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# Behind the Scenes: A Look at Socio-cultural Messages in Situation Comedies and their Effects on Gendered Messages

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Behind the Scenes:  
A Look at Socio-cultural Messages in Situation Comedies  
and their Effects on Gendered Messages

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Sociology

Bridgewater State University

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**Behind the Scenes:  
A Look at Socio-cultural Messages in Situation Comedies  
and their Effects on Gendered Messages**

**Abstract**

Specific values, characteristics and behaviors are expected for men and women in American society. Previous research has shown that gender stereotypes on television programs are believed to influence society's "perception of appropriate sex roles" and reinforce negative notions about the role of women in society (Fullteron et al. 2000). According to Lee & Shaw (2010), matters have not changed much. Television uses speech that creates images of and attitudes towards women that prevent equality. This study undertakes a content analysis of two prime-time television shows, *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. The objective of this research is to analyze the extent to which societal beliefs concerning stereotyped gender roles are reinforced on television. The analysis of *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* illustrates the perpetuation of sexist attitudes and behaviors on prime-time television. This demonstrates social and gender divides in society.

## **Introduction**

In 84 percent of American televised programming, at least one incident of sexual harassment is shown towards women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Peter & Valkenburg (2007) found that more than 32 percent of these incidents were verbal sexual comments aimed towards women's bodies. In contrast, sexualized comments about male characters were focused on not wanting to be involved in a committed relationship. Previous research by Peter & Valkenburg's (2007) shows that 63 percent of female characters on prime-time programming yearn for a relationship, whereas male characters speak about romantic relationships 49 percent of the time. The focus on physical appearance and the desire to be in a relationship are two gender stereotypes that are present on television programming. Television programming does not promote equality by neutralizing gender differences and roles. Instead programming promotes inequality through exclusion and exaggerating gender differences (Potter, 2010).

Television programs are major influential socializing agents in society. Due to the fact that television relays many socio-cultural messages, it is important to understand that viewing large amounts of television can cause a directed shift in ways of thinking. This is expanded upon in the frameworks and theories section. Exposure to stereotyped behaviors and attitudes can play a role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in society. Previous research has shown that gender stereotypes on television programs are believed to influence society's "perception of appropriate sex roles" and reinforce negative notions about the role of women in society (Potter, 2010).

Often sociocultural messages are shown in manifest and latent ways to viewers. The goal of this content analysis research is to analyze the quantity and quality of gender stereotypes that are present in television programming directed at adult viewers. The scope of the study will focus on messages that are present in society and supported by the media. These messages include stereotyped gender

representations, occupational differences between men and women, gendered and sexualized physical appearances, and behavioral differences. The importance of documenting social-cultural messages from television programming is to better illustrate the ways in which television programming can potentially affect the viewers. Television programming relays behaviors that are expectations for specific genders in society (Ritzer, 2013).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Television Programming***

As Bryant and Zillman (2002) explained, television is a systematic source of storytelling. Its programs bring a system of images and messages into every home. Television is still considered to be the primary source of socialization and daily information. In comparison to other media sources, television relays a restricted set of choices for a virtually unrestricted variety of interests (Potter, 2010).

Television programming, especially situational comedies, often supports the gender stereotypes that exist in society. The behaviors of the characters teach viewers that men and women are supposed to behave in a traditional manner, including but not limited to: women dressing in sexualized attire, women working in low status workplaces, men behaving as abusers and men being defined by qualities of masculinity. One goal of television programming is to convince the audience that the behaviors shown, relate to the ways that women and men want to be, or should be (Lauzen, 2008). Lauzen (2008) found that long-term exposure to television, can negatively affect the viewer's career choice. For example, if viewers are constantly exposed to traditional gender-specific workplaces, they may accept that as reality and think that specific genders are only supposed to work at those jobs. Studies that have been conducted show how gender stereotypes are represented during regular programming and the effects of viewing these stereotypes. The popular stereotypes that are included in television

shows include male domination, the occupations that women and men hold, and the objectification of women through their dress. Exposure to these images has a cumulative effect on viewers (Lorber, 2012).

Lauzen (2009) found that during the 2006-2007 prime-time seasons, female characters accounted for only 42 percent of all characters. The figures that account for the number of times women are seen compared to men during programming illustrates the societal belief that men should always be noticed in the public realm, and women should remain in the background, the private realm. It is not surprising that in particular scenes that focused on public venues there are more men than there are women. Lauzen (2009) explains that another way that men are represented as dominant counterparts is through body language. Men, in most television programs, appear to control the behaviors of women. Most submissive roles are played by women. As discussed above, women are directed toward taking part in the private sphere of society, compared to men who take part in the public sphere. Lauzen (2009) found that prime-time television programs give privilege to male characters in many different ways. Television shows favor to men because most male characters are more likely to work outside the home and hold high status jobs. Men are twice as likely as women to be shown as bosses on shows. Additionally, Lauzen's (2009) research found that male characters in television shows hold occupations that are considered a necessity for society, such as police officers, fire fighters and doctors. Women on the other hand, are more likely to be found in jobs that are considered to be less powerful, such as: household occupations and student roles.

### ***Viewership***

The examination of television messages is essential due to the abundance of hours individuals spend viewing television programming where over 98 percent of American households have at least

one television set and the average household has a television turned on for over 30 hours each week. In the typical American household, a television set is in use for about five hours a day (Ritzer, 2013). According to a *New York Times* survey, children between the ages of eight and eighteen view 22 hours and 52 minutes of television per week. Research indicates that women spend more time viewing television as compared to men (Poniewozik 2011). Women view four hours and 11 minutes television programming daily on average, while men spend three hours and 34 minutes in front of the television (Nielson, 2012). Researchers have argued that this statistic holds meaning because it has been shown that women spend more time in the home compared to their male counterparts.

The general number of viewing hours is a result of the lifestyle of the viewer. The audience is always the group of people available at a certain time of day. This means that viewing decisions depend more on the time than on the programming. Ritzer (2013) further explains that the number and variety of programming options available to view when most viewers are able to watch is also limited by the fact that many programs are designed for the same broad audience.

Soulliere (2006) explains that television viewing is a gendered activity. Gendered images on television are influenced by the gender of the targeted audience. For example, televised content divides the audience into categories such as “mostly men/boys” or “mostly women/girls”. The gender stereotyped content may be perceived differently depending on the audience for the particular show.

### ***Stereotypes About Women***

Television is a prevailing socializing agent and is specifically influential in regards to gender identity. In the United States, television is portrayed as the prime storyteller for cultural events that take place (Emons & Scheepers, 2010). Hence, as Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan (2002)

explained, television is a message system relaying ideas, myths and lessons which cultivate basic assumptions about the “facts” of life and judgments on which conclusions are based. Due to the consistency that these messages are portrayed on television programming, the audience can assume that there is a relation between society and these stereotypes. The behavior of actors and actresses on television programming may teach viewers about sex role stereotyping. Lorber (2012) explains: “one of the most obvious and important characteristics of television actors is their gender, and one of the most important 'lessons' that children learn from television actors is how gender fits into society” . The roles of characters have a prodigious effect on the ways that viewers perceive the lessons and imagery that may not represent reality.

Women are over represented in lower status positions than men (Piety, 2009). The range of career opportunities for women on television is restricted to the stereotypical types of employments that are designed for women in society. Potter (2010) found that female characters are cast most often in the traditional “female” occupations such as: secretaries, nurses and teachers. Nadler (2012) states that only eight percent of top leadership positions are filled by female characters, and only two percent as CEOs. By contrast, male characters are more likely to be portrayed in traditional male professions (Potter, 2010). Men mostly played roles holding occupations of management, military, police officers, lawyers and doctors.

As a result of male characters working in professions that are deemed traditional male jobs in society, they earn higher wages in comparison to female characters. As stated previously, most professions that female characters on television hold are secretaries, nurses and teachers. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of May 2011, the wages that were estimated for occupational employment were incomparable based on the occupation. For jobs that are labeled traditional “female” jobs, the wages were as followed: registered nurses earned \$69,110 annually and



preschool teachers earned \$51,290 annually. Occupations that are societally accepted as “male” occupations earned a substantially higher annually income. For example, lawyers earn \$130,490, doctors earn \$231,550 and detectives receive \$75,720 annually compared to female counterparts.

