equipment, and they enabled the personal library to include television broadcasts. The *Chicago Tribune* began featuring a weekly column called “Worth

Taping,” in which Marilyn Preston would recommend programs for VCR users to record. Programs ranged from foreign films to record in order to build a personal library with high cultural capital to lower-status, eccentric television shows that could serve as good entertainment.<sup>24</sup> In his examination of the column, Shawn Michael Glinis finds that Preston sometimes advocated one show over another for “snobbish reasons” but was just as likely to recommend taping a program “while also deeming it of low cultural significance.”<sup>25</sup> The “Worth Taping” columns therefore demonstrate the tensions between the personal library as a marker of taste and class and the reality that it was often cultivated around a range of tastes and interests.

In popular imagination, the VCR took middle- and upper-class America by storm, prompting revisionist histories that it was an overnight success.<sup>26</sup> In reality, there were many preceding and competing systems. The VCR/VHS (video home system) combination had been embroiled in a long battle with Sony’s Betamax. Before that, other technologies designed for playback, and sometimes recording, had entered the market even as early as the 1960s. Many of these were eventually driven out of existence by other systems that were cheaper, less complicated, or less buggy, but they nonetheless helped determine which aspects of home video were the most appealing to consumers. Cartrivision, for example, was a playback and recording device that was only on the market in 1972. The machine was accompanied by two kinds of cartridges, one that could not be recorded on or rewound and was only for prerecorded tapes of movies, and one that could be recorded on and was for home use. Frederick Wasser attributes Cartrivision’s short-lived sale and quick failure to a lack of rental agreements that minimized the number of films prerecorded to cartridges, as well as its rush to market before programming and operational flaws had been sorted out by its engineers.<sup>27</sup> Although its lifespan was brief, Cartrivision is an early example of the drive to combine time-shifting television with staying at

home to watch movies (rather than going to the cinema) into one machine. As such, it was a precursor to the ultimate success of the VCR/VHS combination in its dual functionality.

Developments in home technologies inspired by earlier experiments like Cartrivision were one way that what was considered “television” was evolving in the long 1980s. In a 1977 special report on the changing nature of television for *TV Guide*, Merrill Panitt correctly hypothesized that “[n]ew technologies – pay-cable, two-way cable, home video tape and video-discs, and all the other promised electronic miracles – would make possible a much wider variety of programming than commercial networks now are able to present.”<sup>28</sup> As the number of ways viewers could encounter television expanded, so too did the content of this television. The shift in ratings measurement from household to demographics further encouraged a wider array of content designed to appeal to different groups. By the end of the long 1980s, videotape and cable programming had dramatically changed *how* audiences watched as much as *what* they watched.



Figure 5.2. This 1978 ad by RCA emphasizes personal freedom and choice as a result of the video cassette recorder’s functionality.

An estimated forty thousand homes in the United States had some kind of time-shifting machine by 1977.<sup>29</sup> The Sony Betamax had been introduced to the market in 1975 at a whopping price of over a thousand dollars, thus positioning it as a technology for electronic elites. Once VHS was introduced in 1977, the competition between these two systems quickly excluded other playback technologies. For example, Laserdisc was introduced in 1978 as a competing and cheaper system, but its entry into the market served to drive down the price of Betamax and VHS. Despite its claims to a better “availability of feature films, better freeze frames, and random access,” Frederick Wasser argues that Laserdisc’s “lack of recording was decisive” and resulted in its failure to compete as time-shifting became the foregrounded reason to purchase a video recorder.<sup>30</sup>

Television executives were reportedly not paying much attention to time-shifting during the technology’s early years under the assumption that the systems were too expensive and therefore a fad. Paul Klein, a vice-president at NBC, called time-shifting machines “the dumbest thing ever conceived” because “the most important thing about television is immediacy.”<sup>31</sup> Immediacy, however, became less important in the long 1980s to American audiences than individuated viewing schedules.

Time-shifting technologies enabled viewers to go out during their favorite broadcasts and watch them later, and in this way it should be noted that time-shifting devices did, in some ways, encourage forms of recreation other than domestic entertainment. Hilderbrand describes the “watch whatever, whenever” mantra of early Betamax ads as promoting access – “a partial reorientation of power, even as the content industry has grown increasingly consolidated.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to access to content and time, the VCR granted access to an outside world that a

television lover may have previously had to abandon in order to avoid missing a favorite program.

At the same time, however, time-shifting increased domestic viewing by granting more possibilities to the viewer. By recording one network's primetime lineup while watching another's, a viewer could turn three hours of programming into six. "Appointment viewing," in which viewers watched a program at its designated broadcast time, gave way to increased temporal flexibility and increased viewing options. By extension, viewers had more reasons to participate in "staying in."

As there became more possible kinds of entertainment for the "staying in" audience, the domestic space increasingly presented itself as a recreational space, but one whose technological complexities often excluded women. Through a survey of families with a VCR in the home, Ann Gray found that women often felt uncomfortable operating the machine because of what she sees as institutional sexism that discourages women from learning to be proficient with technology and machines.<sup>33</sup> But her survey also found that some women who could have mastered programming the VCR maintained an intentional ignorance of its functions so that the machine would not become yet another household device for which they bore responsibility.<sup>34</sup> By 1990, industry analysts estimated that nearly half of all VCR owners did not know how to program their device to record television and only used it for playback of prerecorded material.<sup>35</sup>

For those who did understand the intricacies of VCR programming, the device could serve as a new gizmo to play with, a gadget necessitating its own play space. The VCR, along with other devices associated with "staying in," led to an expansion of designated space in the home for media consumption. As Lynn Spigel has chronicled, television spent its early years migrating toward the center of the living room, where it replaced the hearth or the piano as the

object around which the family gathered.<sup>36</sup> Cecilia Tichi similarly finds that the television environment has historically functioned as an “electronic hearth” that shaped the physical space of the American home in addition to American culture.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the long 1980s, growth in the size of the average American home meant television and its related technological counterparts did not need to occupy such a central role on the living room. Even if they did, they could also occupy other rooms in homes with multiple television sets. On average, newly built homes in 1985 were sixty percent larger than homes built in the post-war suburban sprawl.<sup>38</sup> This meant more space for individual family members. In his study of teen bedrooms, Jason Reid finds that the number of private bedrooms with television sets steadily increased in the 1970s and 1980s across social classes.<sup>39</sup> For Reid, this meant that sending a child to their room became less of a punishment strategy as the bedroom was “thus transformed into a powerful leisure space that would eventually challenge, if not displace, the family room as the preferred site in which teenagers and their peers could entertain themselves.”<sup>40</sup>

Larger home sizes also enabled the creation of designated media spaces. Michael Newman notes the increased popularity of “home theater ensembles” that combined video cassette players with larger television sets or even projection sets in an attempt to duplicate the “going out” experience within the privacy of the domestic sphere.<sup>41</sup> But these media rooms were often created and primarily inhabited by men. As television and video culture became more technologically complex, it also became more targeted to men. Consumer articles and advertisements positioned the VCR similar to other high-tech gadgets that were aimed at men interested in the masculinized hobby of home electronics construction and use.<sup>42</sup> *TV Guide*, for instance, heralded the coming of a complex “Video Communication Center,” a sort of living room/control room that included a television set, a cable receiver, video games, and a video



cassette deck.<sup>43</sup> Because of the multitude of devices, the article gave suggestions for where to place each device and plug it in. Other magazines offered similar advice about how to set up a media room with all the new technological accompaniments (including VCRs) for optimal home viewing.<sup>44</sup>

The complexities of the technologies needed for a good home theater or media room, as well as the expense of installing it, shaped the media space by both gender and class. Newman cites the advent of ABC's magazine *Video Today* as a demonstration of video's "move away from mass culture and entertainment by association with masculine forms of artistic and technological leisure pursuit."<sup>45</sup> Barbara Klinger similarly finds that the home theater in the 1980s was "expensive and largely reserved for the rich," whom she dubs the "new media aristocrats."<sup>46</sup> At the same time, Klinger notes that while "women are often considered primary purchasers of items for the home, men are the primary consumers of media center hardware."<sup>47</sup>

Even among men who watched television with their families, the experience was often one in which the rest of the family was ignored for Dad's preferences. Gene Brodie and Zolinda Stoneman noted in 1983 that fathers "tend to become engrossed in the television programme, relying on mothers to enact the parenting role with the children."<sup>48</sup> Other researchers in the 1980s found that the father of the family most often controlled the television set and remote control and that ninety percent of the time he made the programming decisions.<sup>49</sup> Howard Rosenberg of the *Los Angeles Times* waxed poetic about his new VHS recorder, extolling his liberation from the enslavement of the television program grid and the wonders of his new gadget. But Rosenberg was also aware of the potential tensions between father and family that the VCR could spawn: "Happiness is taping a program you are dying to see. Misery is discovering that a member of your family has inadvertently taped another program over it."<sup>50</sup>

The masculinization of home video culture enabled the domestic space to be seen as a space for men and men's hobbies, thus encouraging "staying in" forms of leisure. Masculinized media spaces, whether a technically complex living room or a designated media room, allowed for social viewing, such as neighbors gathering to watch the Super Bowl. But designated spaces for individual family members to consume television and video also meant privacy: not only from strangers (such as a crowd at a movie theater) but from other family members as well. Designated media rooms could serve as a father's escape from his family, especially if there were other television sets in the bedrooms or kitchen for the other family members to watch. Privacy could allow for the viewing of television and video tapes that a man did not feel comfortable viewing in front of others. Indeed, during the first half of the 1980s, a significant percent of prerecorded tapes were pornographic; at the same time, television networks like Playboy brought pornography into the home via cable. New technologies and a greater emphasis on individuated viewing spaces established the conditions for illicit, private viewing.

#### From "Porno Chic" in Public to Private Home Video

Pornography had become undeniably fashionable during the 1970s. Films like Gerard Damiano's 1972 *Deep Throat* and 1973 *The Devil in Miss Jones* were screened in theaters to mainstream audiences. *Deep Throat*'s success, earning over \$50 million despite its shoestring budget, prompted Ralph Blumenthal of *The New York Times* to label the cultural moment "porno chic."<sup>51</sup> "Porno chic" in a sexually pervasive and open era enabled the "going out" audience to partake in a collective, mainstream experience of something that had previously been non-normative.

This did not mean, however, that everyone was comfortable being seen in public at a pornographic movie. This was especially true as feminist activists and other advocacy groups from the right and left launched campaigns against the pervasiveness of pornography.<sup>52</sup> The Hollywood movie industry responded to porn's popularity by trying to recapture the "going out" audience, to steer audiences away from porn theaters and back to conventional cinema. In the 1970s, Jack Valenti, the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, which implements the industry's self-imposed film ratings, actively worked to expand what sort of content was appropriate for an R-rating. Valenti's strategy meant films that might have previously been rated X for sexual explicitness would now be rated R. According to Jon Lewis, this had the effect of marginalizing X-rated films, soft-core pornography, and sexually explicit art house or independent films, a sort of punishment on them for operating outside the MPAA bounds.<sup>53</sup> Although Damiano had made pornography mainstream through *Deep Throat's* success, hard-core pornography began to lose out to sexually explicit mainstream films that were more socially acceptable and often more available to see.

In 1970, there were an estimated 750 porn theaters in the United States; by 1989, that number had declined to 250.<sup>54</sup> Lewis sees the disappearance of "chic" porn from mainstream theaters and the shuttering of so many adult theaters as a sign of Hollywood's defeat of the porn industry. "In the absence of hard core," he argues, "America rediscovered Hollywood."<sup>55</sup> In reality, the shuttering of porn theaters was the result of many social factors, including successful advocacy campaigns, increasing conservative political attitudes and political power for the religious right, as well as Hollywood's reinvigoration. Hollywood might have recaptured the "going out" audience, but it did not kill or outlast pornography. Pornography moved out of the theater and into the lucrative cable and home video markets.

Certain cable networks that were born in the 1980s recognized the value of bringing adult content into the home for the pleasure of viewers who might not want to be seen at a porn theater or, as the number of theaters declined, did not have access to one. Even as early as 1977, cable companies offered X- and R-rated movies on a pay-per-view basis to attract and keep customers.<sup>56</sup> To prevent children from accessing adult content, some cable providers offered “mature” and “family viewing” packages – though at least one provider, Cablevision in Waco, Texas, reported that most customers subscribed to both.<sup>57</sup>

The Playboy Channel began in 1982 with a goal of making televisual the kinds of adult-themed images and content that had made *Playboy* the magazine so popular. Content included amateur stripping contests, sexy dance contests, and even made-for-TV movies. The network was plagued from its earliest days by a conundrum. On the one hand, some viewers felt its programming was not hard-core enough and could not compete with readily available X-rated video cassettes; on the other hand, its “medium-core” content approach was intended to placate cable providers who feared losing subscribers simply because they carried the channel.<sup>58</sup> Among the more surprising statistics about its viewers the channel discovered was that nearly half were women.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the Playboy Channel specifically tailored its offerings to this female audience, a shift that resulted in the “actual increase of fantasy and decrease in brutality” in its adult movies [Figure 5.3].<sup>60</sup>



*Figure 5.3. The 1984 opening to the Playboy late-night movie featured Barbie-like dolls performing in a kick line that noticeably included men in their underwear.*

In addition to cable programs and made-for-cable movies, pornography moved into the home video market. Recognizing that this offered an alternative to “going out,” producers began making films on video tape for those who were more comfortable consuming porn in the privacy of their homes. As David Hebditch and Nick Anning observe, it no longer made sense for someone to “watch a porn film sitting next to a cop from the local vice squad when they could be viewing more or less the same thing in the comfort and privacy of their own homes.”<sup>61</sup> While Lewis sees the porn industry in the late 1970s as the weaker rival compelled to react to the power of Hollywood, Jonathan Coopersmith sees the porn industry as rightly predicting the financial benefits of new technologies.<sup>62</sup> Since cable TV and video were the “wave of the future,” producers of pornography adapted; content moved from theaters outside the home and into the domestic space. For the first half of the 1980s, adult movies on tape surpassed prerecorded

mainstream movie sales while the film industry and manufacturers of recording devices battled over copyright issues.<sup>63</sup> Adult movies on video tape became a lucrative market for the porn industry, which responded by changing their production practices. In her examination of how the film industry reconciled with the advent of videotape, Caetlin Benson-Allott asserts that “home video has not overtly changed the form and look of feature film” and “formal changes [to movies] may be slower and less apparent than structural changes to the film industry.”<sup>64</sup> Video granted many technical and economic benefits over film: faster production time, easier duplication for distribution, and consequently much lower costs.<sup>65</sup>

While production costs dropped, the retail price of a porn tape could be nearly twice as much as the price of a Hollywood movie on tape.<sup>66</sup> For the porn audience, the convenience of privacy of video consumption made it worth the expense. For this reason, Linda Williams claims that “the home video revolution [...] was initiated more by the drive to see a film like *Deep Throat* and its progeny than by the drive to see *The Godfather*.”<sup>67</sup> In his larger study of time-shifting, Sean Cubitt similarly finds that “video seems more likely to be used for solitary or illicit viewing.”<sup>68</sup> Pornography on video tape, screened in the home, afforded a new kind of privacy to consumers willing to pay a premium for it.