The differences in wages earned by each gender specific occupation are not misrepresented on television programming. Research shows that the pay women receive falls below the spectrum of the wages men earn. In society, there is a stereotype known as the male-wealth stereotype. This stereotype demonstrates that there is a difference in the wages earned between the two genders (Williams, Paluck & Spencer-Rodgers, 2010). In the United States, the average woman who works full time and year-round earns \$0.81 for every dollar earned by the average full-time man (Williams et al., 2010). In addition to women receiving lower wages once they begin working, they are not treated equally when applying for the position. An employer's initial salary offer to a male candidate for the job will be higher than that of a female candidate (Williams et al., 2010). Previous studies have explained why this occurs in society. The term “glass ceiling” explains how barriers towards women's advancement in the workforce stem from social and cultural factors that are ubiquitous in society (Williams et al., 2010, Bond, Thompson, Galinsky & Prottas, 2002). These barriers reflect the attitudes and behaviors that are present in several aspects of society including: media and social interactions between individuals. When women are constantly subjugated by these gendered attitudes, it can hinder their career choices.

Aside from the portrayals of the differences between the character cohorts and the traditional occupations, television shows also air programming that focus on women’s sexuality and physical appearance. Kim (2007) found that the heterosexual script was mostly enacted by depictions of sexuality as a defining component of men's masculinity. On television shows, men are often preoccupied with women's bodies. Research has shown that male characters tend to ogle female characters, blatantly judge women by their physical appearance and treat women like sex objects.

Although male characters often initiate remarks or gestures concerning the sexuality and physical appearances of women, there are occasions where female characters take part in this stereotypical way of thinking (Kim 2007). In addition, Peter & Valkenburg's (2007) research has illustrated that in sexually non-explicit content that is featured on prime-time programming, the focus on women's bodies is much greater than the focus on male's bodies. For instance, a previous content analysis of prime-time programming revealed that in 84 percent of the anatomized episodes, at least one incident of sexual harassment was present. Moreover, 32 percent of all sexual harassment incidents were verbal sexual comments that were aimed at women's bodies or body parts (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007).

The physical appearance for female characters on television is accentuated precisely. Appearance is very important in the construction of female character identity when compared to their male counterparts (Bahadur, 2012; Lauzen & Dozier 2002). Bahadur (2012) found that female characters on television are more likely to be wearing sexy attire or exposing skin. This finding is supported by Kim's (2007) findings that female characters are pressured into objectifying themselves for male characters' pleasure. The exploitation of women's bodies and looks is considered important on television because it is a strategy used for attracting men through portraying the ideal female. Davis (2010) found that a higher proportion of female characters, compared to men, are depicted in sexualized attire. Statistics show that female characters are sexualized based on their attire 24 percent of the time; while conversely, men were sexualized by their attire four percent of the time (Davis 2010). The demand to ensure that the female cohort is portrayed in a sexualized manner, results in the idea that women are valued primarily for their physical appearances. The focus on women's beauty on television demonstrates that women's attractiveness is more important than intelligence, personality and other characteristics (Kim 2007).

### *Stereotypes About Men*

Soulliere (2006) explains that research concerning gender and popular culture media has tended to focus on women rather than men but television actually illustrates sociocultural messages regarding stereotypes for both genders. Situational comedies also show male characters in ways that men are expected to behave in society. For example, masculinity plays an important role in the scripts for many programs. Male characters use their masculinity to exemplify particular gendered qualities. There are a number of characteristics that situational comedies exhibit in regards to masculinity including: violence and aggression, toughness, risk-taking, physical strength, emotional restraint, courage, dominance, competitiveness and success (Soulliere 2006).

Situational comedies illustrate that men prefer to not be in relationships. In fact, studies show that men want to or need independence (Kim 2007). It has been shown that men actively avoid commitment and desperately seek space from their partners. Programming rarely shows men speaking about romance. Kim (2007) explains that women are more likely to be shown talking about romantic relationships, where 63 percent of female characters talk about romantic relationships and only 49 percent of male characters speak about romantic relationships.

Male characters are also more often depicted as abusers, in contrast to female characters. Television shows address abuse or even educate the audience about abuse in a manner that targets men. Moreover, television programs imply that only men are capable of committing abusive acts. It is a socio-cultural belief that males are the dominant gender and one way this dominance is maintained is through violence (Kahlor & Eastin 2011). When violence is present, the victims are left in a submissive state. According to Kahlor et al (2011), 30 percent of prime-time programming is focused on violent crimes, such as rape. If viewers are consistently watching programs that portray men as abusers and rapists, it may influence how others perceive men. Even in situational comedies, abuse is depicted. It is

usually shown in comedic contexts, but the message is still that males can be, and perhaps are expected to be, abusive to women.

### ***Frameworks and Theories***

In order for producers and writers of television programs to successfully relay socio-cultural beliefs to viewers in a discreet manner, several of techniques are used. These techniques are utilized to help reinforce concepts and ideas into the memories of viewers. One technique is called priming. Carpentier (2009) discusses priming as a process in which mental constructs are activated and influence how individuals evaluate ideas. Thus, media provides its viewers with criteria and frames of reference. Priming allows television programming to manipulate the viewers in subtle ways. Carpentier (2009) explains further that exposure to images or repeated themes in media sources have been shown to prime concepts of ethics, hostility, and sexuality and racial or gender stereotypes. As a result of priming, consequential behaviors were aimed towards the activated concept. For example, behaviors were more hostile, and subsequent judgments were based on the activated concept of first impressions of individual adhered to racial stereotypes (Carpentier, 2009).

Through the scripted language, attire and behaviors of female and male characters, viewers are shown how men and women are supposed to behave in society. Television programming influences the audience by airing a filtered view of information regarding gender differences. Potter (2010) explains similarly that by receiving and processing information, individuals develop memory traces or activation tags, that is, concepts or issues are primed and made more accessible in an individual's memory. Evidently, if individuals spend an abundance amount of time viewing television programming, it will have an effect on how they analyze gender differences in society. Concepts and ideas that are aired on

television are intertwined with those that exist in society. It is important to realize the relationship that exists between television and society. For instance, societal behaviors and norms serve as the foundation for the televised script. Media utilizes this information and creates programming that reinforces societal beliefs.

Mainstreaming is another technique used to reinforce certain societal norms to the audience. Mainstreaming is a process of “blurring, blending and bending” which Good (2009) suggests that people who view television for long periods of time encounter. This process explains that heavy viewing may disregard differences and perspectives and behavior that would usually result from other factors and influences (Good, 2009; Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). Constantly being exposed to the same images results in the development of a common outlook for viewers (Good, 2009; Gerbner, 2002; Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). Constant viewership from disparate social groups is more similar in attitude than those of lighter viewership from the same subgroups due to mainstreaming (Good, 2009).

Furthermore, cultivation theory examines the effects on viewer’s attitude as a result of long-term exposure to television. Good (2009) explains that the cultivation theory focuses specifically on television's contributions to viewer's conceptions of social reality. Cultivation theory suggests that television influences and shapes viewers criteria and behaviors because it shapes social reality. According to Good (2009), the combined effects of massive television exposure over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole. Therefore, cultivation theory suggests that those who watch large amounts of television are likely to be highly influenced and accept the processed information from television as reality (Good, 2009).

Lastly, another means of analysis is the social learning theory. This theory is often the reasoning for the impact of socio-cultural messages on television towards the viewers. Here, as people are repeatedly exposed to gender specific images and behaviors, they tend to internalize the behaviors

(Hovland et al., 2005). The more time spent watching television, the more the audience will identify with these behaviors that are shown.

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on two prime-time television shows, *2 Broke Girls*, and *Happy Endings* and their messages about gendered roles. The chosen methodology is content analysis. A content analysis is a method that analyzes cultural artifacts used for communication purposes. Content analyses are used to measure cultural change and to study different aspects of culture. The objective of content analyses is to capture the meanings, emphasis, and themes of messages and to understand the organization and process of how they are presented (White & Marsh, 2006). In a qualitative content analysis, the researcher foreshadows a question that is used to guide the research and influence the collected data (White & Marsh, 2006). The data selection for this method is purposive sampling. This type of sampling allows for identifying complete and accurate answers to research questions. The coding schema is developed to identify significant concepts and patterns. Since the object of qualitative research is not generalizability but transferability (White & Marsh, 2006), the samples in this study do not need to ensure that all objects being analyzed have an equal or predictable probability of being included in the sample. The coding for content analysis is usually subjective to document perceptions; increase credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of findings (White & Marsh, 2006).