The consumption of gay pornography played a significant role in the development of the video market. Among those seeking privacy to screen pornography at home were consumers of gay porn.<sup>69</sup> In his history of gay video porn, Joe Thomas notes that a primary difference between gay and straight porn is that “gay porn is thoroughly integrated into gay life, whereas straight porn is considered deviant and stigmatized by the mainstream heterosexual world.”<sup>70</sup> Surveys of men’s pornography consumption habits bear out that self-identified gay men are more likely to report viewing pornography and report doing so more frequently than self-identified

heterosexual or bisexual men.<sup>71</sup> Thomas' observation, however, conflates the identity of the consumer with the kind of sex (hetero- or homo- ) depicted in content. Although gay men certainly consume gay porn, pornography depicting sex acts between two men can be consumed by men of various sexualities.<sup>72</sup> As Michael Bronski argues, straight culture considers pornography dangerous and gay porn worse.<sup>73</sup> For men who do not self-identify as gay, the consumption of pornography, especially gay pornography, is stigmatized. Watching video tapes in private was one way to access illicit gay content.

Video enabled gay porn to commercialize, which also meant decreased emphasis on aesthetics in favor of increased explicitness.<sup>74</sup> Roles for performers began to fall into a strict top/bottom paradigm. Although tops could penetrate bottoms, they could also avoid performing and simply be serviced by the bottom. This was both a cause for an increase in "gay for pay" (self-identified straight performers participating in gay porn) and a result of it, as gay porn's financial success attracted many non-gay stars.<sup>75</sup>

Another development was in the narrative, which, for Richard Dyer, began to emphasize the "process of watching, and also of being watched."<sup>76</sup> Dyer cites examples in which the plot begins with one man showing gay porn to another or the plot is the making of a gay porn video. He attributes this trope's popularity to "the pleasure of seeing sex," which can be heightened with attention drawn to the act of looking.<sup>77</sup> Because of the popular tropes of looking and sharing, John Burger argues that gay video pornography could legitimate homosexuality to the viewer, at least while he is safe in his home.<sup>78</sup> Textually, Burger finds gay porn demonstrates how homoerotic slippage can infiltrate mainstream society – offices, gyms, military barracks, and other homosocial environments where porn films are set.<sup>79</sup> Part of the pleasure viewers get is

in the way porn in these settings “destroys the public/private dichotomy so cherished by heterosexist society.”<sup>80</sup>

In her now foundational essay from 1975, Laura Mulvey argues that film positions its audience as male by perpetuating the male gaze at female bodies on screen.<sup>81</sup> Steve Neale expands on Mulvey’s claims to consider how the male gaze might be turned on male bodies within film. Drawing upon Westerns and other men’s genres, Neale demonstrates how any homoerotic potentiality created by men gazing at other men is mitigated through forces like violence.<sup>82</sup> Neale’s work challenges the notion that watching film is a heterosexual male pleasure – in the sense of men watching women – and opens up the possibility that even heterosexual men can take pleasure in watching the bodies of other men on screen.

Gay pornography on video presupposed the male spectator’s gaze, though Richard Dyer defines pornography not by the gaze itself (looking) but by the content’s effect on the spectator. The effect of melodrama, he explains, is to make the spectator weep; the effect of pornography is to make the spectator ejaculate.<sup>83</sup> Linda Williams similarly believes the experience of encountering pornography moves beyond the gaze. Drawing upon Vivian Sobchak’s notion of cinema as a series of “embodiment relations,” Williams sees the act of consuming pornography as a “series of mediated exchanges of our bodies, the film’s body, and the bodies on screen.”<sup>84</sup> Like Dyer, Williams argues that the spectator’s attraction originates “not just of the eyes but also of the flesh.”<sup>85</sup>

At around the same time that Mulvey popularized the notion of the cinematic gaze, television studies was grappling with the presumed conditions under which viewers encountered television texts. In 1972, Raymond Williams proposed the concept of “flow” to describe how someone might watch episodes of different series, one after the other, during a night of



primetime viewing, as well as television's unending programming stream.<sup>86</sup> Because the presumed viewer wasn't watching with rapt attention but instead was doing other things like eating dinner at the same time, John Ellis proposed in 1982 that television was not subject to the gaze but the glance.<sup>87</sup>

The televisual glance, however, is often prefigured as female because the activities being undertaken while watching are domestic (and often presumed to be examples of domestic labor performed by women). Charlotte Brunsdon notes that the cinematic gaze is often characterized as a "male-fixed, controlling, uninterruptible gaze" while the televisual glance is figured as a female "distracted, obscured, already busy manner of watching television."<sup>88</sup> Brunsdon feels these categorizations (cinema/male/attention and television/female/distracted) are not unmovable, but for her bringing the gaze into home television viewing does not represent a masculinization of the home or a "masculine mode" of viewing so much as a "mode of power."<sup>89</sup>

Aside from gender concerns, Ellis' concept of the glance ignores the possibility that television can be as transfixing as cinema. Writing about developments in television aesthetics in the 1980s, John T. Caldwell agrees with Brunsdon that glance theory "could not be a less accurate or useful description" because "*some* TV viewers are deeply engaged in specific programs – and do find *pleasure* in entranced isolation while watching a show, star, or favorite performer."<sup>90</sup> Caldwell does not name the viewing of pornography in his examples, though certainly watching pornography in isolation with devoted attention could be a pleasurable experience for a viewer.

Home video technologies disrupted the concept of the distracted glance by enabling viewers to pause, rewind, fast-forward, and watch over and over. As technology increasingly positioned as men's gadgetry, with content like sports and pornography likewise positioned as

men's viewing material, home video had the potential to recover the domestic space as one of rapt attention and of power. Pornography on video encourages a kind of hyper-gaze in which looking and looking again collide with physical arousal. In the privacy of one's own home, the VCR produced conditions for the male "staying in" audience to partake in the spectacle of bodies. As pornography moved away from the public sphere, this act of looking became less sanctioned in the "going out" culture. For men who wished to gaze at other men's bodies, gay porn on video tape was a simple, albeit sometimes expensive, way of seeking this pleasure. For these viewers, the rise of the VCR did not mean a redefinition of the domestic space as a locus of heteromascularity; it meant granting more power to the act of looking queerly.

### Sports, Liveness, and Access

A concurrent phenomenon to the screening of bodies through video tape arose through the development of cable networks. The adult-themed Playboy and sports-themed ESPN were two networks born in the long 1980s that initially targeted men through erotica and sports, respectively. Although their content may seem different on the surface, both channels offered viewers the opportunity to gaze at bodies in scopophilic pleasure. Whereas Playboy was eventually shaped by the reality of its unexpected female viewers, the less explicitly sexual ESPN maintained its ability to present savage violence, sweat, and muscles to its predominantly male audience.

Sports had been part of television since its earliest days. The first televised sporting event happened as early as 1939 when NBC broadcast a baseball game between Princeton and Columbia that was an "artistic flop."<sup>91</sup> With only one camera and blurry transmissions, home

viewers would have a difficult time following the ball or differentiating the players. Boxing, by contrast, was quite popular in television's early days. NBC broadcast Friday night fights from Madison Square Garden beginning in the 1930s on radio and in the 1950s on television. Arthur Daley, a sports commentator for the *New York Times*, attributed the popularity of televised boxing to the fact that "the ring is small enough to always be in focus" and "every seat in front of a video screen is a ringside seat" and finally that "the price is perfect – free."<sup>92</sup>

Capitalizing on the popularity of sports broadcasts and the burgeoning cable market, ESPN launched in 1979 as Entertainment and Sports Programming (ESP-TV). The network was the brainchild of Bill Rasmussen, who had been a sports anchor at WWLP-TV, an NBC affiliate in Western Massachusetts. The idea for an all-sports channel in Connecticut, where ESP-TV was headquartered, was a "culmination of a longtime love affair with sports" on the part of Rasmussen and his son Scott.<sup>93</sup> Two major events shaped the network's early years and subsequent future. First, ESP-TV arranged financing through an oil giant and later sold a percentage of its business to ABC, two deals that helped the network remain flush while accruing subscribers and advertisers. Stuart Evey, an executive at the Getty Oil Company, arranged for Getty to provide financing in 1979, which gave the fledgling channel sufficient capital to begin. The ABC deal for a fifteen percent sale in 1982 granted ESPN access to use ABC sports material and thus benefited the network in terms of money and programming. Second, Chet Simmons, an executive who had worked on sports programming for ABC and NBC, came aboard as president, and the Rasmussens ceased day-to-day operations of the network. Under the leadership of Simmons and his successor Bill Grimes, the network grew from a "funky little seat-of-the-pants operation" to a twenty-four hour network that would eventually sprawl to six networks, radio, websites, books, and other profit-making enterprises.<sup>94</sup> By 1984, Getty Oil had become part of

Texaco, which sold its remaining interest in ESPN to ABC. Because ESPN was by that point “one of the more promising ventures in the cable business,” the deal, which was made without a bidding process, angered other television giants like Ted Turner of Turner Broadcasting, who would have liked to have had a chance to acquire the network.<sup>95</sup>

Previous histories of ESPN have been written from a sports enthusiast’s perspective that overemphasizes the inner politics of networks and celebrates the heroic narrative of the producer-creator at the expense of consideration for audience and reception. Michael Freeman and the writing team of James Andrew Miller and Tom Shales chronicle ESPN’s growth through the allegory of a sports narrative: the underdog fledgling network battles against cable, satellite, and broadcast giants as it struggles to find financing and an audience until it arrives at its own “touchdown” (generally seen as ESPN’s expansion into a second channel and radio at the end of the long 1980s).<sup>96</sup> Stuart Evey, who was the CEO of ESPN at the time of its sale to ABC, wrote a memoir of his experiences in which his role as a visionary in the network’s history.<sup>97</sup> Through their emphasis on the internal workings of the network, these accounts neglect the significant role audience and reception played in the development of men’s cable programming alongside visionary producers and use of cutting-edge technologies.

Audience was important, given how the network ultimately put together its revenue stream. Quickly into ESPN’s development, channel executives struck a deal with Anheuser-Busch to include advertisements between programs. Chet Simmons saw this as a natural partnership, given men’s common habit of drinking beer while watching sports.<sup>98</sup> Other ad space was sold to car companies like Subaru and Pontiac, technology companies like Magnavox, and even Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign.<sup>99</sup> In 1983, ESPN also became the first network to charge cable providers fees based on the number of subscribers. A fee of ten cents per

month per subscriber added up to \$10 million in 1984, and the per-subscriber carriage fee increased three-fold by the end of the 1980s.<sup>100</sup> If a provider balked at the fee, they could not have access to ESPN, and they tended to be “inundated with phone calls from irate customers” who wanted their sports programming back.<sup>101</sup> The combination of revenue from subscribers and ad buyers stabilized the network’s finances and became a common model for other cable networks, as well as increasing profits for major league sports themselves. Roger Werner, who served in various executive capacities at ESPN throughout the 1980s, credits the double revenue stream with the “growth of sports overall, and the inflation of player salaries, the cost of thirty-second spots, and the cost of tickets to games. It’s all interlinked.”<sup>102</sup>

ESPN was able to grow because the audience wanted to see more sports on television. Miller and Shales assert that ESPN’s real talent, however, wasn’t in offering the sports programming subscribers wanted to see but rather in making subscribers care about programs they ordinarily wouldn’t have simply because they had access to watch them.<sup>103</sup> By offering more programming than audiences had previously been able to access, ESPN created an audience, encouraging subscribers to want more and then giving it to them.

As the number of channels like ESPN the average cable subscriber could access increased, there were more opportunities for sports to be seen on television, and sports broadcasting soon made more money for major sports franchises than ticket sales did.<sup>104</sup> By 1989, ninety percent of men, and seventy-six percent of women, reported watching sports on television.<sup>105</sup> Sports on television expanded so much in the long 1980s that by 1990 revenues from broadcasting were the most important sources of income for Major League Baseball (MLB) and the National Football League (NFL).<sup>106</sup> MLB, for instance, earned \$80 million from television and radio in 1980 but a whopping \$612 million by 1990.<sup>107</sup> Television was so

financially lucrative that it “succeeded in changing the rules of football and baseball to make those sports more suited to television’s commercial needs” by increasing the number of timeouts, during which commercials could air, or ensuring game play waited for commercial breaks to end.<sup>108</sup> These changes were worthwhile to major league sports because of the financial gains television broadcast offered them.

These gains were made possible through technological advancements that allowed better access to live coverage, as well as the better visibility afforded by close-ups and instant replays, visibility that couldn’t happen at the stadium. While some critics found that television destroyed the aura of sports by encouraging its aspects of spectacle and commercialism over competition and athleticism, many sports fans, as well as television critics, celebrated the intimacy of watching sports on television because the television viewer always has the best seat in the house.<sup>109</sup> The instant replay, which had been introduced in the early 1960s, was one factor in enabling better viewing at home than at the stadium. Writing in 1968, Leonard Schechter described instant replay as a “beautiful thing”: “just as people are turning to each other to ask what happened, the switch is tripped and the play or knockdown or great moment of trouser splitting is being run through again.”<sup>110</sup> Because of the advantages of technologies like the instant replay, Schechter asserted that watching sports on television was superior to the experience of watching in person. Similarly, a *TV Guide* article in 1977 argued that fans attending games had become so accustomed to the commentary and play-by-play from televised broadcasts that they needed help understanding what they were watching.<sup>111</sup> Lawrence Wenner even recalls seeing stadium-goers bring radios and portable television sets to enhance the experience of watching the game in person.<sup>112</sup> These examples demonstrate how profoundly television had shaped how Americans watched and understood professional sports.<sup>113</sup>

Other advantages included new satellite technology that enabled live national broadcast. While NFL games had been broadcast at different times from the 1960s on, football found a regular place on the primetime lineup in 1970 when NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle coordinated a contract with ABC. The program, *Monday Night Football*, garnered enough of an audience share to warrant its continuation until 2006 when it moved to ESPN. In addition to bringing commentator Howard Cosell into the national spotlight, the success of *Monday Night Football* demonstrated the viability of increasing sports programming on television.