Content analysis is an effective method for this research on situational comedies and gendered messages because a specific cultural artifact used for communication purposes is analyzed and explored. The intended focus was to record and analyze the number of instances gendered messages were relayed to viewers and make determinations about the number of instances. Hypotheses were

developed to help guide the research and findings from the two situational comedies. The two shows were chosen as the samples because considering the genre, viewership, and airing times, they allowed for accurate answers to the proposed research question. The coding used was developed to identify gender stereotypes that exist among men and women on television. The examination of these two programs will explore the occupations that women hold in the story lines, the physical appearance of female characters, and the behaviors of female characters compared with male characters. Ten episodes, each one 30 minutes in length, from the second season of *Two Broke Girls*, and ten episodes, each one 30 minutes in length, from the second season of *Happy Endings* were watched and coded for a total of five hours of each program over the course of two months.

*Two Broke Girls* is a comedy series that airs on CBS on Mondays at 9:00 p.m. *2 Broke Girls* focuses on the lives of two women who are struggling economically and work as waitresses in a diner to earn income. The two young women hope to launch a successful cupcake business-if only they can save enough money. One waitress, named Max, works two jobs to survive economically. The second waitress, Caroline, is from “uptown” and receives funds from a trust fund. Unfortunately, she runs into bad luck that forces her to work at a greasy diner to earn an income. Viewers are instantly exposed to gender stereotypes through the title of the show. The title *2 Broke Girls* and the occupations that the women have, highlight how women make lower wages than men and tend to fill the lower status jobs such as waitressing.

The second television program that was watched and analyzed was *Happy Endings*. This comedy programming is broadcasted on Tuesday nights at 9:00 p.m. on ABC. *Happy Endings* is about the dysfunctional adventures of six best friends who live in Chicago. According to the Associated Press, *Happy Endings* is “the funniest show on television.” This show follows the lives of the shop

owner Alex and her ex-fiancé Dave; crazy in love husband and wife Brad and Jane; Max their underemployed gay friend and Penny, a single woman who is constantly looking for love.

The two situational comedies analyzed in this study were selected from two popular networks on television. According to recent television guides, on CBS, there are six situational comedies that are aired weekly: *Two and Half Men*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Mike and Molly*, and *2 Broke Girls*. In like manner, ABC has a weekly line-up for situational comedies: *Modern Family*, *The Middle*, *Happy Endings*, *Last Man Standing*, *Suburgatory*, *The Neighbors*, *Malibu Country*, *How to Live with Your Parents*, and *Family Tools*. The situational comedies that were chosen from each network aired during the 9:00 pm time slots. Compared to the situational comedies that are aired in the 8:00 pm time slot, situational comedies in the 9:00 pm time slots have a larger audience and show adult themed content and humor (Blackwelder, 2013).

The selection of these two television programs was based on the time each was aired, the genre, the audience that the programs attracts and the number of viewers. This criterion is crucial to the study because television programming is targeted at a specific viewing audience based on the airing time and genre.

The airing times of the television programs were important to the study because as it becomes later in the evening, programming is directed toward adult viewers instead of children and/or families. After thirty one weeks of an entire season, CBS placed first in attracting adults ageing between 18-49 and ABC placed fourth, for attracting adults in the same age range (Bibel, 2013). The language and behavior in the shows include little or no filters when it comes to content and stereotypes. For example, the show *2 Broke Girls* moved half an hour later from 8:30pm into the 9:00pm time slot for the second season, allowing the executive directors additional leeway to incorporate more adult themed content into the script (Sitcom Nation, 2012). However, since the time slot is later in the evening, the audience



that the second season attracts is likely more appropriate for the content and character of the show than the audience during the first season. The constant references to sexual innuendos, drugs, and stereotypes suggest that this television show is better geared for the current time slot (Sitcom Nation, 2012). This show is not meant for families to sit down and watch together because it takes advantage of the limits between offensive and non-offensive behaviors.

The airing time is also an important factor for the ratings. During the second season of *Happy Endings*, the rating rose after the back-to-back episodes aired at the 9:00pm and 9:30pm time slots (Blackwelder, 2013). In the first airing, at 9:00pm, *Happy Endings* had 1.2 adults rating and during the second airing, at 9:30pm, the show pulled in a 1.3 rating. The increase in the number of viewers may suggest that the 9:00pm time slot has a larger and older audience in comparison to the 8:00pm time slot.

The genre of the television programming also played a role in the selection in this study. Analyzing situational comedy shows is important because jokes pertaining to gender stereotypes are often present in the script. The script for comedy shows display many socio-cultural ideals even if they are considered to be a stereotype or socially harmful. Palmer (2009) found that situational comedy shows present males making derogatory remarks about women's weight and body type. This is central to the focus of this study. Jokes concerning issues that are present in society as a result of gender differences, bias and stereotypes are discussed on comedy television shows. Palmer's (2009) research on this shows that the male characters engage in conversation with the audience about reasons why women should be paid less than men for similar jobs, and the impediments of having a woman as President for the United States. Presenting topics that are important in a society in a joking manner is popular in situational comedy television shows. This behavior is reinforced by the laughter from the

audience, which suggests that the audience finds these stereotypes and content to be funny (Palmer, 2009).

Finally, since viewers of these shows are older, comic television programming uses suggestive language and jokes that most adults will understand. For example, television comedy shows can joke about women working in lower-status position jobs and making minimum wage because adults understand that this is how society works in reality. Creators and producers are not limited to the extreme measures that they can take in writing the script because the audience that is attracted to the programs is older and more sophisticated (Sitcom Nation, 2012).

The size of the audience for each program is another important factor. It is important to focus on shows where there is a large viewership. Both *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* are two popular shows on their networks. According to recent television guides, each show has viewership that ranges in the millions. The show *2 Broke Girls* has 9.2 million viewers and *Happy Endings* has six million viewers. The high viewership for these programs suggests that many people in society are potentially influenced by the gender stereotypes that these programs display.

### ***Hypotheses***

Through this content analysis, the following research question was explored (A) In what ways does prime-time television programming reinforce the stereotypes that society has towards women and men? The following hypotheses were created to further explore the stereotypes that were recorded and analyzed in the study:

Hypothesis 1: Female characters display stereotyped qualities of sexualized femininity.

Hypothesis 2: Female characters are depicted working in low-status jobs, while male characters are shown in high-status jobs.

Hypothesis 3: The wardrobe for female characters exposes more skin than that of the male characters.

Hypothesis 4: Male characters display stereotyped qualities of masculinity.

Hypothesis 5: The primary setting for shows allows for stereotyped gender roles and interactions.

Hypothesis 6: Blonde female characters are depicted as unintelligent.

Hypothesis 7: Sexual innuendo is central to the story line in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*.

### ***Units of Analysis and Variables***

The unit of analysis that is used in this study is the individual characters on television. This study will focus on how the characters behave and what stereotypes are presented in television programming. The findings of this exploratory study will show the social dynamics that appear on television. The individual characters were examined as the factors that caused them to act in a particular manner.

Although there are many ways to analyze depictions of the behaviors of male and female characters (Stern & Maestro, 2004), this study was specifically aimed at examining the behaviors and images of male and female characters in television programming and how they are closely related to gender stereotypes in society. Hence, these variables were drawn from previous literature that evaluated gender portrayals in television programming. These variables were used through the evaluations of the television shows:

The *Primary Setting* for the characters also played a role in the examination of the shows. These settings were divided into “place of employment”, “home”, “outdoor”, or “other inside location” (Stern & Maestro, 2004).



	Absence of a shirt	Baggy-loose fitted pants with v-line showing	Absence of Pants	Presence of a shirt	Loose fitted pants worn at the waistline	Presence of pants	Absence of either shirt or pants
Male Character (Individual male character)							
Specific Examples							

Male characters were examined for qualities of masculinity. The following table was used to record the observations of qualities that define masculinity for the male characters:

	Strength	Power
Dave		
Max		
Brad		



## Findings and Discussion

### *Hypothesis 1: Female characters display stereotyped qualities of sexualized femininity*

Hypothesis 1 was supported throughout the content shown in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. The female characters in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* display stereotyped qualities of femininity. These stereotypes ranged from alluring behaviors used to attract men, and the urge to be in relationship. Table 1 shows the number of occurrences female characters displayed stereotyped qualities of sexualized femininity in both shows. The first three rows illustrate the number of occurrences for the cast of *Happy Endings*. In like manner, the following three rows represent the data collected from the show *2 Broke Girls*.

**Table 1: Stereotyped qualities of sexualized femininity**

	Flirting	Winking	Puckering of lips (air kissing)	Sexual Behaviors	Total
Jane	3	7	8	6	24
Alex	2	9	0	0	11
Penny	7	3	3	4	17
Max	10	2	0	6	18
Caroline	3	0	6	5	14
Sophie	10	5	0	15	30

The findings in the table conclude that the female characters in *Happy Endings* were written to demonstrate fewer alluring behaviors than the female characters in *2 Broke Girls*. Within the observed 10 episodes, the female characters from the cast of *Happy Endings* were shown behaving in alluring ways 52 times. In contrast, the female characters of *2 Broke Girls* demonstrate alluring behaviors 62 times. The differences in the number of times the female characters are portrayed in a feminine manner

in both shows results from the individualized script of each character. In other words, the female characters that were shown flirting, winking, puckering, and acting out other sexualized behaviors, tended to be the characters that were highly sexualized or constantly seeking the attention of a male character in hopes of finding a romantic relationship.

In one episode of *Happy Endings*, two female characters attempted to attract a male character by taking part in alluring behaviors. The first comment that the mother tells her daughter is to not put too much food on her plate because it is unattractive to men. The same female character also tells her daughter that she should act sexy towards a meat carver at a dinner event. The conversation between the two characters went as following:

Mother: “Be sure to make sexual eye contact with the carver, your stomach will thank you.”

Daughter: (Looks at meat carver, waves, and bites bottom lip)

There is one female character in *Happy Endings*, who constantly looks for love. Penny is known for seeking a relationship throughout many episodes. In one scene two female characters were having a conversation about the search for relationship:

Female character: “I wish I could have some privacy, so I can date an ordinary guy.”

Penny: “Wow. You are just a girl looking for love and so am I.”

In another episode, Penny struggles to not contact her boyfriend, but it seemed to be a very hard task for her:



Penny: “I got to text Pete. But I can't. But I want to. I have not texted him all day, how much power does a gal need?”

Max: “Weak, spineless, disgusting. You need to grow some testes.”

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 1***

Hypothesis 1 was supported by the findings from *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. The examples above from *Happy Endings* illustrate how female characters were portrayed as using alluring behaviors to attract men. Often female characters are shown biting their lips, twirling their hair, or even lifting one leg in order to gain a male character's attention. The comment that the mother makes to her daughter suggests that it is expected that women behave in a particular manner to get what they want from men. The number of such occurrences in the programs was an average of between five to six alluring behaviors during each half hour program.

Another quality of femininity is the need to be in a relationship. Penny is a female character who is constantly on a quest to find love. The example above illustrates how women are depicted as depending on men. Penny goes back and forth about whether to text her boyfriend or not. Max's responses are examples of language that is used to describe women, on television and society. For example, some other qualities of femininity that exist are that women are weak and spineless. Women are often seen as being the weaker gender and needing protection and support.

### ***Hypothesis 2: Female characters are depicted working in low-status jobs, while male characters are shown in high-status jobs.***

The female characters in both situational comedies portray women in low-status jobs. Table 2 shows the female characters from both shows and their place of employment. The first three characters are from the show *Happy Endings* and the last two characters are from *2 Broke Girls*.

**Table 2: Occupations of female characters from *Happy Endings* and *2 Broke Girls***

Female Characters	Occupation
Penny	Administrator at a firm
Jane	Administrator at a car dealership
Alex	Employee at a retail store
Max	Waitress
Caroline	Waitress

The findings suggest that female characters are mainly shown as working in low-status jobs. The female characters on these two shows hold jobs that are considered to be the stereotypical jobs for women: administrator/secretary, salesperson and waitress.

Even though in the programming *Happy Endings* and *2 Broke Girls*, the female characters work outside of the home, the workplaces that they are employed at are low-status and earn minimum wage. In *2 Broke Girls*, Max and Caroline are two women who work as waitresses in a run-down diner. Both Max and Caroline do not earn enough money to pay for necessary items. In one scene Caroline explains how broke she is:

Caroline: “I do not have two dollars saved”

She says this line because the diner was being robbed and she wanted the thief to know that she was broke.

In comparison, the following table illustrates the types of jobs that male characters on these shows hold. The first three characters are from the show *Happy Endings* and the following characters are from *2 Broke Girls*.

**Table 3: Occupations of male character from *Happy Endings* and *2 Broke Girls***

Male Characters	Occupation
Max	Unemployed
Brad	Children's play space; but leaving to go back to a business firm
Dave	Owner of a food truck
Earl	Restaurant security/greeter at the entrance
Han	Restaurant manager

The findings from Table 3 suggest that if male characters are employed, they are more likely to work in a position that is of a higher status than female characters. Although Brad currently works at a children's play space, he is typically portrayed as a business man. His prior job was in a business firm and he plans to leave the play space and return to the business field.

In *Happy Endings* the idea of what is considered the societal norm in regards to occupational work between men and women is explicitly exposed. In the first two minutes of an episode, a conversation about employment arises:

Alex: "I love how cool you are with Jane being the bread winner and you staying home. It is like post gender city population progress."

Penny: "I am Brad and I am basically a woman, I got an inverted wiener and my boobs squirt milk post gender."

Brad: “Do not get it twisted; I am still all man up in here”.

The scene where Penny mimics Brad by calling him a woman suggests that only women stay home, while men work outside of the home.

Not only are men expected to work in the public realm, the type of employment is important also. The show *Happy Endings* illustrates how men are supposed to work in high-status jobs. Brad is currently working at a children's play area when a financial consultant comes in and asks about his prior work experience in the finance industry. Initially, Brad turns down the proposed job offer:

Brad (to his manager and children at his job): “I turned down the offer at the financial office.”

Child # 1: “Really in this economy? You got to think long term bro.”

Child # 2: “Yea. You got to make that scrilla, if you are going to hang on to this vanilla (points to Jane, Brad's wife)

Jane: “Brad you love business. You are a business man at heart.”

Brad: I do love business. I love getting down to it, I love mixing it with pleasure.”

This example suggests that the main career choice for men is business or other high status jobs. Jane persistently tries to convince Brad that his current job, the child play area, is not for him. She pushes Brad to go back to this field of work because she feels it best suits him, and defines who he is.

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 2***

Hypothesis 2 was supported by the behaviors and comments that were analyzed in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. The first example illustrates how female characters on television and women in

society are portrayed to work in lower-status jobs and earn minimum wage. Television focuses on a small range of stereotypical “female” jobs.

The next example from *Happy Endings* explains how the societal norm is for men to work in the public realm, as opposed to women. Allowing the characters to express how men are not expected to stay home proves that women are supposed to be in the private realm. As discussed earlier Barnett, (2004) and Piety (2009) each explained how women are expected to work in the private sphere in order to be protected from the cruelties of the world. This implies that women are seen as the weaker sex in reference to occupational work, resulting in Brad’s need to quickly defend his manhood. Before Brad lost his job, he worked at a large Chicago investment firm. This job is seen as more suitable for him because societal stereotypes hold that men must have higher status jobs than women, and that jobs in childcare are low status, and are generally reserved for women.

The last documented conversation about whether Brad should take the job is an indication that there are certain expectations concerning the type of jobs men should hold. Men are expected to be in high paying occupations that will help them support their families. Kid #2 implies that if Brad wants to remain married, he needs to be able to provide for his wife. Even though males are expected to be the breadwinners, most women work outside of the home. However, it is assumed that males should make more money.

***Hypothesis 3: The wardrobe for female characters exposes more skin than that of the male characters, allowing there to be a focus on a particular body part.***

The analysis of the attire for the characters in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* both illustrated suggestive clothing and a focus on sexualizing body parts. Table 4 shows the documented wardrobe of the female characters for 10 episodes of *Happy Endings*. The findings in Table 4 shows that the attire used in *Happy Endings* tended to be more conservative. However, it is important to understand that

although there is a conservative style used, there is still suggestive clothing present. For example, many incidents where the characters wore loose-fitted shirts, the top button was undone, showing the top of the chest. This is a way to include some degree of suggestiveness through exposing attire, yet in a subtle manner, while still suggest sexualizing the women. For the female characters, the number of occurrences for wearing skirts well above the knees exceeded the number of occurrences for wearing skirts that were knee-length or below.

Thus, some may think that this type of attire is suggestive, the manner in which the producers utilize it, can be considered somewhat conservative. In particular, there were six recorded times where the female characters wore panty-hose with the shorter skirts. The absence of shirts and bottoms was important to analyze as well. This showed how although there were no clothes present, sexualized behavior could be inferred by the audience. For example, in one documented scene, Jane was wearing a robe and Brad says “oohh sexy mama coming through”. This example shows that in scenarios where there is no clothing present, there is still a focus on body parts.