ABC's *Wide World of Sports* (1961-98) also attempted to satisfy the American viewing public's desire for more sports programming but notably did not include major league sports [Figure 5.4]. Instead, the crew of *Wide World of Sports* "combed the globe in search of anything remotely connected with sports that might prove entertaining to American audiences...and inexpensive to show."<sup>14</sup> By putting events on videotape, *Wide World of Sports* could edit clips together to ensure they fit into the program's ninety-minute slot.

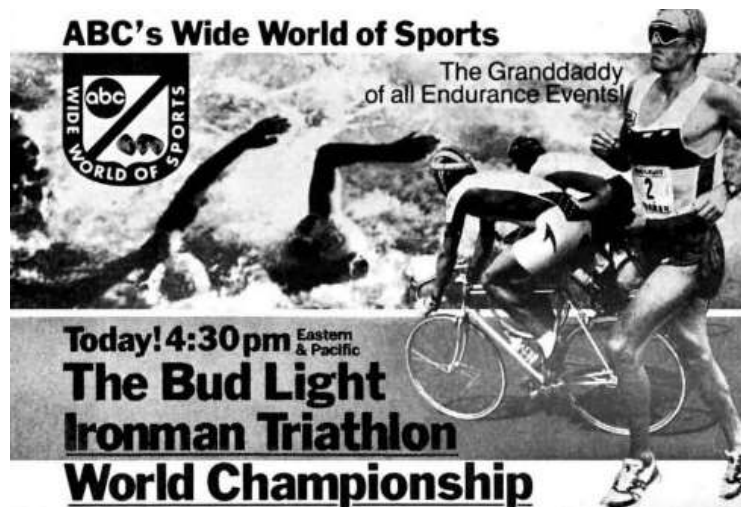


Figure 5.4. This ad for *Wide World of Sports* in the January 23, 1988 issue of *TV Guide* shows how the program sought to create interest in relatively obscure or less televisually dramatic sporting events.

By contrast, *Monday Night Football* and rival programming by ESPN offered the excitement of live broadcasts. ESPN capitalized on the thrill of liveness by offering subscribers a chance to watch games they ordinarily wouldn't get to see because they were in a different part of the country. ESPN also developed the technique of "live cut-ins" that gave important updates on other games in progress, so that viewers could follow multiple games at once without having to sit through the less exciting parts. While the big networks broadcast major league games from start to finish under the assumption that viewers preferred this, ESPN's vice president for programming in the early 1980s, Steve Anderson, believed differently: "If we were doing a game and it was in the second quarter, but another game was near the end and it was close, it seemed obvious to go to that other game."<sup>115</sup> Nationwide broadcasts, including live cut-ins, were some of the major advantages to watching sports on television.

The increase in sports programming in the long 1980s that was foregrounded by the launch of ESPN demonstrates the television industry's interest in fostering men's viewing. Network executives had begun to recognize demographics, rather than households, as a more valuable way of segmenting the audience for targeted programming and advertising. At a time when the primetime quality audience was working middle-class women, live sports programming succeeded at "drawing men away from network primetime programming that almost always rates higher with women."<sup>116</sup> A Simmons market research survey conducted in 1981 found that six times as many affluent men from ages 18 to 49 watched football as those who watched *Dallas*.<sup>117</sup> In 1993, the Nielsen ratings revealed that nine of the fifteen top broadcasts throughout television history had been sports programs.<sup>118</sup>

When ESPN moved to twenty-four hour programming, it was a result of pressure to demonstrate to cable systems that it could fulfill its promise of attracting subscribers through



adventurous programming. This meant, however, that the network had to fill time in unconventional ways. In April of 1981, ESPN offered the first live coverage of the NFL draft, which at that time was “hardly considered spectator material.”<sup>119</sup> Pete Rozelle, the commissioner of the NFL, reluctantly agreed to Chet Simmons’ request for ESPN to televise the draft. As Pete Williams describes, Rozelle “all but laughed” at the request and had misgivings about the “allure of watching a bunch of guys sitting around tables shouting out names.”<sup>120</sup> In his analysis of existing video of that draft, Michael David Smith describes how Pete Rozelle is unable to explain the process of draft picks to the television audience while Howard Cosell describes the event as “overrated and over-propagandized.”<sup>121</sup> While the NFL draft had previously been “barely reported, much less covered” on television before 1981, ESPN’s live broadcast turned out to be a plan that Michael Freeman characterizes as “one of the shrewdest decisions ESPN ever made.”<sup>122</sup> Not only did it fill up program time for the network, but it also whetted the audience’s taste for behind-the-scenes glimpses into football as an industry. The televised draft was so popular that in 1988, when Rozelle moved it to the weekend, it drew 1.7 million “football-starved fans” to watch ESPN’s coverage, and by 1993, the audience had grown to 2.5 million.<sup>123</sup> By making the business of football seem as exciting a television event as an actual football game, ESPN guided the audience’s desire for unprecedented access. In this way, the network developed an audience eager for its programming.

Access and liveness emerged as distinguishing qualities of ESPN, qualities shared with other highly rated sports programs like *Monday Night Football* and the annual broadcast of the Super Bowl. Richard Gruneau describes the “language of sports” as “immediacy and actuality.”<sup>124</sup> Sports programs purport to take viewers into the stadium but really take them into a highly coordinated television production that considers what to include, what to leave out, and

what to replay.<sup>125</sup> Writing in 1978, Herbert Zettl describes a defining characteristic of television – one that particularly separates it from film – as its liveness. For Zettl, the “energy of the original live event and that of the televised event are not too different from each other” because of how television scans and broadcasts images (where film freezes them into static frames on celluloid filmstrips).<sup>126</sup> Additionally, through switching between multiple cameras, television can offer a “multiplicity of viewpoint, a ‘let’s-look-at-it-from-another-point-of-view’ approach” that Zettl sees as central to television’s democratic potential.<sup>127</sup>

Liveness, however, may have always been more of a mythic quality of sports broadcasting than a technological reality. John Ellis finds liveness to be one of television’s most predominant myths, attributable to the idea that it is broadcast into the home according to a schedule.<sup>128</sup> For Jane Feuer, the concept of “television as essentially a live medium” that persists “so strongly as an ideology” is fundamentally flawed.<sup>129</sup> Writing in the 1980s, Feuer notes that much of what viewers might perceive as “live” television is in fact recorded to videotape and that technologies like the instant replay, apart from offering different points of view, were developed “precisely for the purpose of recording and freezing those ‘live’ sports events that were supposed to be the ontological glory of the medium.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, “liveness” was touted as one of the most exciting facets of sports broadcasting that, in reality, hinged upon video.

Programs like *Wide World of Sports* described themselves as presenting sports that were captured “live on videotape” – a semantic gray zone that reiterated the value of liveness. In fact, televised sports had begun using videotape long before the 1980s. Examples of what Michael Newman calls “gee-whiz accounts” of how technological innovations improved home viewing, such as Leonard Schechter’s 1968 article celebrating the instant replay, recognize that “manipulation of live temporality was in some ways an improvement on the immediacy and

directness of television broadcasting.”<sup>131</sup> Rather than ruining the experience of liveness, technologies like the instant replay, slow motion, and ESPN’s live cut-ins were tape-dependent innovations that increased the domestic audience’s sense of access to live sports.

Although women certainly did watch sports on television in the 1980s (and continue to do so), the assumption on behalf of producers and network executives was that many sporting events were being watched by more men than women. Some women’s sports were broadcast, but men’s sports were far more prevalent, meaning that “watching sports on television” presumed in particular men watching men. In fact, the first words ever heard on ESPN were, “If you’re a fan, if you’re a fan, what you’ll see in the next minutes, hours, days that follow may convince you you’ve gone to sports heaven,” but even with careful, repeated viewing it is impossible to tell if the line is “if you’re a fan” or “if you’re a man” – arguably because ESPN saw them as the same thing.<sup>132</sup> During a 1981 *Monday Night Football* game in which the score was close, one television commentator declared, “This is a game for *men only!*” Margaret Morse acknowledges the commentator probably meant to “underscore the evenly matched power of the opponents” (through the assumption of women as weaker).<sup>133</sup> For Morse, though, the comment also “drew attention to the male body in the only situation in which it is a legitimate object of the male gaze.”<sup>134</sup> Writing about the violence of football, Joan Chandler describes how close-ups reveal “the bone-crunching nature of the collision” and the “distorted face and twisting body of injury.”<sup>135</sup> While Chandler’s concern is how televising football created greater awareness for the game’s potential deadliness, her observations on how the body of the athlete is shown on television hearken back to Neale’s examination of how the male gaze, turned onto the body of another man, must be tempered through violence. Toby Miller makes a similar argument about sports by suggesting that the marketing and sale of the bodies of men who play sports (and

participate in corporate sponsorships and advertisements) is a fundamental part of the sports experience. For Miller beauty is as much a part of male sports discourse as toughness, and beauty would become exploited for its commercial possibilities in the 1990s when same-sex desire could be commoditized for a target gay audience.<sup>136</sup>

Although audience numbers reveal women did watch sports on television, the correlation between maleness and sports was so strong that it extended beyond athletes and fans to sports reporters themselves. Talented women worked as sportscasters, but they often experienced discrimination. Reporter Anita Martini of KPRC in Houston claimed in 1977 that she was not allowed to eat in the press room at the Astrodome with the rest of the male reporters.<sup>137</sup> Other women, like CBS' Phyllis George, a former cheerleader and Miss America pageant winner, were hired for their looks to appeal to a presumed audience of heterosexual men, despite having little knowledge or experience in sports journalism.<sup>138</sup>

Admittedly, not all televised sports encourage the scopophilic gaze through graphic display of men's bodies. In the long 1980s, networks devoted some 1200 hours and \$300 million to televising sports annually.<sup>139</sup> Not all of these resources could or did foster queer viewing. On broadcast networks, the Olympics continued to serve as a major sports broadcast every four years (and every two beginning in 1996). The Olympics have a "unique appeal" in that they "attract male and female viewers equally."<sup>140</sup> In addition to cross-gender appeal, certain sports receive more attention on television because they attract more affluent audiences. As Dan Kowet of *TV Guide* observes, networks outwardly claim that sports broadcasting is intended to "bestow the greatest number of sports events upon the largest mass audience," but in practice sports programming is intended to appeal to advertisers.<sup>141</sup> Golf, for example, is "completely devoid of the elements of sports drama" yet is frequently broadcast because "the average golf fan is way

above average when it comes to wealth and willingness to part with it.”<sup>142</sup> Watching golf on television does not allow for better viewing, since it is difficult to see the tiny ball on screen. The sport requires talent and skill, but it does not require virile, macho displays among its players (who, after all, appear in loose, preppy clothing instead of body-hugging uniforms).

Nonetheless, depictions of men sweating, writhing, and, at times, bleeding was and continues to be a significant part of American sports viewing. Television, after all, “made football the most popular national sport and created a new holiday” – Super Bowl Sunday – just to celebrate it.<sup>143</sup> In the 1980s, prior to specific television advertising targeting gay male audiences, sports on television fostered a particular kind of domestic viewing that permitted men to take pleasure in the viewing of other men’s bodies from the privacy of their homes. I call attention to this particular aspect of viewing televised sports, rather than screenings of “big games” in local bars, because of its concurrent timing with an increased ease of access to pornography that was granted by home video players and the creation of video cassette tapes. Together, cable sports and pornography on cassette afforded privacy while looking at bodies. This at once reiterated masculinity’s most normative aspects – men consuming pornography, men watching sports – while offering the potential to watch queerly.

#### Conclusion: Sports and Video as the Embodiment of Americanism

Thus far, I have described the ways that the development of time-shifting and home recording technologies catered to the “staying in” audience, giving them more content to watch on their own schedule. At the same time, the creation of men’s networks like ESPN also offered

new and exciting content for niche audiences. Together, these interrelated developments allowed for a private queer viewing.

But sports and video tapes were not solely understood as providing two kinds of bodily spectacle for private home viewing. Sports especially has a long history of public or social viewing. As Dan Streible notes, in the earliest days of cinema's existence, filmic recreations of boxing matches were exhibited in public.<sup>144</sup> Anna McCarthy chronicles how bars became sites for viewing prize fights and other sporting matches in the early days of television.<sup>145</sup>

Even within the home, viewing did not have to be a solitary activity. Joan Chandler argues that the “stereotyped image of a spaced-out, manipulated, inert creature, passively attending to whatever sports event corporate conspirators care to purvey, does not seem to fit what we know about the sports viewing habits of ourselves and our friends.”<sup>146</sup> Klinger's “new media aristocrats” often outfitted their luxurious home media spaces with large screens that facilitated group viewing. In a 1987 survey of over 700 people, Lawrence A. Wenner and Walter Gantz found that fans of professional football enjoyed watching games together, which led to a transfer of “stadium behaviors” like booing, cheering, eating, and drinking to the living room.<sup>147</sup>

In 1986, the Super Bowl pregame show on NBC included a live interview with President Reagan, who admitted to being a football fan [Figure 5.5]. Interviewed by Tom Brokaw in the White House, Reagan acknowledges the role national sports play in shaping the attitude of the nation, calling it “part of our personality.”<sup>148</sup> Brokaw asks what Americans can expect from Reagan's upcoming State of the Union speech by making an analogy between the Super Bowl and politics: the losing team will be in a “deficient situation, and all those players are going to experience a taxing year.” The phrase “taxing year” is repeated a few times between the two men before Reagan jokes that the upcoming year might be taxing (as in tiring) for him, but the

American public should not expect higher taxes. (In fact, the Tax Reform Act was passed later that year; in this sense, 1986 was indeed a “taxing year.”) Apart from this brief mention of politics, the 1986 interview emphasizes nostalgia for a past in which Reagan was younger and more agile. The bulk of the interview is about Reagan’s college football days. He comes to life as he tells a story about a remarkable play his team performed. This emphasis on nostalgia can be read as a way to depoliticize the Super Bowl XX; there are no right or wrong teams, only Americans.