**Table 4: Wardrobe for female characters on *Happy Endings***

	Tight Blouses	Low-cut Blouses	Tight Bottoms	Skirts or dresses well above the knees	Loose fitted blouses	Loose fitted bottoms	Skirts and dresses below the knees	Absence of either shirt or pants
Female Character (Jane)	4	2	6	6	29	11	2	2
Specific Examples				2 times w/panty hose	7 times w/top button undone			1 time bath scene; 1 time robe
Female Character (Alex)	3		2	1	30	10	1	
Specific Examples	With stomach showing			With panty hose	1 time top button undone			
Female Character (Penny)	3	2	6	5	21	8		
Specific Examples				3 times with panty hose	2 times with panty hose			

In like manner, Table 5 shows the documented wardrobe for the male characters on *Happy Endings*. The findings in Table 5 show that the attire for male characters is also on the conservative side. The male characters were written to wear shirts in majority of the ten observed episodes. However, there are a few times when the top button was undone to bring more attention to the chest area. There were not many times where a male character did not have a shirt. During these incidents, the male characters were either excited or shaving their chests. Max is shown without a shirt four times, with one of those times was while he was shaving. In like manner, Dave is shown without his shirt once throughout all 10 episodes due to him shaving. Similar to the absence of all clothing for the female characters, there was an incident where Max did not have any clothes on. Instead he was wrapped in a towel from the waist down. Although there was no suggestive clothing present to conclude the focus on

a particular body part, the audience can infer that the preceding scene was one of sexual behavior because there was another man present, also wrapped in a towel.

**Table 5: Wardrobe for male characters on *Happy Endings***

	Absence of a shirt	Baggy-loose fitted pants with v-line showing	Absence of Pants	Presence of a shirt	Loose fitted pants worn at the waistline	Presence of pants	Absence of either shirt or pants
Male Character ( <i>Brad</i> )				35	17	17	
Specific Examples				1 time button undone			
Male Character ( <i>Max</i> )	3			34	16	16	1
Specific Examples	1 time shaving chest			1 time button undone			wrapped in towel
Male character ( <i>Dave</i> )	1			31	13	13	
Specific Examples	Shaving chest			4 times button undone			

The data from Table 5 supports the hypothesis that female characters show more skin. The male characters were not often depicted wearing baggy pants or showing their legs, whereas the female characters wore short skirts on multiple occasions.



To consider this further, one example of female characters' clothing revealing more skin takes place during one scene in *Happy Endings* where the group of friends was playing kickball. The uniforms for some men covered their bodies from the collar bone to the ankle in loose fitting, sport appropriate clothing. However, this was not the same for some female characters, where breasts are accentuated, as are small waists and long legs with form fitting uniforms. Brad is the husband of Jane who made a sexualized comment as a result of her uniform:

Brad: "Look at that trader, I hate her. Those long legs sticking out of those teeny tiny shorts that she got on just teasing. I am going to hate her like five times tonight". (Turns to his friends) "Guys I am talking about sex".

Jane: (Stretches in a sexual manner in front of four other men) (The camera focuses on her legs).

Exploiting women bodies is a strategy that is used for gaining the male characters' attention. This is why Jane's legs caught the attention of her husband and her stretching took place near four other men. Exploiting women bodies to attract male characters is meant to be about power between genders. Female characters are shown to have the power to seduce a male character simply by flaunting their bodies. However, this type of power creates a disempowerment for female characters where the constant exploitation of a woman's body is more likely to result in the female character being seen as sexual objects and being treated as such.

In *2 Broke Girls*, the female characters are often judged as a result of their physical appearances. Tables 6 and 7 shows the wardrobe for both the male and female characters in the show.

**Table 6: Wardrobe for female characters on *2 Broke Girls***

	Tight Blouses	Low-cut Blouses	Tight Bottoms	Skirts or dresses well above the knees	Loose fitted blouses	Loose fitted bottoms	Skirts and dresses below the knees	Absence of either shirt or pants
Female Character (Caroline)	1		9	24	12		1	2
Specific Examples				17times for diner uniform  7times outside of work clothes				In bathtub masturbating; in bed with male
Female Character (Max)	1	13	15	18	7	2		
Specific Examples				17times for diner uniform  1time outside of work clothes	4 times top button undone			
Female Character (Sophie)				13			2	
Specific Examples				9times with bra showing  4times without bra showing			Low-cut with bra showing	

The findings from Table 6 illustrate how the attire for the female characters is designed to focus on a particular body part. As a result of mainstreaming, viewers can create a generalized outlook on how women should dress. The high frequency of repeated images for female characters can influence

an audience into believing that women are supposed to dress in suggestive clothing; which is clothing that implies sexual behaviors through revealing body parts to the audience. In all 10 episodes, Caroline wore a skirt or a dress that was well above her knees to bring attention to her legs. On the other hand, the number of occurrences that Max wears a low-cut blouse exceeded Caroline. This is due to the body type of each woman where the camera's central focus for body parts differs. Sophie is a character who dressed in suggestive clothing in all 10 observed episodes. There were some episodes where her degree of suggestiveness was higher than others. For example, there were nine occurrences of Sophie wearing a low-cut dress with the top part of her bra showing and four occurrences where she wore a low-cut dress without her bra showing. Sophie's attire resulted in some type of sexualized behavior aimed towards her.

The following are examples from episodes that illustrate how female customers are sexualized as a result of their attire. The scene shows how a female customer, wearing a yellow dress, is verbally addressed by a male sitting by the door:

Male: "Look here comes the sun" (Looks at her backside) "The moon is looking good too!"

Female: (Smiles) "Your flirting is the right amount of dirty!"

During this scene, this conversation shows how men can initiate comments referring to the sexuality and physical appearance of women and how women can take part based off their responses. Here is another example, in 2 *Broke Girls*, where a male character blatantly objectifies a female character commenting on her physical appearance:

Male: "Look at you, you couldn't look more scrumptious"!

Female: “Yes I can! With a little chocolate drizzled on me”!

Table 7 shows that the attire for the male characters in *2 Broke Girls*. Here we see attire that is conservative for the 10 observed episodes. Male characters wore shirts that covered up their entire torso and loose-fitted pants that came to their waistline. Unlike the female characters, the male characters dressed in ways that covered up their bodies, limiting the exposure of their bodies.

**Table 7: Wardrobe for male characters on *2 Broke Girls***

	Absence of a shirt	Baggy-loose fitted pants with v-line showing	Absence of Pants	Presence of a shirt	Loose fitted pants worn at the waistline	Presence of pants	Absence of either shirt or pants
Male Character (Han)				17	15	15	
Specific Examples							
Male Character (Earl)				12	6	6	
Specific Examples							

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 3***

The previous examples from *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* illustrate how the wardrobe for female characters exposes more skin than male characters. Palmer (2009) found that derogatory comments about women's body types are usually present in situational comedies. Hence, this explains

why there are many comments concerning the physical appearance of women present in these two shows.

The attire of female characters is again used to gain the attention of male characters in *2 Broke Girls*. In *2 Broke Girls*, there is a high degree of suggestive clothing that the viewing audience is exposed to. The type of dress for female characters plays a vital role in the way women are depicted on the show. The waitress uniforms for Max and Caroline shows focused sexualized parts of their bodies. Caroline's uniform is cut well above the knees. Her uniform is designed to focus on her legs, in which she wears heels to accentuate their length and shape. In contrast, Max's uniform also stops well above her knees, but the focus is not on her legs, instead, her breasts are the central focus. Max's top button on her shirt is constantly unbuttoned, throwing the audience's focus on her cleavage. In one scene a man in the diner looks at Max's breasts and smiles. This reaction shows how some men are often preoccupied with female's bodies and the manner in which the uniform fits is designed for that type of feedback. This type of dress seemed to be present throughout every scene in each episode. The attire that Max and Caroline wore, outside of their work uniforms, continued to display the same areas to the audience.

Sexualized clothing was also exhibited on Sophie. In multiple episodes, her breast area is the focal point of her wardrobe. The difference between exposure to Max's breast area and Sophie's breast area is that there is an increased degree of suggestiveness with the rest of Sophie's attire. In the ten recorded episodes, Sophie's breasts were never covered entirely from the audience. There were some scenes where her bra was not showing, but in those scenes her dress was still low-cut.

On the other hand, the male characters in *2 Broke Girls* dressed very differently. For the most part, the type of dress for the male characters was conservative. All of the male characters wore shirts and pants that were comfortably fitted and covered up majority of their bodies. However there were some scenes where the male characters sought to gain the attention of female characters by unveiling

their body. There are three episodes where male characters show their bodies for attention. This number is low in contrast to the constant exposure to female bodies. In one particular episode, two male characters used their bodies to try to gain Max's attention. One male lifted up his shirt, revealing his abs and v-line. Another male was shown in just his underwear, also revealing his abs and lower v-line area. In another episode, two male characters are shown shirtless with their pants slightly off the waist. It is important to understand the difference in the way attire is worn between both genders. There are many more occurrences of female characters being sexualized by clothing than there are for male characters.

The attire for the cast of *Happy Endings* is more conservative in comparison to that of *2 Broke Girls*. The female characters on this show tend to dress in business attire such as: comfortably-fitted blouses that do not show breasts, comfortably-fitted bottoms. There were a few scenes where Jane wore a button up blouse with the first couple of buttons unbuttoned, but there was no excess skin shown. The dresses that were often worn came slightly above the knees, but not enough to be considered suggestive attire.

From the documented observations, male characters in *Happy Endings* also dressed in a traditional manner. Brad was once employed at a business firm where he had to wear a suit and tie. His new job at a children's play space ensured that he wore comfortably-fitted clothes, where his arms were the only thing exposed. Dave dressed more casually because his job, as a food truck cook, did not demand business attire. Lastly, Max's wardrobe is also casual attire. There are some scenes in episodes where he is shirtless, but the only part of his body showing was his shoulders. This tended to happen when Max was shown at the completion of sexual intercourse, where the blankets of the bed covered his chest.

The cast of *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* both depict the characters in a gender stereotypical manner. The attire that each gender wore corresponded with a particular demeanor. This

was shown when both genders tried to gain the attention of the cohorts, and was judged solely because of their physical appearances.

***Hypothesis 4: Male characters display stereotyped qualities of masculinity.***

As stated previously, qualities that reference masculinity are strength, wealth and power. If a male does not hold these qualities, he is looked upon as being weak. Table 8 has the number of occurrences in which each male character, on *Happy Endings*, was portrayed as showing a stereotypical quality of masculinity. Strength here refers to unemotional behavior and the ability to repair things and power refers to references of male dominance over females.

**Table 8: Stereotyped qualities of masculinity in *Happy Endings***

	Strength	Power
Dave	9	7
Max	6	9
Brad	8	6

The findings in Table 8 suggest that the male characters are written in a way to show their masculine qualities. However, there were scenes where the male characters behaved in ways that questioned or challenged their manhood.

In *Happy Endings*, Dave is criticized as being weak because he cried over the thought of one of his friends being dead. Max proceeded to call Dave “a sentimental bitch” because he showed his emotions. A few scenes later, Dave cried again because he learned that two of his friends are getting

married. This time Dave states “I am crying and I do not care who knows it.” The attitude that men are not supposed to display emotions in front of others is present not only on television programming but also in society. If male characters are being called names as a result of crying, the overall messages shown to viewers dictates that this is not masculine behavior. Here in particular, calling Dave sentimental and a bitch is meant to feminize his actions, and mock him for his inability to be masculine, which means that he is instead feminine.

Another scene in *Happy Endings* when a male character's masculinity is questioned is when Dave and Brad attempted to fix an electric socket. There seems to be a competition between male characters when it comes to who is more masculine. Brad questions Dave's manhood because Dave was unsure of what a circuit breaker was. Dave's response to Brad was: “I am way more a man than you will ever be”. This shows that if a male character has some uncertainty about a realm that is considered masculine, he is less powerful and is seen as being weak.

Male characters are often depicted as wanting or needing independence when it comes to romantic relationships compared to their female counterparts. Max, a character on *Happy Endings*, tells his friend that writing a romantic song for someone is lame. Max goes on to say “got to be like me, fly solo. Love is an allusion.” Male characters are not usually shown as being affectionate and yearning to be in a relationship. Female characters, on the other hand, are constantly portrayed as wanting to be in a relationship. Again, in *Happy Endings*, Penny craves having a boyfriend by any means possible:

Penny: “I am getting pumped to play kickball. It is a great place to meet guys. My friend collided at home plate with this cute guy and now they are getting married.”

Another stereotype that television portrays in reference to men is that males tend to be abusers or violent. Dave, in *Happy Endings*, says to Alex “you women do not know a real man unless he came up and slapped you in your face.” This statement suggests that males should be violent or abusive to



females in order to be masculine. Another scene in *Happy Endings* in which a male character is depicted as being an abuser is during the kickball game. On two different occasions, Dave kicked the ball and hit Penny in the face. Penny exclaims that it is not his fault, she was in the way.

Male characters are similarly represented as abusers or violent in *2 Broke Girls*. In one episode Max and Caroline were talking about confrontations that people they knew were involved in:

Caroline: “My friend and her boyfriend did this piece called confrontation where they just slapped each other’s faces for days.”

Max: “Oh yea? My mom and her boyfriend did that to. Except they called it who smoked the last cigarette.”

In another incident Andy, Caroline's boyfriend, makes a comment that can be inferred as a violent attack. When Max asked Andy what are his plans with Caroline, Andy replied by saying: “I am going to take her on a romantic hayride. Then I am going to knock her out with chloride and take her kidney and sell it for a new iPad.”

These different scenes imply and exhibit to the audience that men tend to be the stronger gender and their strength can be shown through violent acts. In many of the incidents, male characters are either referencing violent acts towards women or are included in violent acts towards women.

#### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 4***

Hypothesis 4 refers to male characters displaying qualities of masculinity and is supported by the analysis of the male characters on the television shows. In the first documented behavior from *Happy Endings* a male character's manhood was questioned because he showed his emotions. He was called a derogatory name that implies weakness and femaleness because he was emotional. One quality

that defines masculinity is strength, so when that quality is put into jeopardy, it can serve as a threat to masculinity.

The second example where Dave and Brad attempt to fix a circuit breaker demonstrates that the ability to understand electrical problems is portrayed as a masculine quality. In order to be seen as a man, one must have some type of power. Knowledge is power and since Dave did not initially know what a circuit breaker was, Brad questioned his manhood.

Kim (2007) explains that men are taught to want to or need to be independent. Max is a male character who exhibits this feeling and tries to coerce his other male characters into his same way of thinking. Furthermore, the example that shows Penny seeking a relationship suggests that female characters are often portrayed to be the group to want relationships more.

*2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* both depict men as being violent. A man being portrayed as abusers on television is becoming a common theme. Television programming creates characters to behave in a violent manner because this is the type of behavior that is shown in society (Potter, 2010). Since these shows are popular, the images and messages about gender may be internalized by the audience.

***Hypothesis 5: The primary setting allows for stereotyped gender roles and interactions.***

The primary setting for television shows is important in reference to the gender script and behaviors. In *2 Broke Girls*, the primary setting is at the place of employment for the two female characters, Caroline and Max. Caroline and Max are employed at a low-class diner as waitresses. The representation as a diner as the primary setting and two women waitressing implies that the social-cultural message is that women, more than men, are supposed to work in diners as waitresses.

The primary setting in *2 Broke Girls* allow for opportunities of sexual harassment to occur towards Caroline and Max. In past studies, scholars have argued that sex-role spillover is the explanation for why sexual harassment occurs differently in workplaces known for mostly women employees, and sex role spillover theory argues that sexual harassment occurs more often where individuals expect that employees are available as sexual objects, and where behaviors such as flirting, teasing, or touching are expected (Huebner 2008; Pringle 1998; Cobble 1991; Hochschild 1983; Gutek 1982). According to past studies, waitresses report that sexual harassment from customers is common (Huebner 2008; Owings 2002; Huebner 1994; Cobble 1991). Society has made sexual harassment an institutionalized part of the restaurant culture. Huebner (2008) explains that waitresses suffer from sexual harassment because they are sexualized and the service-oriented nature of the job.

In *2 Broke Girls*, when there is a male customer being served in the diner, it allows opportunities for sexual harassment to occur. In one episode, male customers were being served by Max and Caroline. The customers viewed and treated Max and Caroline as sexual objects:

Male customer (to Max): “Hey doll face! Where's the food?”

Max: (Comes over and explains the options on the menu)

Male customer (to Max): “I was not listening because I was looking at your boobs.”

Male customer (to Caroline): “Hey hot stuff! Where's the hot stuff?”

Furthermore, in another scene Max says she can take care of this male customer, meaning that she would take his food order, but he took it in a different, sexualized, context. The male customer began to smile in a sexualized and suggestive manner while biting his bottom lip.