The following day, Tom Shales of the *Washington Post* called Super Bowl XX “a day of flagrantly self-satisfied American-ness.”<sup>149</sup> Seeing the event less about gender and more about national character, Shales credits Reagan with saving “NBC’s otherwise slipshod and desultory pregame show from nearly complete fizzle.”<sup>150</sup> Lawrence A. Wenner reads the pregame interview as Reagan “giving the presidential seal of approval” to using televised sports as a break from more pressing social and global problems.<sup>151</sup> If the Super Bowl is an implicit national holiday, it is hardly the stuff of secret, private viewing.



*Figure 5.5. President Ronald Reagan declared that he was “so proud of and approving of both teams” in Super Bowl XX.*

Since Reagan's 1986 interview, all presidents have been involved in the Super Bowl in some way, which has helped to establish the largest television and sports event of each year as a de facto American holiday. In 2012, Barack Obama gave another pregame interview, a tradition he continued throughout his presidency. Given the Super Bowl's proximity to the State of the Union and presidential inaugurations (both of which take place in late January), a president's appearance during the pregame show or coin toss can help reestablish his image. It is customary for a president to refuse to take sides on the big game unless his home team is playing. When asked which team he will root for, Reagan declares he is "proud of, and approving of, both teams." This pride in the Americanness of the game itself, rather than in one particular team, is an insistent demonstration of a nonpartisan attitude on the heels of polemical political events.

The tendency of Americans to watch major sporting events like the Super Bowl further establishes an ethos of an American holiday around the game. But this does not negate the possibility for other, more illicit modes of viewing that were fostered by the tandem development of cable and home video technologies. On the contrary, the Americanness of football and the Super Bowl especially only serve to reiterate the ways that queer potentialities are folded into the popular conception of American masculinity, even if this is not widely recognized in popular discourse. During the 1991 halftime show, for instance, Fox's counter-programming of *In Living Color* featured a sketch called "Men on Football" that explicitly connected the game with queerness. In the sketch, Blaine (Damon Wayans) and Antoine (David Alan Grier) call attention to the tight pants worn by football players and the action of tackling as queerly exciting, as evidenced by their increased arousal as they discuss the sport.<sup>152</sup>

Another example of how sports and pornography are conflated for mass appeal in an embodiment of Americanism can be found in the 1989 HBO special examining the annual



swimsuit issue of the magazine *Sports Illustrated*. The annual swimsuit issue, which features various female models posing in bathing suits in exotic locations, has been sold annually since 1964. In 1989, *Sports Illustrated* released a special twenty-fifth anniversary issue with model Kathy Ireland on the cover, its best-selling issue to date [Figure 5.6]. Articles within the issue featured interviews with models, photographers, and magazine executives who had contributed to the legacy of the annual issue. In addition to this celebration in print, *Sports Illustrated* also produced a documentary, *The Making of the Sports Illustrated 25th Anniversary Swimsuit Issue*, which was broadcast on HBO in 1989 and later released on VHS. The visual pleasures of the print magazine had turned into cable television and home video content, uniting the two forms of domestic viewing I have described in this chapter.



*Figure 5.6. Kathy Ireland on the cover of Sports Illustrated, February 13, 1989.*

While *Sports Illustrated* is not a magazine devoted to pornography in the way that *Playboy* is, its 1989 HBO special called attention to the assumption that sports and eroticism go hand-in-hand in ways that the Playboy Channel did not. The annual swimsuit issue is largely

regarded as soft-core pornography (or, at the very least erotica), which is achieved by sexualizing of female bodies for a predominantly male readership. In her survey of *Sports Illustrated* readers, Laurel Davis finds that the annual swimsuit issue's foregrounded sexuality is one of the reasons readers subscribe to the magazine.<sup>153</sup> Bryan Curtis sees the issue as “wholesome-but-smutty” with medium and long shots used to mitigate the eroticism in a way not seen in magazines like *Playboy*, which feature close-ups and nudity.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless, the swimsuit issue has been the subject of controversy. In 1978, model Cheryl Tiegs' nipples could be seen through a fishnet swimsuit, resulting in cancelled subscriptions from some readers and outcries from librarians – as well as new subscriptions for interested readers.<sup>155</sup>

The HBO special similarly straddled the line between “wholesome and smutty” – or, more accurately, boring and enticing. Each segment follows a model to the location of her photo shoot. The camera shows the model posing while photographers, lighting designers, and editors strategize how to best capture her. This behind the scenes look at *Sports Illustrated* might be the print-to-video equivalent of ESPN's first broadcast of the NFL draft. Although the video allows the viewer to see moments of the photo shoot that would not ultimately make the print edition of the magazine, much of the special involves discussion about the models' performances and what good photography entails. In one segment, Elle Macpherson stands in wet sand on a beach, the waves lapping at her ankles [Figure 5.7]. She wears an orange bikini bottom and yellow crop top that, a few minutes in, she splashes with water to make seem sexier. Once the shirt is wet, her nipples are visible through the thin fabric, and the photographer can be heard encouraging her to pull it over her head to reveal her bare breasts, which she does not do. In the final moment of the segment, there is a freeze frame on the shot that ends up being published in *Sports Illustrated*, which is far less scandalous than the live-action images. Her nipples can no longer be seen.



*Figure 5.7. The swimsuit issue video captures model Elle Macpherson while also showing the still photographer capturing her.*

The benefit of video is to allow access and liveness which the print magazine cannot offer as well. Just as the NFL draft on ESPN created an audience through the offering of new content, the HBO special also serves as a lengthy commercial that *Sports Illustrated* no doubt hoped would drive viewers who did not already subscribe to the magazine to purchase it. The cross-promotional media strategy was largely successful. More than half a million VHS copies were sold, and the program was one of HBO's most-watched programs of 1989.<sup>156</sup> HBO and *Sports Illustrated* repeated the venture in 1992 with *Sports Illustrated: Swimsuit '92*, which aired more than six times. Similar specials have continued to air in recent years.

The annual swimsuit issue is a departure from *Sports Illustrated's* regular issues, which depict images of mostly male athletes alongside interviews and news about sports industries. Because the swimsuit issue caters to a heterosexual gaze, it can be understood as mitigating the potentially homoerotic pleasure men find in the regular issues. *Sports Illustrated's* conflation of athletics and erotics makes it a soft-core version of "sports porn." The larger category of "sports porn" can be understood as the eroticization of sports themselves, which often excludes women.

Brian Pronger notes that while in mainstream sports “homoerotic slippage” is assiduously avoided through a culture of homophobia among players and coaches, in sports pornography homoerotics are actively pursued.<sup>157</sup> For Pronger, bodily response to sports is as important as it is for Williams and Dyer with regard to pornographic film. In sports, physical demonstrations of engagement include clapping, cheering, and booing, which are usually in reaction to specific game plays. In other words, they do not occur throughout the entire game but only when the spectator is stimulated. In pornography, physical responses like arousal, masturbation, and orgasm are expected throughout the reading or viewing experience until orgasm is achieved and the text is no longer inspirational.<sup>158</sup> Although sports viewership is arousing and involves an amount of homoerotic pleasure understood by scholars, Pronger points out that it would be uncommon, indeed bizarre, to see “men masturbating at hockey games or when gathered around with their buddies watching the Superbowl [sic] on television.”<sup>159</sup> Yet “homoerotic slippage” is precisely what popularizes sports pornography featuring male-male sex and marketed to men on home video. Pronger singles out the 1985 video release *Sizing Up Before Your Very Eyes*, directed by Matt Sterling, as an example of classic sports pornography. The narrative is set in the locker room at an international sports competition, where two men have sex after appreciating each other’s athletic feats.

Pronger concerns his investigation of “sports porn” with explicit gay pornography with a central theme of sports or athletics. The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue does not foreground homosexual desire or portray explicit gay pornography. In providing one issue per year that encourages male readers to lust after the bodies of the female models photographed within, the magazine allows for explicit disavowal of the same lustful gazing in the rest of the issues. The act of looking at male athletes depicted throughout the year is rendered safe and socially

acceptable. The swimsuit issue special on HBO, like the Playboy Channel's representations of men for its female viewers, mask other forms of queer looking by foregrounding heterosexual desire.

*Sports Illustrated's* annual swimsuit issue is one example of how television in the late 1980s combined men's interest in pornography on tape with their interest in sports. The swimsuit issue is light on actual depictions of sports in favor of eroticized images of the female body, but this is only one aspect of how sports and pornography went hand in hand in the long 1980s. As cable sports rose in prominence, so too did pornography on video, and both offered men ways to engage in spectatorial pleasure without leaving the domestic sphere. Likewise, products like *Sports Illustrated's* annual swimsuit issue and the HBO documentary about it tie sports with the erotic material touting heterosexual pleasure. But the development of men's networks and the rise of the VCR in the home also fostered the conditions for men to find illicit queer pleasures as they watched the bodies of other men on screen.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Gray, "Behind Closed Doors: Video Recorders in the Home," in *Feminist Television Criticism*, eds. Charlotte Brunson, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 237.

<sup>3</sup> Richard O. Davis, *Sports in American Life: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 200.

<sup>4</sup> Akio Morita, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York: Signet, 1988), 232.

<sup>5</sup> *Sony Corporation of America et al. v. Universal City Studios, Inc. et al.*, 464 US 417 (1984). See also Paul Harris, "Supreme Court Rules Against Hollywood in Copyright Decision," *Variety*, June 18, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> David Lachenbruch, "Join the Home Video Revolution..." *TV Guide*, October 15, 1977, 30-33.

<sup>7</sup> Everett Rogers, "Video Is Here to Stay," *Media and Values* 42 (1988). Reprinted by Center for Media and Literacy, <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/video-here-stay>

<sup>8</sup> Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video*, 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

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- <sup>10</sup> Eric Hirsch, "New Technologies and Domestic Consumption," in *Consuming Media Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, eds. Roger Silverman and Eric Hirsch (London: Routledge, 1992), 208-226.
- <sup>11</sup> David Gauntlett and Anita Hill, *TV Living: Television Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Stobel, "Changing Tastes, More Individual Viewing Blamed for Decline of Situation Comedies on Network TV," *Television-Radio Age*, June 25, 1984, 39.
- <sup>13</sup> For more on television's origins as viewing within the family circle, see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); for more on how cable encouraged individualized viewing, see Luke Stadel, "Cable, Pornography, and the Reinvention of Television, 1982-1989," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 3 (2014): 52-75.
- <sup>14</sup> National Institutes of Health, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties" (Washington: United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1982), 91.
- <sup>15</sup> Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video*, 94.
- <sup>16</sup> Bill Rasmussen, *Sports Junkies Rejoice!: The Birth of ESPN* (1983)
- <sup>17</sup> Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video*; Joshua Greenberg, *From BetaMax to Blockbuster: Video Stores and the Invention of Movies on Video* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014); Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
- <sup>18</sup> Greenberg, *From BetaMax to Blockbuster*, 20.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. See Sony Betamax ads in *TV Guide*, October 1, 1977; October 22, 1977; December 2, 1977; and June 10, 1978.
- <sup>20</sup> Anecdotal evidence I collected from sports fans indicated that they did not often use recording technologies in the 1980s to tape sports games because a score would often be announced on the nightly news or in a newspaper before they had a chance to watch the tape, thus spoiling the experience. This disinterest in watching a game with a known outcome is somewhat contradicted by the popularity of old game reruns on ESPN Classic, which launched in 1995. However, ESPN positions these games as worth watching not to see who will win, since that information is already historically recorded. Instead, the value lies in being able to witness history unfold through the skill used in particular plays or how a certain victory was achieved.
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Cerone, "The Time Machine: Using Listed Codes, VCR Plus Will Simplify Recording Off TV," *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1990.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Greenberg, *From BetaMax to Blockbuster*, 18.
- <sup>24</sup> Marilyn Preston, "A Weekly Tip-Sheet For You and Your VCR: Worth Taping," *Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 1984: N58.
- <sup>25</sup> Shawn Michael Glinis, "VCRs: The End of TV as Ephemera" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 65-70.
- <sup>26</sup> Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video*, 50.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>28</sup> Merrill Panitt, "Programming for Profit," *TV Guide*, March 5, 1977, 40. Two-way cable was a feature in which a device was connected to the television that would enable viewers to "talk back" to their set and change television viewing from passive reception to active involvement, but by the mid-1980s the television industry had determined it was a failure. Examples of programs were game shows that could be played at home or public services seeking input from

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- device users. See Sally Bedell Smith, "Two-Way Cable T.V. Falters," *New York Times*, March 28, 1984.
- <sup>29</sup> David Lachenbruch, "The Great Time-Shift Experiment," *TV Guide*, April 9, 1977, 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Wasser, *Veni Vidi Video*, 73.
- <sup>31</sup> As quoted in Lachenbruch, "The Great Time-Shift Experiment," 6.
- <sup>32</sup> Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*, 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Gray, "Behind Closed Doors," 239.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Cerone, "The Time Machine."
- <sup>36</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 38.
- <sup>37</sup> Cecilia Tichi, *The Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 42-61.
- <sup>38</sup> National Association of Home Builders, "Housing Facts, Figures, and Trends for 2006" (2006); "Median and Average Square Feet of Floor Area in New Single-Family Houses Completed by Location" (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
- <sup>39</sup> Jason Reid, *Get Out of My Room!* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 137-166.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.
- <sup>41</sup> Michael Z. Newman, *Video Revolutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 42.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.
- <sup>43</sup> Lachenbruch, "Join the Home Video Revolution..." 30-33.
- <sup>44</sup> David Prescott, "The Living Room Revolution: Entertainment Together - Or Whenever," *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1985, 14; "Buyer's Guide to Home Video Equipment," *The Family Handyman*, December 1981, 77-79; Steven A. Booth, "Home Video," *Popular Mechanics*, November 1980, 118-120.
- <sup>45</sup> Newman, *Video Revolutions*, 49.
- <sup>46</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 21.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>48</sup> Gene H. Brodie and Zolinda Stoneman, "A Contextualist Framework for Studying the Influence of Television Viewing in Family Interaction," *Journal of Family Issues* 4, no. 2 (1983): 340.
- <sup>49</sup> James Lull, "The Social Uses of Television," *Human Communications Research* 6, no. 3 (1980): 197-209; David Morley, *Family Television* (New York: Comedia, 1986), 36.
- <sup>50</sup> Howard Rosenberg, "Me and My Machine: A Stormy Relationship," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1982, N20.
- <sup>51</sup> Ralph Blumenthal, "'Hard-Core' Grows Fashionable - and Very Profitable," *New York Times*, January 21, 1973.
- <sup>52</sup> Advocacy campaigns by groups like Women Against Pornography are chronicled extensively in Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University, 2002), 267-300. David Allyn examines the differences but sometimes overlapping concerns among conservatives, liberals, and radicals had over pornography. See Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 184-195.
- <sup>53</sup> Lewis, *Hollywood vs. Hard Core*, 188-189.
- <sup>54</sup> Joseph Slade, *Pornography and Sexual Representation* (New York: Greenwood, 2001), 1098.
- <sup>55</sup> Lewis, *Hollywood vs. Hard Core*, 266.
- <sup>56</sup> Sally Bedell, "Too Hot to Handle?," *TV Guide*, October 8, 1977, 18.