Another incident of sexual harassment occurred when two young men came into the diner. After Max explains the menu and walks away, one male character says to the other: “Did you see her nurses?” The comment that was made by this male character shows that often women are seen as sexual objects on situational comedy.

One last comment made by a store clerk illustrates how the setting for a story line allows for derogatory comments to be made towards female characters. One scene when Caroline and Max were shopping in an underground men’s store, the store clerk approached them and said the following:

Store Clerk: “What can I help you dolls with”? “If the price is too high we can negotiate” (In sexualized manner)

Caroline (to Max): “We cannot afford this shirt.”

Max: “You heard the man; the price can go down, if you go down.”

The show *Happy Endings*, on the other hand, is more diverse in regards to the setting. The group of friends has encounters at various locations throughout the show. At various times throughout the show, the characters are shown in someone's home, a restaurant or the local pub. The primary settings tend to be at inside locations. In addition to the settings mainly taking place at inside locations, these locations were gender-neutral and did not allow for stereotypical behavior.

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 5***

In *2 Broke Girls* the primary setting allowed for stereotyped behavior. There were many incidents throughout the ten episodes recorded that supported this finding. In one episode alone, there were five incidents where Max and Caroline were sexually harassed at the diner.

The interaction between Max, Caroline and the male customer shows how waitressing is seen as a location of sexual harassment. These sexualized interactions occur because, as stated previously, there is a stereotype attached to waitressing that makes this acceptable and expected behavior. This explains why there were more sexual harassment behaviors on *2 Broke Girls* compared to *Happy Endings*. The first example shows how with one-on-one interaction between the waitress and the male customer there is an opportunity for sexualized behavior and comments to occur.

The second recorded behavior shows how the male characters intentionally misunderstood what Max meant. Instead of taking the comment as one of her job duties, customer service, he takes it in a sexualized manner. The idea of serving a man, as in waitressing, was clearly confused with pleasing a man, sexually.

The next example when one male customer asked another about Max's "nursers" also illustrates how waitresses are seen as sexualized objects. This also coincides with the idea of how the physical appearance of female characters is used to capture the attention of male characters. In this scene, the way that Max's uniform fitted on her breast area, made the male character focus on that area more.

Lastly, in the example with the store salesman, Max and Caroline are sexually harassed in a discreet manner. The salesman did not directly say what his intentions were, but the audience is able to infer what they are through the comment that Max made to Caroline. The setting in this scene is an underground store, which can be depicted as being unsafe for female characters. The type of behavior from the salesman was not unexpected since the audience can infer that this is something to likely occur since the scene was in a place that can be seen as unsafe.

As stated previously, the show *Happy Endings*, did not illustrate many scenes where negatively stereotypical behavior took place because of the setting. In many scenes, the setting was in a friend's home where only the friends hung out or in the bar where the focus was solely on the group of friends.

There was hardly any stereotypical behaviors based on the setting that were problematic because the settings changed frequently, unlike in *2 Broke Girls*.

***Hypothesis 6: Blonde female characters are depicted as unintelligent.***

A popular running joke on television references attractiveness of female characters according to their hair color. Female characters with blonde hair are depicted as lacking intelligence. In addition to lacking intelligence, these characters tend to be written as attractive, easy on the eyes, sexually accessible, and easy to ridicule (Lee & Shaw, 2010). Lee & Shaw (2010) explain that women have always been the target of male-male joking. The main purpose of an obscene joke is to sexually expose a target individual for the pleasure and satisfaction of a third party.

Table 9 shows the number of incidents where running jokes were made in reference to blonde haired women in 10 episodes of each program:

**Table 9: Number of occurrences for blonde jokes in 10 episodes**

Blonde Jokes in <i>2 Broke Girls</i>	Blonde Jokes in <i>Happy Endings</i>
17	19

In order to fully understand the extent of how often blonde jokes are present, the table illustrates the number of occurrences. The data shows that there are as many incidents of blonde joke, where there was an average of two blonde stereotyped references per each episode.

In *2 Broke Girls* there were many incidents where jokes were made in reference to being blonde. Caroline is the blonde character in the show and Max is the brunette. Caroline is often ridiculed for her actions and comments. Throughout many episodes, Max either had to assist Caroline in easy tasks or ridiculed her for her mistakes. In one episode, Caroline becomes the butt of many jokes

from her coworkers and friends. The ridiculing went on for the entirety of the episode. In one scene she urinates on herself because she was afraid from a robbery that took place. The following jokes were made towards Caroline because of her accident:

Han: “Look at that, something ate right through the swifter and I don’t think it was the bleach. How will you ever live with the shame?”

Earl: “Well ladies, I think we all acted pretty brave tonight, well some of us.”

Sophie: “What a nice outfit! On a scale from 1-10, you’re an eight. Get it? Urinate.”

“My friend and I were laughing so hard, we almost peed ourselves, but we didn’t because we aren’t you.”

“Ooh you ladies are going to the movies? What are you going to see, something rated pee pee g?”

Another episode where Caroline is shown as having little intelligence is when she and Max went out to eat for lunch at a soup kitchen. When Caroline walks up to the door and reads the sign she says:

Caroline: “Ooh Soup kitchen. This is a fancy name for a restaurant. Aww that is nice, they let the homeless use the bathroom and sit at a table.” (Walks inside with Max)

Caroline (to lunch server): “Hello, may I see a lunch menu please?”

One last scene where Caroline is involved in a “blonde moment” is when her strap on her high heeled shoe broke. Instead of taking off the shoe and replacing it with another, she decides that it would be a smart idea to use masking tape to tape it to her leg and ankle. Caroline did not use a small amount of tape to fix the strap, she taped the entire shoe.

In the television program *Happy Endings*, the blonde jokes are also highly represented. Alex is a young blonde woman who is portrayed as being less intelligent than her friends. In one episode Alex

was said to have put sunscreen on her grape so it would not turn into a raisin. All of her friends laughed at her because they knew it was a dumb idea. Alex exhibits the stereotyped characteristics that are associated with blondes in society. Alex is pretty, seems to be sexually accessible and easy to make fun of. The conversations that she holds show that she is the representation of the dumb blonde joke. For instance in one scene, she says KFC stands for Kitchen Fresh Chicken. In another incident, she repeatedly tries to pull the refrigerator door fully open before the light comes on. Lastly, there is a scene where Alex says “I have my smart moments; I am not as dumb as I am.” This last line that Alex says implies that she knows she is dumb, but there are some moments where she can do or say things that seem smart.

The running jokes targeting blonde women play on a set of stereotypes, and this is what makes them valuable for comedic moments and scenes in this type of television program. On *Happy Endings*, Dave talks down about Alex in attempts to make her feel less intelligent:

Dave: “You lose focus more than the camera I told Jane not to buy.”

Dave: “Look at that little girl, reading that great big book. Jumping into the deep end without floaties.”

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 6***

Blonde jokes are present in both shows playing on the stereotype that blonde women are less intelligent. In *2 Broke Girls* Caroline behaved in many ways that showed that she lacked intelligence. The example showing how Caroline is constantly ridiculed by her coworkers because of her accident illustrates how the popular running joke referring to blondes as being easy to ridicule is an accurate depiction of the stereotype.



The scene where Caroline did not understand the purpose of a soup kitchen showed that she lack common knowledge, and therefore was unintelligent. After reading the sign and seeing many homeless people inside, she still was unable to process the fact that the soup kitchen is used by individuals who are homeless and need to eat.

Lastly, the incident where Caroline taped her shoe to her leg and ankle showed that she did not have common sense to go change her shoes. At this point, Caroline is portrayed as being a “dumb blonde” because she preferred to limp around with her entire foot wrapped in masking tape. The hypothesis is also supported in *Happy Endings*. In this program, everyone constantly ridicules Alex for her actions, where her mistakes are always accounted for by her blonde hair.

***Hypothesis 7: Sexual innuendo is central to the story line in 2 Broke Girls and Happy Endings.***

In both *Happy Endings* and *2 Broke Girls*, there are sexual jokes that are latent in the script. Sexual innuendo is highly represented on television. Sexual intercourse is depicted or strongly implied in one of every ten shows on television (Teen Health and the Media, 2009). Research illustrates that two out of every three shows on television present sexual content to its audience. Sexual content is more likely to be included on prime-time programs that air on the major networks (Teen Health and the Media, 2009). Sexual innuendo refers to jokes that are made indirectly in reference to sexual activities. These jokes exist for both female and male characters.

In *Happy Endings*, there is a scene where Dave is writing a song for his girlfriend. The lyrics to his song are: “I wish I knew how to make you come (pause) home to me...come come come!” The pause in between the words 'come' and 'home' implies a sexual meaning. The sexual reference in the

script implies that Dave is trying to find ways to make his girlfriend sexually satisfied, instead of coming home to him.

Another episode where sexual innuendo is present is when Jane's boss and male coworkers had a men's group at work. This group would meet every afternoon and watch explicit content on the computer and comment on it. One afternoon while Jane was in the room, the boss said aloud to the other male characters "oh look at those sunny sides up on that breakfast platter." Everyone laughs at his comments. A couple scenes later, the same male character makes a couple remarks while attending a gathering at Jane's house:

Boss: "Thanks for the scotch. That was the second best 18 years old I had all week."

Boss: "Is there a 10 inch hoe here, because that was a low blow."

In another scene of a Max and Brad were having a conversation about the struggle with the straws that come on juice boxes. The conversation was as followed:

Max: "What is up with the straws and these juice boxes? How hard does it have to be to get the thing in the hole?"

Brad: "I know it just spills all over you."

Although Max and Brad are talking about juice boxes, the type of language used could be associated with sexual meaning, and this is where the writers are attempting to derive humor.

The show *2 Broke Girls* also has scenes of indirect sexual content. In one episode, Caroline complains that her heel is wobbly. Max advises Caroline to stick this there (hands Caroline chewed up gum) and hold it. Max then says, "I swear I said this about something else." In this conversation, the

underlying message that Max refers to is sexual intercourse. Although she does not exactly express the idea of sexual activity, the behaviors that coincide with sexual activity are expressed. Another incident where sexual innuendo is present is when Max and Caroline were at the movie theatre and ran into Han, their co-worker.

Caroline: “Han is coming.”

Max: “What?”

Caroline: “I mean he is coming this way.”

Caroline's clarification on her response implies that her initial response was taken in a sexual manner by Max and the audience. The initial comment implies that Han is experiencing a sexual orgasm, when in fact Caroline implied that Han is heading their way in the movie theatre.

In another episode, Max and Caroline talk about a recent date that Caroline and Andy went on. Andy work at a candy store, which explains the language used in their conversation:

Max: “Did you touch his *Whatchamacallit*? Did you bring him *Almond Joy*?”

Caroline: “His *Butterfingers* got nowhere near my *Mounds*.”

Max: “Well your *Mounds* look more like *Snowcaps*.”

The intentions of this conversation were overtly sexual. However, Max and Caroline did not use direct sexual language throughout the conversation.

Table 10 illustrates the frequency of sexual innuendo that is present in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. The table is sectioned in reference to underlying sexual messages that are directed to women

and men. The columns labeled “Sexual Comments Directed at Women” indicates the number of occurrences where either female characters say a sexual comment to another female character or a male character say a sexual comment to a female character. Like manner, the columns labeled “Sexual Comments Directed at Men” indicates the number of occurrences where either male characters make a sexual comment to another male character or a female character makes a comment to a male character.

**Table 10: Number of occurrences of sexual innuendo in 10 episodes of each show**

	Sexual Comments Directed At Women (2 Broke Girls)		Sexual Comments Directed At Women (Happy Endings)		Sexual Comments Directed At Men (2 Broke Girls)		Sexual Comments Directed At Men (Happy Endings)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Episode 1	4	7.55	3	17.65	5	20.83	0	0
Episode 2	2	3.77	1	5.88	1	4.17	0	0
Episode 3	6	11.32	3	17.65	2	8.33	0	0
Episode 4	7	13.21	0	0	1	4.17	1	6.67
Episode 5	5	9.43	0	0	0	0	1	6.67
Episode 6	4	7.55	0	0	2	8.33	2	13.33
Episode 7	9	16.98	4	23.53	2	8.33	3	20
Episode 8	4	7.55	0	0	2	8.33	4	26.67
Episode 9	7	13.21	5	29.41	8	33.33	4	26.67
Episode 10	5	9.43	1	5.88	1	4.17	0	0
<b>Total</b>	53		17		24		15	

### ***Discussion of Hypothesis 7***

The analysis from both shows supports the hypothesis that sexual innuendo is highly represented on this type of television programming. The figures in the table above show how present sexual

innuendo is in *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*. Sexual innuendo is aimed at women in both shows. The total number of occurrences within 10 episodes of *2 Broke Girls* is 53 directed toward women, compared to 24 directed toward men. In like manner, the number of sexual innuendo occurrences within 10 episodes of *Happy Endings* toward women is 17, compared to 15 toward men. This table shows that female characters are more prone to indirect sexual comments rather than men. It also shows how frequently sexual innuendo is used throughout the two storylines.

## **Conclusion**

Television serves as a storyteller in society. The magnitude in which television has an effect on society is significant. The content on television is prevalent to society, where it is spread to 98 percent of American households for upwards of 30 hours a week. The messages that television programming relay to a large number of viewers are based on stereotypes about gender. These stereotypes range from expected gender behavior, occupational differences between men and women, the attire for men and women, and the connection between hair color and intellect. These messages are often relayed in a subtle manner potentially resulting in some individuals not becoming aware of the underlying meaning. Producers and writers create these messages to be subtle by using the techniques and theories such as: priming, mainstreaming, cultivation theory, and social learning theory (Potter, 2010). Yet, not so subtle as to be missed by the majority of the viewing audience.

Through viewing and documenting 10 episodes of *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings*, all eight hypotheses were supported. Many stereotypes were presented in these shows, and the effects of high exposure to these types of shows and stereotypes could negatively influence society. Viewers can begin to accept the images and behaviors on television as being reality. Additionally, programs like these use

stereotypes about sex and gender for humor, which can undermine society's ability to take these issues seriously.

The two shows *2 Broke Girls* and *Happy Endings* demonstrated consistent themes of sexism for both males and females. However, the sexist behaviors and language used seemed to have more of a harmful effect on the female characters in the shows. Sexism is a problem that is spread in society often through the media, where the media is a responsible source when it comes to perpetuating it. Because of this, it is important that we educate ourselves using media literacy. Media literacy is the ability to understand how mass media works, how they produce meaning, and how they are organized. The media literate person understands the effects of the media. The media brings the world into our homes and gives us information about everything, yet most of us do not look beneath the meaning of the media we internalize (Croteau et al, 2012). The media unconsciously and consciously shapes the visions we have of ourselves and society. In some ways this is fine but in many ways it is damaging. Both situation comedies examined, displayed serious sexism and stereotyped assumptions about the way males and females are expected to behave. Croteau et al (2012) argue that people generally do not look deeply into the meaning the media extends to us.

The purpose of media literacy is to empower people to think about what they are watching, reading, and hearing. Media literacy is really about deconstructing ideology; the system of meaning that helps define and explain the world (Potter, 2010). Ideologies do not necessarily reflect reality accurately. Most of the time, they present distorted versions of the world. We are usually unaware of the ideological position of the media because we take society for granted. We are socialized from birth about our gender roles so when we see these roles displayed on television, for example, we do not question them. We are also not taught to question taken-for-granted behavior. Media literacy forces us to deconstruct meaning. Media portrayals reflect an ideology about who is and who is not valued, what

roles are appropriate for what groups, and what is just. Croteau et al (2012) contend that the accumulation of media images suggests what is normal, such as that women should be preoccupied with their looks or are incomplete without a man. This was clear in the two sitcoms examined. There was a very narrow range of behaviors displayed. The females were generally sexualized and the males pressured to be dominant. Without media literacy, we would not really think deeply about the consequences of these gendered portrayals. The media should not define the norms and ideas of the public but it will continue to do so unless we deconstruct what we are seeing, hearing, and reading, and resist what is unjust.

### **Future Research**

While this research focused on gender, future research should look at the interaction of race and gender on situational comedies. Race is portrayed in specific ways as is gender, but they also interact. For example, the research will look at different shows where the main characters are African Americans. The observations would note if there are any changes in the hypotheses that were developed for this particular content analysis. Previous research shows that there are many stereotypes that are present on shows where the cast is predominantly African American. Mastro & Tropp (2009) explained that African Americans are portrayed as working in low-status occupations, and having traits such as “fun-loving”, “happy-go-lucky (clownish), and “poor” (267). However, in addition to these stereotypes that were not analyzed in this study, there are potential similarities in some gender stereotypes. The female and male characters are likely to both be depicted as behaving in ways that exhibit the qualities of femininity and masculinity as their white counterparts. Thus, as the cast of the situational comedies alter, many of the stereotypes are likely to remain the same.

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