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- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, 19.
- <sup>58</sup> Richard Stengel, "A Tale of a Bunny and a Mouse," *Time*, September 12, 1983, 62.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Karen Jaehne, "Confessions of a Feminist Porn Programmer," *Film Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1983): 15.
- <sup>61</sup> David Hebditch and Nick Anning, *Porn Gold* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1988), 227.
- <sup>62</sup> Jonathan Coopersmith, "Pornography, Technology, and Progress," *Icon* 4, no. 1 (1998): 101.
- <sup>63</sup> Merrill Lynch, "The Home Video Market: Times of Turbulence and Transition," in *Following the Dollars from Retail to Net Profits: An Examination of the Businesses of Creating and Using Revenues from Motion Pictures and Television Programs*, ed. Keith G. Gleer (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California Press, 1986), 111-133.
- <sup>64</sup> Caetlin Benson-Allott, *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 194.
- <sup>65</sup> John R. Wilke, "A Publicly Held Firm Turns X-Rated Videos into a Hot Business," *Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 1994, 1-2.
- <sup>66</sup> Coopersmith, "Pornography, Technology, and Progress," 104.
- <sup>67</sup> Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 306.
- <sup>68</sup> Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 42.
- <sup>69</sup> Home video was also a resource for those who wished to view non-pornographic LGBT content. Direct-to-video producers and mail-order distributors like Wolfe Video, which began selling lesbian-themed videotapes through the mail in 1985, flourished in the 1980s as a result of some consumers' willingness to pay a high price for the discretion that home delivery afforded them. See Bryan Wuest, "LGBT Film Distribution Companies and the Gay Media Niche, 1985 to Present (PhD diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 2017).
- <sup>70</sup> Joe A. Thomas, "Gay Male Video Pornography: Past, Present, and Future," in *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2000), 49-67.
- <sup>71</sup> Martin J. Downing, Jr. et al., "Sexually Explicit Media Use by Sexual Identity: A Comparative Analysis of Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Men in the United States," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46, no. 6 (2017): 1763-1776.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 165-166.
- <sup>74</sup> Thomas, "Gay Male Video Pornography," 53.
- <sup>75</sup> John R. Burger, *One-Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography* (New York: Haworth Press, 1995), 21-25. Burger notes that the trend of self-identified straight porn actors being serviced by others in gay porn films was also caused by the AIDS epidemic.
- <sup>76</sup> Richard Dyer, "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms," *Jump Cut* 30 (1985).
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> John R. Burger, *One-Handed Histories*, 21.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, 41.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid, 99.
- <sup>81</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.
- <sup>82</sup> Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983): 2-17.
- <sup>83</sup> Dyer, "Male Gay Porn."



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- <sup>84</sup> Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 57-59; Williams, *Screening Sex*, 20.
- <sup>85</sup> Williams, *Screening Sex*, 20.
- <sup>86</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 77-121.
- <sup>87</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 160-172.
- <sup>88</sup> Charlotte Brunson, "Women Watching Television," *Medie Kultur* 2, no. 4 (1986): 105.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>90</sup> John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 27, emphasis in original.
- <sup>91</sup> Donald Parente, "A History of Television and Sports" (PhD diss., University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, 1974), 50.
- <sup>92</sup> Arthur Daley, "Is Boxing on the Ropes?" *New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 1954, 19ff.
- <sup>93</sup> Michael Freeman, *ESPN: The Uncensored History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 2000), 27.
- <sup>94</sup> James Andrew Miller and Tom Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2011), xiii.
- <sup>95</sup> N.R. Kleinfeld, "ABC to Acquire ESPN as Texaco Sells Its 72%," *New York Times*, May 1, 1984.
- <sup>96</sup> It is worth noting that both books also seek to expose ESPN's internal culture of misogyny.
- <sup>97</sup> Stuart Evey with Irv Broughton, *ESPN: The No-Holds-Barred Story of Power, Ego, Money, and Vision that Transformed a Culture* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2004).
- <sup>98</sup> Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*, 78.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>100</sup> Raymond Gamache, *A History of Sports Highlights* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), 152.
- <sup>101</sup> Freeman, *ESPN*, 117.
- <sup>102</sup> As quoted in Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*, 114.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.
- <sup>104</sup> Helmut Dietl and Tariq Hasan, "Pay-TV Versus Free-TV: A Model of Sports Broadcasting Rights Sales," *Eastern Economic Journal* 33, no. 3 (2007): 405-428.
- <sup>105</sup> Lawrence A. Wenner, "Media, Sports, and Society: The Research Agenda," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage, 1989), 14.
- <sup>106</sup> Rodney Fort and James Quirk, "Cross-Subsidization, Incentives, and Outcomes in Professional Team Sports Leagues," *Journal of Economic Literature* 33, no. 3 (1995): 1265-1299.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>108</sup> Panitt, "Programming for Profit," 38-39.
- <sup>109</sup> Brian Rader, *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: The Free Press, 1984); Joan M. Chandler, *Television and National Sport* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), xi.
- <sup>110</sup> Leonard Schechter, "Why It's Better to Watch the Game on TV," *New York Times*, March 3, 1968, SM32.
- <sup>111</sup> Steve Galman, "Review: Network Basketball," *TV Guide*, March 19, 1977, 36.
- <sup>112</sup> Wenner, "Media, Sports, and Society," 32.
- <sup>113</sup> Of course, not all stadiums were equipped to enable the best television viewing. Sports writer Melvin Durslag criticized a lack of lights for night games at Wrigley Field, which he felt put a

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- crimp in the possibilities for television fandom for the Chicago Cubs. See Melvin Durslag, "No Lights, No Pennants, No Blackouts," *TV Guide*, July 9, 1977, 26-27.
- <sup>114</sup> Davis, *Sports in American Life*, 195.
- <sup>115</sup> As quoted in Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*, 62.
- <sup>116</sup> Wenner, "Media, Sports, and Society," 36.
- <sup>117</sup> As cited in Robert W. McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage, 1989), 63.
- <sup>118</sup> John Catsis, *Sports Broadcasting* (Chicago: Nelson-Hill, 1996), 72.
- <sup>119</sup> Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*, 63.
- <sup>120</sup> Pete Williams, *The Draft: A Year Inside the NFL's Search for Talent* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006), 53.
- <sup>121</sup> Michael David Smith, "A Look Back: Before the NFL Draft Got Big," *NBC Sports*, April 22, 2012.
- <sup>122</sup> Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*, 63; Freeman, *ESPN*, 102.
- <sup>123</sup> Williams, *The Draft*, 53.
- <sup>124</sup> Richard Gruneau, "Making Spectacle: A Case Study in Television Sports Production," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage, 1989), 134-135.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>126</sup> Herbert Zettl, "The Rare Case of Television Aesthetics," *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, no. 2 (1978): 7.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>128</sup> Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 77.
- <sup>129</sup> Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," in *Regarding Television*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983), 15.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>131</sup> Newman, *Video Revolutions*, 24.
- <sup>132</sup> Lee Leonard speaking on *SportsCenter*, "Episode 1.1," ESPN, September 7, 1979.
- <sup>133</sup> Margaret Morse, "Sport on Television: Replay and Display," in *Regarding Television*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983), 44-45
- <sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>135</sup> Chandler, *Television and National Sport*, 63.
- <sup>136</sup> Toby Miller, *Sportsex* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2002), 9. For more on the development of the gay market in the 1990s, see Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- <sup>137</sup> Melvin Durslag, "Press-Box Lib: Women Sportscasters Think They're Past the Days of Being Snubbed by Namath and Scorned by Ashe," *TV Guide*, July 30, 1997, 16-19.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* It is worth noting that a culture of hiring women to be sexual objects for male spectators, a culture that resulted in pervasive sexual harassment at ESPN, has been exposed in recent years and is discussed at length in Miller and Shales, *Those Guys Have All the Fun*.
- <sup>139</sup> Dan Kowet, "Paying for Blood," *TV Guide*, October 15, 1977, 4-5.
- <sup>140</sup> Catsis, *Sports Broadcasting*, 88.
- <sup>141</sup> Kowet, "Paying for Blood," 7.
- <sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>143</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, "Television and Behavior," 77.
- <sup>144</sup> Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

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- <sup>145</sup> Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 29-62.
- <sup>146</sup> Chandler, *Television and National Sport*, 17.
- <sup>147</sup> Lawrence A. Wenner and Walter Gantz, "The Audience Experience with Sports on Television," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage, 1989), 244.
- <sup>148</sup> *Super Bowl XX*, NBC, January 26, 1986.
- <sup>149</sup> Tom Shales, "Hut One, Hut Two, Hype!, Hype!, Hype! On the Tube, a Bowl Binge," *Washington Post*, January 27, 1986.
- <sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>151</sup> Lawrence A. Wenner, "The Super Bowl Pregame Show: Cultural Fantasies and Political Subtext," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage, 1989), 174.
- <sup>152</sup> *In Living Color*, "Homeboy Shopping Network," Fox, January 26, 1992.
- <sup>153</sup> Laurel R. Davis, *The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 19.
- <sup>154</sup> Bryan Curtis, "The *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue: An Intellectual History," *Slate*, February 16, 2005.
- <sup>155</sup> Dave Osborn, "Cheryl Tiegs Reflects on White 'Fishnet' SI Suit, Modeling Career," *Naples Daily News*, March 7, 2014.
- <sup>156</sup> Martie Zad, "*Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Models to Make HBO Splash," *Washington Post*, March 1, 1992.
- <sup>157</sup> Brian Pronger, "The Homoerotic Space of Sport in Pornography," in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, and Experience*, eds. Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale (London: Routledge, 2004), 145-158.
- <sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Six Conclusion: The End of the Long 1980s?

As the long 1980s wound down, the different themes of the Clinton era emerged alongside new forms of entertainment that television's "post-network" or cable era offered. The television series that had so defined the long 1980s shifted off primetime, many into syndicated reruns at off-peak hours. In the spring of 1992, *Growing Pains*, *Who's the Boss*, *The Cosby Show*, and *MacGyver* all concluded. Series like *Full House* lingered until the mid-1990s, attempting to find ways to address concerns of the new decade but soon feeling out of step with the kind of primetime programming that began to dominate American television.

Network executives in the 1990s became less interested in family programming like *Full House* than in programming for what Ron Becker calls the socially liberal, urban-minded, professional, or "slumpy," demographic.<sup>1</sup> Primetime television quickly began to reflect the presumed social values of this new target audience: progressive tolerance to sexual and racial minorities was more popular than wholesomeness, sitcoms like *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-98) and *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) featured clusters of single friends instead of families with children, and explicit sex and sexuality, especially queerness and homosexuality, were common themes across primetime. Moralistic series that had populated the primetime schedule in the 1980s, like *Family Ties* and *MacGyver*, seemed out of touch with the material that was intended to appeal to this young, hip demographic.

Serial melodramas that had dominated the primetime schedule eventually ended. *Dallas* lasted an impressive fourteen seasons, though by its final season in 1990-91 only three of the original main cast members remained as series regulars.<sup>2</sup> *Dallas* outlasted *Dynasty* by two years, and the *Dallas* spinoff *Knots Landing* would last two more seasons into 1993. Other major

dramas like *Hill Street Blues* and *Magnum PI* made a major impact on the cinematography and narrative style of primetime dramas, though both had ended in the late 1980s.

Popular dramas in the 1990s were the clear descendants of series from the long 1980s. NBC's *ER* (1994-2009) drew upon *Hill Street*'s frantic workplace setting, jumpy camera work, and overlapping storylines, replacing the police precinct with a Chicago emergency room. The melodrama mode was adopted with success to teen dramas. Aaron Spelling's *Beverly Hills, 90210* (Fox, 1990-2000) lasted longer than *Dynasty* and spawned several spinoffs as had *Dallas*.<sup>3</sup> As with those two series, *90210* depicted a world of extreme wealth, but in lieu of the conflict arising from patriarchal machinations, the narrative emphasized teenage angst and familial and social issues.

As the 1990s grew on, the serial storytelling format became the hallmark of television about men, usually intended for men. By the 2000s, the serial melodrama genre was populated with cable series featuring men at the center. *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-15), and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) were some of the critical darlings of this period that was heralded as a new "golden age" of television by critics.<sup>4</sup> Without offering an entire history of twenty years of television, I want to call attention to the way this "new golden age" descended directly from the long 1980s. In popular understanding, the period is distinguishable for its cinematic aesthetics and lavish production designs – elements that highlight the "quality" label. These quality dramas are also known for their gripping stories. As Newman and Levine point out, though, those gripping stories are melodramatic and serial in the same way that primetime serials of the long 1980s were and daytime soaps continue to be.<sup>5</sup> The difference is in the foregrounding of male characters and men's experiences; because these are male melodramas, ads, paratexts, and interviews with casts and producers position them away from

any “soapy” qualities, which Newman and Levine argue gives men cultural permission to watch these series.<sup>6</sup> As I have demonstrated in the second chapter of this project, the focus on men’s stories within primetime serials began in the long 1980s as a way of inviting male viewers into the narrative. Thus, the evolution of masculinities within primetime serials sees its direct impact on some of the most critically acclaimed programs today.

Alongside their legacy via impact on narrative form and production values, series from the long 1980s also simply never left television. As the fourth chapter of this project reveals, the 1980s saw a proliferation of cable networks that address specialized segments of the larger viewing public. For many of these networks, syndicated reruns were a cost-effective way to fill the programming schedule. Derek Kompare calls these networks “television boutiques, focusing on particular audiences and genres, and providing not only rerun programming an entire formal iconography and ethos geared towards a particular television brand.”<sup>7</sup> Kompare cites cable channels like Nick at Nite and TV Land as two networks that capitalized on nostalgia for television’s past. *Designing Women*, *Charles in Charge*, *Diff’rent Strokes*, *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, and *Who’s the Boss* were all rerun in the early 2000s on Nick at Nite, in addition to being syndicated on local channels. Today niche networks like CoziTV, founded in 2012 as part of the NBC Universal group, feature a constant stream of nostalgic programming that gives the sense the long 1980s are still alive. *The A-Team*, *Hart to Hart*, *Knight Rider*, *Magnum PI*, *Simon and Simon*, and *Miami Vice* are all broadcast on Cozi, often multiple times in one day. AntennaTV, a digital cable network owned by Tribune Media, airs reruns of *Mr. Belvedere* and *Family Ties*, among others. Although primetime broadcast television may have moved on from the 1980s, television as a whole has not.

The kind of programming that succeeded in the reruns market was revealing about the tastes of the American public. The 1970s programs that had propelled Fred Silverman to the status of television legend and that had dominated the primetime ratings (*All in the Family*, *Laverne and Shirley*, *Happy Days*) were “only moderate, fading successes” as syndicated reruns in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, *M\*A\*S\*H* was a rerun juggernaut that consistently beat out other programs in ratings. It was so successful in syndicated rerun that it was continually on the air throughout the 1980s. Success in syndication can be attributed to myriad factors, but the significance of *M\*A\*S\*H*'s success is that the number and availability of reruns meant continued images of Alan Alda's sardonic but sympathetic Hawkeye Pierce in the foreground as an off-primetime reiteration of primetime's “new man” ideology. Similar 1980s programs found second, third, sometimes ninth lives in syndicated reruns.<sup>9</sup> These programs were cheap for affiliates to buy, and their continued presence on screen meant continued models of long 1980s masculinities were available to watch.

In American politics, the end of the long 1980s was marked by the inauguration of Bill Clinton as the nation's forty-second president. Just as television continued to grapple with the legacy of the 1980s in generic shifts and reruns while also finding a new tone, Clinton's presidency in some ways promised a new (Democratic) start after twelve years of Republicans in office but in other ways continued to be more of the same Reagan-era project. A southerner whose charm appealed across lines of racial segregation, Clinton invoked Carter in many ways: campaigning as a non-elite outsider, respectful of women and people of color, whose presidency was buoyed with the promise of more attention paid to the struggles of the working class. Although George H.W. Bush's presidency had differed from Reagan's in many ways, and Bush himself was never the charismatic state figurehead that Reagan had been, in the popular

imagination Clinton's election seemed to firmly close the book on the Reagan era. At the 1993 inauguration, for instance, poet Maya Angelou read a poem entitled "On the Pulse of Morning," which both equated Clinton's presidency with Reagan's famous "morning in America" campaign commercial and proclaimed the end of the Republicans' twelve-year legacy. Historical accounts vary in their interpretation of whether Clinton's presidency, particularly his economic policies, "surrendered, completing the policy revolution that...Reagan had started fifteen years earlier."<sup>10</sup>

Unlike Carter, whose admission in 1976 that he had committed "adultery in his heart" was more of a validation of his wholesomeness than a true confession of sin, Clinton exuded sexuality, and his White House was plagued with was scandals about sexual and financial misconduct.<sup>11</sup> His particular form of masculinity took the "new man" ideology of the 1970s and breathed new life into it. But his masculinity was also marked by a contradictory respect for women, as evidenced by the significant role First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton played in the administration and the appointments of the first woman Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, as well as the second woman to the Supreme Court, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Just as equally, though, Clinton's masculinity was marked by mistreatment of women, as the allegations of sexual misconduct attest.

This project marks the end of the long 1980s with the election of Bill Clinton to office. This cultural moment also coincides with changes to primetime's preferred demographic, the conclusion of many series studied here, and the explosion of cable networks that ushered in a more individuated viewing experience. But in many ways, for children of the long 1980s like myself, the emotional conclusion to the period was the news breaking in 2014 of numerous allegations of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment carried out by Bill Cosby. As the number of women accusing him grew overnight, it became increasingly difficult to deny the



allegations and reconcile the engaged, fun-loving father of Cliff Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* with the backstage nightmare. For Bambi Haggins, the recent news stories show the “cracks in the idealized veneer” of Cosby’s old comedy material that now seems teeming with references to behaviors named in the assault allegations.<sup>12</sup> If Cosby, who relentlessly preached respectability politics in his personal life and portrayed a doting new age father on television, is in reality a sexual predator, then the vision of the new man across 1980s television must be questioned. The father figure many Americans admired and many aspired to be is a shattered illusion. As Brittany Cooper puts it, “that Cliff Huxtable was merely a TV character is almost irrelevant. Real is relative. He and his family represented a particular kind of possibility.”<sup>13</sup> For Cooper, the loss of the Cosby image means the opportunity to seek out new possibilities – perhaps more authentic ones – for families. But Cooper is also quick to acknowledge that Americans, and especially the black community, are in a period of collective mourning over the loss of an icon and the vision he represented. I would also add that we are in a period of mourning for the era over which Bill Cosby presided as Cliff Huxtable; while there are still reruns to keep series available to viewers, television from the long 1980s is now symbolically dead.

### Trump TV: The Performativity and Fragility of Masculinity

When I began this project, I imagined writing about the significance of Hillary Clinton’s election as the nation’s forty-fifth – and first woman – president and its impact on American culture. I wondered what it would mean to examine masculinities within television content, producers, and audiences during the long 1980s. Would doing this kind of work seem out of step with the feminist revolution that seemed to be happening? Would I write about how Hillary

Clinton's presidency ushered in a new era of American culture that foregrounded women and their experiences? To some extent, this has happened regardless of Clinton's loss. The Sony reboot of the *Ghostbusters* franchise with a cast of women comedians in 2016 may now be regarded as a box office flop, but it was the start of a slew of expected film and television projects in which male characters will be converted to female and played by women.<sup>14</sup> But Clinton's loss on that fateful night meant the shattering of another vision, one of many us had expected, campaigned and voted for, and been prepared to celebrate.

The election of Donald Trump was a shock. The goal of this project is not to interrogate how or why Trump was elected, nor even to examine Trump's presidency; however, through a television historical lens, Trump's election offers intriguing possibilities for exploring the relationship between masculinities on television and in American politics. In the third chapter of this project, for instance, I examine drag performances on *Saturday Night Live* in the long 1980s. During the 2016-17 season, *Saturday Night Live* became extraordinarily popular again, in large part due to its heavy political themes. The season boasted fifteen appearances by Alec Baldwin as Trump, often showing the chaos and inanity of Trump's White House during the episode cold opens.

Other personae within Trump's administration have been satirized. The most conspicuous was (now former) press secretary Sean Spicer, performed by Melissa McCarthy in a suit, a wig with a very high hairline, and unflattering makeup [Figure 6.1]. Sketches often ended with tantrums that involved "Spicey" throwing the podium in the press briefing room. McCarthy's Spicey is yet another incarnation of *Saturday Night Live*'s long history of drag and its cutting political humor. As Halberstam observes, "white men derive enormous power from assuming and confirming the nonperformative nature of masculinity."<sup>15</sup> The portrayals of Spicer by

Melissa McCarthy highlight how performative, and often ridiculous, white, heterosexual masculinity can be. But where the best sketches of the long 1980s showed the pliability of masculinity, here a tremendously talented woman embodies the rigidity of heteromascularity at its worst. Further, some of the joy in watching the Spicey sketches is that the character is played by a woman, thus equating mockery of Spicer with mockery of his masculinity – humor via emasculation (“look, he’s a girl!”). As with Dana Carvey’s Church Lady or Mike Myers’ Linda Richman, McCarthy’s Spicey shows her talent at crossing gender lines in performance, but the overall effect is to not to show that McCarthy is brave enough to embrace her inner masculine side. The effect is ultimately to make funny masculine anger and violence, rendering it a source of humor rather than a sincere social problem that needs solving. In this way, the Spicey sketches reify some of the very aspects of heteromascularity they seem to want to critique.



*Figure 6.1. “Spicey” behind the press briefing room podium on Saturday Night Live.<sup>16</sup>*

## Reviving and Rebooting the Long 1980s

Across film, television, and streaming content, the long 1980s have become popular fodder for revitalization, though the successes of these endeavors are mixed. As American society emerges from the Great Recession, series about extreme wealth may be fun to indulge in once again. *Dallas* was revived in 2012 as a “next generation” story that featured Larry Hagman as J.R. Ewing alongside a cast of newer, younger, but equally materialistic children of his generation, though the series was on TNT, a cable network that skews older in its demographics. Larry Hagman’s death during the filming of the second season irrevocably changed the series, which continued for a full third season without him before its cancelation. In 2017, the CW brought back a new version of *Dynasty*, and the coinciding timing of this reboot with Trump’s first term in office enables a criticism of patriarchal ruthlessness while also encouraging viewers to envy extreme affluence. An early review by television critic Maureen Ryan describes the show as having an ethos of “mere adequacy,” the result of lackluster script-writing and the CW’s notorious miniscule budgets for sets and costumes that, unlike in the original version, mean that the rebooted series lacks the opulence and camp that made the original so memorable.<sup>17</sup> Neither series achieved anywhere near the ratings or critical reception of the original series.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere, action series are also finding themselves rebooted. The new *MacGyver* premiered on CBS in the fall of 2016 and is currently in its second season. As with the original series, the title character (played by Lucas Till with a shoulder-length hairdo that rivals Richard Dean Anderson’s) works for a secret government organization and gets out of international scrapes using his ingenuity (“MacGyverisms”). Unlike the original, however, MacGyver now works with a partner, Jack Dalton (George Eads). This change gives the series a “bromantic”

edge that the original often lacked. But navigating the tension between tough, smart action hero and loyal friend and partner is hardly an innovative way of depicting a character's range of masculine performance; it draws upon tropes familiar to the Western, action series of the past, and great American literature with few gestures toward the original *MacGyver*'s deep sensitivity and contemplativeness.<sup>19</sup>

Like *MacGyver*, *Magnum PI* is slated for a reboot as of 2017; the reboot is under development by Peter Lenkov, who is also currently serving as the showrunner for the *MacGyver* reboot.<sup>20</sup> *Magnum PI*'s legacy in American television was its negotiation between episodic and serial storytelling, a negotiation that is now standard among scripted network dramas. The reboot will also tap into the original series' emphasis on survivor trauma, with the new title character as a veteran who served in Afghanistan. According to a poll by CNN in 2011, nearly sixty percent of Americans saw the war in Afghanistan as a parallel to Vietnam (where the original Thomas Magnum served), since both wars were perceived to be morally ambiguous quagmires, causing unnecessary injury and death to Americans with little gains to or support from the native populations.<sup>21</sup> Since many episodes of the original *Magnum* depicted what would today be called post-traumatic stress disorder, a reboot could be quite successful if it tapped into the same psychologically haunting experiences. Likely, though, given the tone of other contemporaneous primetime action series, explorations of the psyche will be forfeited for explosions.

One other critical change for the *Magnum* reboot is the recreation of the character Higgins, originally played by John Hillerman, as a woman (Juliet instead of John). While the *MacGyver* reboot foregrounds relations between men, the *Magnum* reboot erases one of the central, most dynamically interesting relationships of the original series in favor of what will likely become a simplistic relationship of heterosexual tension. This change follows a pattern

established in other reboots and revivals. A new interpretation of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in CBS' *Elementary* (2012- ), for instance, falls into the same trap by changing Watson to a woman, played by Lucy Liu.

### *Fuller House: A Case Study in Nostalgia for the Long 1980s*

Perhaps the most visible gender-swap is in the Netflix series *Fuller House*, a revival of the ABC sitcom *Full House* that shifts focus from three men raising children to three women. Within the narrative, this shift is a result of the “next generation” scope of the series. Similar to the *Dallas* revival, *Fuller House* puts the narrative focus on two of the daughters from the original series, who are now adults, and their friend.<sup>22</sup> While the charm of the original series, as I have described in the second chapter, was predicated on men learning to fulfill the feminine domestic role, this switch undercuts any potentially interesting reconfigurations of gender. Now three women are charged with raising a group of children together, and while their talents at child-rearing vary, there is a kind of logic and naturalness expected of them within the narrative as women characters. The alternative family construction of the original series has been preserved, but it has lost any of its dangerous queerness or intrigue. Instead, women are once again expected to cook, clean, and raise children while also serving as breadwinners. This postfeminist sense of “having it all” in many ways reflects the ideals of the 2010s, but it also negates the most important premise of the original series and any implications for challenging hegemonic gender roles.

In the series' premiere, D.J. (Candace Cameron-Bure) is overheard worrying about how she will manage to take care of her three children now that her husband, a firefighter, has died in

the line of duty.<sup>23</sup> Her sister Stephanie (Jodie Sweetin) decides to quit her job in London to help D.J., and D.J.'s childhood friend Kimmy (Andrea Barber), a divorcee, moves in to their San Francisco home with her children as well. Together they forge an alternative family unit. As the series progresses, the three women engage in various romantic relationships and at times contemplate leaving their shared house to create new families, but, as with the original series, they always return to the “she-wolf pack.” In many ways, the series shows that single mothers can have thriving personal lives (with the help of two additional moms to help with the kids), but it also naturalizes the connection between women and the domestic in ways that neuter the original series’ compelling premise [Figure 6.2]. The goal of *Fuller House* is not to redefine the American family or the American family sitcom.<sup>24</sup> The goal is to give target viewers roughly the age of the children in the original, who are now adults with subscriptions to Netflix, a way to relive their youth and see themselves in the shoes of D.J., Stephanie, and Kimmy.



*Figure 6.2. The women go out on the town, but D.J. feels guilty about leaving her kids.*<sup>25</sup>

The series’ release via the streaming platform Netflix is responsible for one of the biggest changes to the experience of watching. The original series aired on broadcast primetime, one

week at a time, leaving viewers to hunger for more in the interceding six days – a hunger that was somewhat sated by the rest of the ABC Friday night T.G.I.F. lineup of similar domestic sitcoms, but not fully. During the summer hiatus, as episodes were rerun, fans could revisit the season and build anticipation for the return of new episodes. Netflix’s strategy for its original series maintains the anticipatory build-up as one waits for a new season to debut (a very long nine months in the case of *Fuller House*, compared to the traditional broadcast model of four for summer hiatus). But Netflix eliminates any possibility of week-to-week anticipation by releasing entire seasons at the same time, allowing (expecting) the viewer to binge-watch from start to finish. The experience of watching *Fuller House* on Netflix, as James Poniewozik describes it, becomes “a self-conscious, dated and maudlin reminder of the ceaseless march of time and your inevitable demise.”<sup>26</sup> The ceaseless of that march is exacerbated by Netflix’s autoplay feature, which streams one episode after another without user input. These two facets of watching on Netflix encourage – perhaps force – the viewer to binge-watch.

*Fuller House* serves as doubly interesting case study in how nostalgia for the long 1980s shapes television and digital culture today. Narratively, its reification of women’s place in the home, combined with constant references to the original series through in-jokes, character appearances, and parallel plotlines, and its use of a laugh-track (which is uncommon among sitcoms today), make the experience of watching the series like witnessing, as one reviewer says, “a nostalgic trainwreck.”<sup>27</sup> In terms of production and distribution, each season’s release is anticipated and celebrated, promising several hours of binge-watching that bring the long 1980s back for a few potent hours.



## Conclusion: The Legacy of the Long 1980s

When I was a preteen, I had a blank VHS tape onto which I had recorded several of my favorite T.G.I.F. shows, including a hokey episode of *Full House* in which the Tanner family threw a barbecue and celebrated by dancing a conga line while father Danny (Bob Saget) sang the O'Jays' 1972 hit "Love Train."<sup>28</sup> As a child who was often too ill to play outside and isolated in the rural countryside from friends who lived in town, I holed up all weekend in the guest bedroom of our house, which had a television set and VCR, to watch television while my parents were outside working on the lawn and garden. It was my own private and (I realize in hindsight) queer world of viewing. I watched the T.G.I.F. tape countless times. I envied the Tanners' "love train" compared to the solitude of my own childhood. My obsessive rewatching was an analog precursor to what we call binge-watching today. It was also a reliving of the long 1980s, which were still ongoing right outside the bedroom window. The more I watched that tape, the fuzzier the image became, and this normal degradation from the VCR revealed the imperfections of the technology and the period by extension.

This is perhaps a fitting analog equivalent to the nostalgia for the long 1980s that is discoverable on broadcast, cable, and streaming reboots, in YouTube fan vids of original series, and through the many reruns one can find populating minor cable channels at all hours of the day. The long 1980s have, in many ways, never died, but, like the less glittery CW *Dynasty*, our desperation to bring them back produces little more than a flawed copy.

This project has sought to argue for a new way of looking at television in the 1980s that emphasizes men as audiences and representations of men and masculinities on screen. This approach is intended to call into question some of the preconceptions television studies has had

about the 1980s as a decade in which women's issues were central; my approach is also intended to link together existing scholarship of 1970s and 1990s television as more sexually liberated. Finally, I seek to demonstrate how the 1980s serve as the cornerstone for contemporary television by initiating many of the technological, industrial, and generic changes that have shaped the present moment. Television in the long 1980s demonstrated the strategies networks employed to attract and hold onto audiences of men at a time when the television audience was becoming fractured due to social forces, technological innovations like the VCR that enabled users to watch movies or record television for later, and industrial changes like the birth of cable networks that offered alternative programming. Although the reboots of 1980s series may look aesthetically and feel textually quite different than their original counterparts, in many ways the legacy of 1980s television persists across the television landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Some of the original cast departed due to budget cuts and producers' discretion; others chose to leave over contract and salary disputes. Although many of the original recurring and even some of the original regular cast appeared sporadically throughout the final seasons, only Larry Hagman, Patrick Duffy, and Ken Kerchaval remained as regulars in season fourteen.

<sup>3</sup> Spinoffs of *Beverly Hills, 90120* included *Melrose Place* (Fox, 1992-99), a more adult serial drama, and *Models Inc.* (Fox, 1994-95), which featured characters who originated on *Melrose Place*. Both *90210* and *Melrose Place* were rebooted by the CW; *90210* ran from 2008-2013 and *Melrose Place* from 2009-2010.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous think-pieces on the subject of this "golden age" exist. For an account that especially considers the role of men and masculinities, see Brett Martin, *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xvii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> "Lorimar's *ALF* Continues to Sell," *Broadcasting*, May 30 1988, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Meeropol, *Surrender: How the Clinton Administration Completed the Reagan Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Robert Scheer, "Playboy Interview: Jimmy Carter," *Playboy*, November 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Bambi Haggins, "Losing Cosby," *Flow*, October 26, 2015.

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<sup>13</sup> Brittany Cooper, “Black America’s Bill Cosby Nightmare: Why It’s So Painful to Abandon the Lies That He Told,” *Slate*, July 9, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> On reception of the 2016 *Ghostbusters*, see Billy Proctor, “‘Bitches Ain’t Gonna Hunt No Ghosts’: Totemic Nostalgia, Toxic Fandom and the *Ghostbusters* Platonic,” *Palabra Clave* 20.4 (2017): 1105-1141. For a list of other gender-swapped projects under development in recent years, see Emine Saner, “*Lord of the Flies* to *Ocean’s Eight*: How Hollywood Movies Are Flipping Gender,” *The Guardian*, September 2, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 235.

<sup>16</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, “Melissa McCarthy/Haim,” NBC, April 13, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Maureen Ryan, “TV Review: ‘Dynasty’ Reboot on the CW,” *Variety*, October 9, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Lower ratings are expected for series that are not on Big Three primetime, particularly given contemporary television’s multiplicity of offerings that results in lower ratings across the board. The *Dallas* revival series premiere had a reported 6.9 million viewers, but its third season averaged less than 2 million. By contrast, the lowest rated final season of the original *Dallas*, which CBS reportedly did not want to broadcast, still managed to pull in nearly 11 million viewers on average. The CW’s *Dynasty* has averaged around 1 million viewers in its first season, compared to 19 million for the original. See Fred Rothenberg, “Primetime Soap Opera ‘Dynasty’ Trying Old Whodunit Technique,” *Eugene Register-Guard*, July 24, 1981, 6B; Bill Carter, “So ‘Dallas’ Is Finally Over. Or Is It?” *New York Times*, May 6, 1991; “TNT’s ‘Dallas’ Rides Tall With 6.9 Million Viewers, Rankings as the Year’s Number 1 Cable Premiere,” *TV By the Numbers*, June 14, 2012; Nellie Andreeva, “‘Dallas’ Cancelled by TNT After Three Seasons,” *Deadline*, October 3, 2014; Matt Webb Mitovich, “Ratings: *Dynasty* Slips in Week 3,” *TV Line*, October 26, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> On the legacy of the “bromantic” duo in American literature, see Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1960). April Selley draws upon Fiedler’s work and the legacy of the Western to examine buddy duos like Captain Kirk and Spock from the original *Star Trek* series. See Selley, “‘I Have Been, and Ever Shall Be, Your Friend’: *Star Trek*, *The Deerslayer*, and the American Romance,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 20.1 (1986): 89-104.

<sup>20</sup> Lesley Goldberg, “‘Magnum P.I.’ Reboot in the Works at CBS,” *Hollywood Reporter*, October 20, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> CNN Political Unit, “CNN Poll: Support for Afghanistan War at All Time Low,” CNN, October 28, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Twins Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, who jointly played the third daughter, Michelle, in the original series have declined to be part of the project, a reality the series has made several winks toward. See Maureen Ryan, “TV Review: Fuller House,” *Variety*, February 16, 2016; Jamie Blynn and Ryan Gajewski, “*Fuller House* to Explain Olsen Twins’ Character Absence by Giving Her a Hilarious Job,” *Us Weekly*, December 8, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> *Fuller House*, “Our Very First Show, Again,” Netflix, February 26, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> In fairness, the goal of the original *Full House* was not to redefine the American family or domestic sitcom either; it was to make people laugh in order to stay on the air.

<sup>25</sup> *Fuller House*, “Funner House,” Netflix, February 26, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> James Poniewozik, “‘Fuller House’ Sequel Is a Forced March Down Memory Lane,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Sabrina Broderick, “‘Fuller House’ Is a Nostalgic Train Wreck,” *The Daily Nebraskan*, September 27, 2017. On the decline of the laugh track in sitcoms, see Stephen M. Lepore, “In a

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Fall TV Season Bereft of Comedy, the Laugh Track Continues to Fade,” *New York Daily News*, November 23, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> *Full House*, “Secret Admirer,” ABC, December 7, 1990.

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APPENDIX  
List of Films and Television Series Referenced

*ABC World News*, ABC, March 30, 1981

*The A-Team*, "Mexican Slayride," NBC, January 23, 1983

*The A-Team*, "The Bend in the River, Part II," NBC, September 25, 1984

*The A-Team*, "Cowboy George," NBC, February 11, 1986

*The A-Team*, "Point of No Return," NBC, November 21, 1986

*The Addams Family*, ABC, 1964-66

*ALF*, NBC, 1986-90

*All in the Family*, CBS, 1971-79

*American Graffiti*, 1973, dir. George Lucas

*The Andy Griffith Show*, CBS, 1960-68

*Animal House*, 1978, dir. John Landis

*The Arsenio Hall Show*, first-run syndication, June 3, 1992

*Baa Baa Black Sheep*, NBC, 1976-78

*Batman*, ABC, 1966-68

*Battlestar Galactica*, ABC, 1978-79

*Benson*, ABC, 1979-86

*Beulah*, ABC, 1950-52

*Beverly Hills, 90210*, Fox, 1990-2000

*Bewitched*, ABC, 1964-72

*The Blues Brothers*, 1980, dir. John Landis

*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1961, dir. Blake Edwards

*Breaking Bad*, AMC, 2008-2013

*Breathless*, 1960, dir. Jean-Luc Godard

*Cagney and Lacey*, CBS, 1981-88

*The Carol Burnett Show*, "Episode 9.6," CBS, October 18, 1975

*CBS Late Night/The CBS Late Movie*, CBS, 1972-1993

*Charles in Charge*, "War," CBS, October 24, 1984

*Charles in Charge*, "Home for the Holidays," CBS, December 19, 1984

*Charlie's Angels*, ABC, 1976-81

*The Colbys*, CBS, 1985-87

*Conan the Barbarian*, 1982, dir. John Milius

*The Cosby Show*, "Rudy's Sick," NBC, December 13, 1984

*The Cosby Show*, "Clair's Case," February 21, 1985

*The Cosby Show*, "Slumber Party," NBC, March 28, 1985

*The Cosby Show*, "Slumber Party," NBC, March 28, 1985

*The Cosby Show*, "Planning Parenthood," NBC, April 30, 1987

*Dallas*, "A House Divided," CBS, March 21, 1980

*Dallas*, "Who Done It," CBS, November 21, 1980

*Dallas*, TNT, 2012-2015

*Deep Throat*, 1972, dir. Gerard Damiano

*Designing Women*, "The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita," CBS, November 4, 1991

*The Dick Van Dyke Show*, CBS, 1961-66

*Diff'rent Strokes*, NBC, 1978-85; ABC, 1985-86

*The Donna Reed Show*, ABC, 1958-1966

*Dragnet*, NBC, 1951-59

*Dynasty*, ABC, 1981-89

*Dynasty*, CW, 2017-present

*Elementary*, CBS, 2012-present

*Empty Nest*, NBC, 1988-95

*ER*, NBC, 1994-2009

*The Facts of Life*, NBC, 1979-88

*Falcon Crest*, CBS, 1981-90

*Family Affair*, CBS, 1966-71

*Family Ties*, "Pilot," NBC, September 22, 1982

*Fridays*, ABC, 1980-82

*Friends*, NBC, 1994-2004

*Full House*, "Joey Gets Tough," ABC, November 25, 1988

*Full House*, "Secret Admirer," ABC, December 7, 1990

*Full House*, "Fuller House," ABC, February 22, 1991

*Full House*, "Oh Where, Oh Where Has My Little Girl Gone," ABC, October 8, 1991

*Fuller House*, "Our Very First Show Again," Netflix, February 26, 2016

*Fuller House*, "Funner House," Netflix, February 26, 2016

*Ghostbusters*, 1984, dir. Harold Ramis

*Ghostbusters*, 2016, dir. Paul Feig

*The Godfather*, 1972, dir. Francis Ford Coppola

*The Goldbergs*, CBS, 1949-51; NBC, 1952-56

*The Golden Girls*, NBC, 1985-92

*Growing Pains*, ABC, 1985-92

*Hardcastle and McCormick*, ABC, 1983-86

*Hart to Hart*, ABC, 1979-84

*Hawaii Five-O*, CBS, 1968-80

*Hee Haw*, CBS, 1969-71; first-run syndication, 1971-92

*Hill Street Blues*, NBC, 1981-87

*The Honeymooners*, CBS, 1955-56

*I Dream of Jeannie*, NBC, 1965-70

*I Love Lucy*, “Job Switching,” CBS, September 15, 1952

*I Remember Mama*, “Mama’s Birthday Present,” CBS, September 10, 1954

*In Living Color*, “Pilot,” Fox, April 15, 1990

*In Living Color*, “Homeboy Shopping Network,” Fox, January 26, 1992

*It’s Pat*, 1994, dir. Adam Bernstein

*Karate Kid III*, 1989, dir. John Avildsen

*Kate and Allie*, CBS, 1984-89

*Kids Say the Darndest Things*, CBS, 1998-2000

*Knots Landing*, CBS, 1979-93

*Kramer vs. Kramer*, 1979, dir. Robert Benton

*Late Night*, NBC, 1982-92

*The Late Show*, CBS, 1993-present

*The Late Show with Joan Rivers*, Fox, 1986-87

*Leave It to Beaver*, CBS, 1957-58; ABC, 1958-63

*The Little Rascals*, ABC, 1982-84

*The Lone Ranger*, ABC, 1949-57

*Love, Sidney*, NBC, 1981-83

*M\*A\*S\*H*, CBS, 1972-83

*MacGyver*, “Pilot,” ABC, September 19, 1985.

*MacGyver*, “Thin Ice,” ABC, February 1, 1988

*MacGyver*, CBS, 2016-present

*MadTV*, Fox, 1995-2009

*Mad Men*, AMC, 2007-15

*The Magnificent Seven*, 1960, dir. Antoine Fuqua



*Magnum PI*, "Woman on the Beach," CBS, October 22, 1981  
*Magnum PI*, "Memories Are Forever," CBS, November 5, 1981  
*Magnum PI*, "Home from the Sea," CBS, September 29, 1983  
*Magnum PI*, "Echoes of the Mind I," CBS, September 27, 1984  
*Magnum PI*, "Echoes of the Mind II," CBS, October 4, 1984  
*Magnum, PI*, "Solo Flight," CBS, February 4, 1987  
*Magnum PI*, "Resolutions," CBS, May 8, 1988

*Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, first-run syndication, 1976-77

*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, CBS, 1970-77

*Miami Vice*, "Brother's Keeper," NBC, September 16, 1984

*Modern Family*, ABC, 2009-present

*Mork and Mindy*, ABC, 1978-82

*Mr. Belvedere*, ABC, 1985-90

*Mr. Ed*, first-run syndication, 1961; CBS, 1961-66

*Mr. Mom*, 1983, dir. Stan Dragoti

*My Three Sons*, ABC, 1960-65; CBS, 1965-72

*My Two Dads*, "See You in September?," NBC, April 30, 1990.

*Mystery Science Theater 3000*, Comedy Central, 1989-96

*Nightline*, ABC, 1980-2013

*Perfect Strangers*, ABC, 1986-93

*Peyton Place*, ABC, 1964-69

*Platoon*, 1986, dir. Oliver Stone

*Rags to Riches*, NBC, 1987-88

*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981, dir. Steven Spielberg

*Rocky*, 1976, dir. John Avildsen

*Rocky III*, 1982, dir. Sylvester Stallone

*The Ropers*, ABC, 1979-80

*Saturday Night Live*, "Elliott Gould/Kid Creole and the Coconuts," NBC, November 15, 1980

*Saturday Night Live*, "Ray Sharkey/Jack Bruce and Friends," NBC, January 10, 1981

*Saturday Night Live*, "Charlene Tilton/Todd Rundgren/Prince," NBC, February 21, 1981

*Saturday Night Live*, "Bill Murray/Delbert Clinton," NBC, March 7, 1981

*Saturday Night Live*, "Jr. Walker and the All-Stars," NBC, April 11, 1981

*Saturday Night Live*, "Eddie Murphy/Lionel Richie," NBC, December 11, 1982

*Saturday Night Live*, "Michael Palin/The Motels," NBC, January 21, 1984

*Saturday Night Live*, "Charlton Heston/Wynton Marsalis," NBC, March 28, 1987

*Saturday Night Live*, "Chris Evert/Eurythmics," NBC, November 11, 1989

*Saturday Night Live*, "Rob Lowe/The Pogues," NBC, March 17, 1990

*Saturday Night Live*, "Andrew Dice Clay/Julee Cruise/Spanic Boys," May 12, 1990

*Saturday Night Live*, "Kirstie Alley/Tom Petty," NBC, October 12, 1991

*Saturday Night Live*, "Christian Slater/Bonnie Raitt," NBC, October 26, 1991

*Saturday Night Live*, "Linda Hamilton/Mariah Carey," NBC, November 16, 1991

*Saturday Night Live*, "Mary Stuart Masterson/En Vogue," NBC, March 21, 1992

*Saturday Night Live*, "Kirstie Alley/Lenny Kravitz," NBC, April 17, 1993

*Saturday Night Live*, "Melissa McCarthy/Haim," NBC, May 13, 2017

*Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell*, ABC, 1975-76

*Seinfeld*, NBC, 1989-98

*Sidney Schorr: A Girl's Best Friend*, 1981, dir. Russ Mayberry

*Silver Spoons*, NBC, 1982-86; first-run syndication, 1986-87

*Simon and Simon*, CBS, 1981-89

*Small Wonder*, first-run syndication, 1985-89

*Soap*, "Episode 1.18," ABC, January 24, 1978

*Soap*, "Episode 3.22," ABC, March 27, 1980

*The Sopranos*, HBO, 1999-2007

*SportsCenter*, "Episode 1.1," ESPN, September 7, 1979

*Stuart Saves His Family*, 1995, dir. Harold Ramis

*Super Bowl XX*, NBC, January 26, 1986

*Terminator*, 1984, dir. James Cameron

*Texaco Star Theatre*, "Episode 3.37," NBC, May 29, 1951

*thirtysomething*, ABC, 1987-91

*Three Men and a Baby*, 1987, dir. Leonard Nimoy

*Three's Company*, ABC, 1977-84

*The Tonight Show*, "Episode 13.190," NBC, September 26, 1974

*The Tonight Show*, "Episode 17.23," NBC, February 1, 1978

*The Tonight Show*, "Episode 44.01," NBC, September 12, 1991

*The Unauthorized Full House Story*, Lifetime, 2015

*Watch What Happens Live After Show*, "Kathy Walkile and Andrew Dice Clay," Bravo, September 15, 2013

*Wayne's World*, 1992, dir. Penelope Spheeris)

*Webster*, ABC, 1983-87; first-run syndication, 1987-89

*Who's the Boss*, "Pilot," ABC, September 20, 1984

*Who's the Boss*, "Angela's First Fight," ABC, October 23, 1984

*Who's the Boss*, "Angela's Ex, Part One," ABC, February 5, 1985

*Who's the Boss*, "Angela's Ex, Part Two," ABC, February 12, 1985

# Bridget Kies

Curriculum Vitae

## EDUCATION

Ph.D., English (Media, Cinema, and Digital Studies), University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2018.  
Dissertation: “Masculinity in American Television from Carter to Clinton.”  
Committee: Tasha Oren, Elana Levine, Gilberto Blasini.

M.A., English (Media, Cinema, and Digital Studies), University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2013.  
Thesis: “First Comes Love: (Homo)Normalizing Popular Culture.”

M.F.A., Interdisciplinary Arts and Media, Columbia College Chicago, 2006.

B.A., French, Lake Forest College, 2002.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, August 2011–present.

Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Radio–Television–Film, University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh, present.

Adjunct Faculty, Department of Humanities, College of Lake County, August 2017–present.

Associate Lecturer, LGBT+ Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, August 2015–December 2017.

Adjunct Instructor, College of Arts and Sciences, Valparaiso University, August 2006–May 2011.

## COURSES TAUGHT

Film and Media Studies:

Television Criticism and Theory, spring 2018

Understanding Media, spring 2018

Film and Society, fall 2017, spring 2018

Film, Television, and Sexuality, spring 2015

Introduction to Television Studies, online: spring 2014, spring 2015, fall 2016

Entertainment Arts: Film, Television, and the Internet, online: spring 2012–fall 2014

Film Aesthetics, summer 2009, summer 2010

## LGBTQ Studies:

Do LGBT People Want to be Normal?: Diversity, Assimilation, and Queerness in a Post-Marriage Equality World, senior capstone, spring 2017

Queer Stars and Celebrities, senior capstone, spring 2016

Introduction to LGBT Studies, fall 2015, fall 2016, fall 2017

## First-Year Composition:

Introduction to College Composition, fall 2013, fall 2014

College Writing and Research, spring 2017

## As Teaching Assistant:

Entertainment Arts: Film, Television, and the Internet, spring 2012, spring 2013

History of Film I: 1895–1945, fall 2011, fall 2017

## PUBLICATIONS

### Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

“Television’s ‘Mr. Moms’: Idealizing the New Man in 1980s Domestic Sitcoms.”  
*Feminist Media Histories* 4.1 (2018): 142–170.

“‘A Friendship That Will Define You Both’: *Star Trek* and the Devolution of American Masculinity.” *Science Fiction Film and Television* 9.3 (2016): 417–438.

“First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage: (Homo)Normalizing Romance on American Television.” *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5.2 (2016): 1–13.

“A Red Room of Her Own: Dominants, Submissives, Fans, and Producers of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.” *Intensities* 8.1 (2016): 34–46.

“Literary Culture Inside and Outside Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.” *International Journal of the Book* 10.3 (2012): 27–32.

“One True Threesome: Reconciling Canon and Fan Desire in *Star Trek: Voyager*.”  
*Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (2011). [doi:10.3983/twc.2011.0248](https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0248)

### Non-Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Introduction to “Queer Nostalgia and Queer Histories,” edited by Bridget Kies and Thomas J. West, III, special issue, *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture* 2.2 (2017): 161–166.

“Melodrama and the Masculine Turn.” With Molly McCourt. In “Women, Soap Opera, and New Generations of Feminists,” edited by Christine Geraghty and Elke Weissmann, special dossier, *Critical Studies in Television* 11.3 (2016): 370–373.

## Editorial Service

Guest editor with William Proctor, “Toxic Fan Practices,” special themed section, *Participations: The Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 15.2 (2018): forthcoming.

Guest editor with Thomas J. West, “Queer Nostalgia and Queer Histories,” special issue, *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture* 2.2 (2017).

## Book Chapters

“Sexploitation on YouTube: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the ‘Gay Network.’” In *Queer TV in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Kylo Patrick Hart, 194–210. Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2016.

“Death by Scissors: *Gay Fighter Supreme* and the Sexuality That Isn’t Sexual.” In *Rated M for Mature: Sex and Sexuality in Video Games*, edited by Matthew Wysocki and Evan Lauteria, 210–224. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015.

“‘Always Hold on to Smallville’: Domesticity and the Male Hero.” In *Mapping Smallville: Critical Essays on the Series and Its Characters*, edited by Cory Barker, Chris Ryan, and Myc Wiatrowski, 45–58. Jefferson: McFarland, 2014.

“The Monstrous Male Body.” In *Supernatural: Fan Phenomena*, edited by Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis, 22–33. Bristol: Intellect Press, 2014.

## Book and Media Reviews

Review of *Men with Stakes: Masculinity and the Gothic in U.S. Television* by Julia Wright, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, forthcoming.

Review of *Ghostbusters*, directed by Paul Feig, *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture* 2.2 (2017): 265–268.

Review of *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Popular Culture* by Gilad Pavda, International Media and Nostalgia Network, June 2016.

<https://medianostalgia.org/2016/06/17/imnn-book-review-of-gilad-padvas-queer-nostalgia-in-cinema-and-pop-culture/>

## Blog Posts and Podcasts

“‘A Taxing Year’: Reagan’s 1986 Super Bowl Pre-Game Interview.” In Media Res, January 28, 2018.

“My Two (and Three) Dads: *Full House*, *Fuller House*, and 1980s Sitcom Families.” In Media Res, March 7, 2016.

“Fifty Shades of Paratexts: Fan Videos vs. Commercial Trailers.” Watching the Trailer, February 11, 2015.

“‘Blanche, Will You Marry Me?’: *The Golden Girls* and Marriage Equality.” In Media Res, June 10, 2014.

*The Pictures Get Smaller*, Riverwest Radio, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2012–2013.

### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Workshop Participant, “Syllabus Hack: Introducing Television Studies in the Internet Era.” Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Toronto, Canada, March 2018.

“Safe Spaces for Dangerous Ideas: Creating a Classroom with Productive Dialogue.” Queer People, Practices, and Lives III, Columbus, Ohio, May 2017.

“Straight Saviors and Guardian Angels: Glamorizing LGBT History in Recent Film and Television.” Film and History, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 2016.

Roundtable Participant, “Resisting Presentism, Reviving the Past: Feminist TV Histories.” Flow TV Conference, Austin, Texas, September 2016.

“From Fighting Crime to Fighting Memories: Queering Masculinities and Genre in 1980s Action Series.” Console-ing Passions, South Bend, Indiana, June 2016.

“Teaching *Boys in the Band* in the Age of *Modern Family*.” Film and History, Madison, Wisconsin, November 2015.

“Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: The Politics of Loving and Leaving Fandom.” Fan Studies Network, Norwich, United Kingdom, June 2015.

“A *Vicious* Viewership: British Television, American Audiences, and Gay Male Identity.” Television in the Age of Transnationalisation and Transmedialisation, Media Across Borders Network, London, United Kingdom, June 2015.

“Sexploitation on YouTube: Here! Media and Gay Television’s Life in the Post-Network Era.” Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Montreal, Canada, March 2015.

“Lycans and Werewolves and Shifters, Oh My!: Gender- and Genre-Bending in *Supernatural* and Its Fandom.” Southwest Popular Culture Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2015.

“Sexploitation on Demand: How New Generations of Technology Enable New Representations within LGBT Media.” Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies Association, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom, January 2015.

“Sexploitation on YouTube: Here! TV, Gay-for-Pay, and Male Nudity.” *Film and History*, Madison, Wisconsin, October 2014.

“Homo-genizing Popular Television and *The New Normal* for Producer-Fan Interactions.” Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Seattle, Washington, March 2014.

“Homo-genizing Producer-Fan Relationships in Popular Television.” Fan Studies Network, Norwich, United Kingdom, November 2013.

“A Red Room of Her Own: The Dom/Sub Relationship Between Fans and Producers of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.” Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2013.

“First Comes Love: The Pleasure in (Homo)Normalizing the Subversive.” International Association for the Study of Popular Romance, York, United Kingdom, September 2012.

“Literary Culture Inside and Outside Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.” International Conference of the Book, Barcelona, Spain, July 2012.

“The Monstrous Male Body: Panic, Possession, and Pregnancy in *Supernatural* and Its Fandom.” Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2012.

“From Sacrificial Space Dudes to Hypermasculine Homophobes: Redefining Kirk and Spock.” *Film and History*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 2010.

“This Man Is My Friend. No One [Else] Touches Him.” Textual Echoes Symposium: Fan Fictions and Sexualities, Umeå, Sweden, February 2010.

#### ACADEMIC SERVICE

Student Panelist, “When Free Speech Collides with Impermissible Speech,” Freedom of Expression and Civil Discourse Series, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, September 2017.

Advisory Committee, LGBT+ Studies Program, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2015–present.

Graduate Student Advisory Committee, Graduate School, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2015–2017.

Judge, University of Wisconsin System Symposium for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity, April 2015.

Area Chair, Queer Film and Television, Film and History Conference, 2014–2016.



Programming Committee, Milwaukee LGBT Film Festival, 2012.

Steering Committee, First-Year CORE, Valparaiso University, 2009–2011.

### GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND AWARDS

Society for Cinema and Media Studies Women's Caucus Graduate Student Essay Prize, March 2017.

LGBTQ+ Scholarship, Cream City Foundation, 2016–2017.

Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship, Graduate School, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2015–2016.

Peter C. Rollins Director's Award for Management of Conference Scholarship, Film and History Conference, October 2014.

James A. Sappenfield Fellowship, Department of English, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, May 2014.

Graduate Student Award, International Conference of the Book, July 2012.

Committee to Enhance Learning and Teaching Grant, Valparaiso University, Fall 2009.

### REFERENCES

Tasha Oren, [tasha.oren@tufts.edu](mailto:tasha.oren@tufts.edu)

Associate Professor, Department of Film and Media Studies, Tufts University

Elana Levine, [ehlevine@uwm.edu](mailto:ehlevine@uwm.edu)

Professor, Department of Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

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Professor, Department of English, Valparaiso University  
Former Director, First-Year CORE Program