Portrayal of Women in American TV as a Reflection of Social Changes

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:162212

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-04-26**

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

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Utjecaj društvenih promjena na prikaz žena u američkoj televiziji

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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti
Znanstveno polje: filologija
Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2019.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
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Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Osijek, 2019

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Department of English
Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature

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Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities
Scientific field: philology
Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2019

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U Osijeku, 01.09.2020.

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Abstract

The portrayal of women is an on-going topic in mass media discourse. With changes in viewer preferences, the television industry experiences pressure to follow societal adjustments. This paper explores the development of female portrayals in the medium of television in the 20th and 21st centuries. The depiction of women in television is a direct result of the changing views of society. The period of post-feminism ideology introduced variety and empowerment in American television with an accent on women and individuality. Post-feminism influenced the television industry in visible changes in the characterization of female roles by portraying women as leaders, scientists and overall successful individuals who do not fear confrontation and exhibiting their sexuality. This paper follows the evolution of frequent submissive female characters into inspiring businesswomen and the ever-growing gender equality by analyzing influential female characters from American television. The frequent types of characters that women play in different genres will be studied by providing examples from television shows and advertisements.

***Keywords*:** American media, television, post-feminism, female role, societal changes

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Introduction

The portrayal of women in television has always been a controversial topic and continues being a subject of discussion in the media. The changes in society considering female roles influence television production to follow societal adjustments, like promoting feminism and empowering female roles in the industry. The transformation of television from being a largely male-oriented medium to promoting gender equality has, to an extent, been a direct result of the post-feminist era. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore specific changes in the portrayal of women in American television in the 20th and 21st centuries with a particular focus on the impact the changes have had on the television audience.

This paper firstly defines post-feminism and delves into the starting points of this movement as well as lists reasons for its initial outbreak. The first subsection discusses post-feministic elements in American media, mainly television, where female roles are able to earn just as much money as men and enjoy their sexuality. The second section deals with women landing more authoritative roles like women crime fighters, scientists and "bad" girls with good intentions. The final two sections deal with different roles in marketing regarding television advertising, highlighting how gender affects its use of stereotypes, and discuss the future of women in television by proposing how to improve female portrayal in the coming years.

1. Post-feminism

There is no solid definition of what post-feminism is and not one concept is universally agreed on. The definition that best suits the purpose of this paper is Rosalind Gill's view on the idea that post-feminism highlights female individuality and desexualizes women's bodies, as expressed in the following quote: "the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment" (255). The post-feministic period, according to Elana Levine, flourished at the start of the 21st century as an answer to: "the political urgency of feminist attention" (138) and changed both feminism and the media. In addition, Ann Brooks considers post-feminism to be a response to the male-centered post-modernism and engages other problematic political issues and connects it with Morris' statement: "It has also reflected feminism's engagement with a number of wider 'political struggles' around race, ethnicity, class and nationality" (qtd. in Brooks 129). Brooks comments on the "representatively postmodern" (135) popular culture and claims that "[f]eminism in its intersection with dimensions of cultural studies and cultural theory, particularly postmodernism, has re-evaluated popular culture forms—music, style, dance, social rituals—from a feminist/postfeminist position" (135).

1.1 Post-feministic Media

The alterations in media are in fact due to post-feminism which concentrates more on the cultural influence and less on "feminist backlash" (Levine 139). The postfeminist television, as Sanders argues, is clearly depicted in the 1990 series *Charmed* and shows a "healthy post-feministic discourse" (qtd. in Levine 139). Post-feministic roles are also featured in the 1998 series *Sex and the City* where American television was introduced to empowering female roles. *Sex and the City* encouraged women to talk freely about sexual relations and self-love like Carrie Bradshaw's remarks on romantic relationships: "Maybe some women aren't meant to be tamed. Maybe they need to run free until they find someone just as wild to run with" (Star 00:29:24-00:29:31). The women of *Sex and the City* embody what Gill directs to be post-feministic subjectification: "Notions of choice, of 'being oneself' and 'pleasing oneself,' are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary western media culture" (Gill 153). Gill goes on to introduce post-feministic types of women and argues that one uses her sexuality in her advantage over men and the other uses desire to please herself. In the 2004 series *Desperate Housewives* the character Gabrielle Solis symbolizes both 'charismas': "You wanna sell some knits you gotta flash your [tits]" (Cherry 00:24:06-00:24:07). What both Gill and Levine agree on

is that post-feminism is a sort of neutral stand between feminism and anti-feminism. According to Levine: “post-feminism is carefully distinguished from feminist backlash” and Gill’s statement confirms it: “These two parallels suggest, then, that post-feminism is not simply a response to feminism but also a sensibility at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas” (Gill 164; Levine 139). McRobbie (37) adds that the *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (2001) movie franchise shows a woman that values tradition and is criticized by the feminist public but then explains that newer empowering ideas emphasize the previously mentioned female individuality and sexual subjectification:

> But this is not simply a return to the past; there are, of course, quite dramatic differences between the various female characters of current popular culture from Bridget Jones to the “girls” in *Sex and the City* and to Ally McBeal . . . they brazenly enjoy their sexuality, without fear of the sexual double standard. In addition, they are more than capable of earning their own living, and the degree of suffering or shame they anticipate in the absence of finding a husband is countered by sexual self-confidence. Being without a husband does not mean they will go without men. (McRobbie 37-38)

Evidently, the post-feminist influence on the American television and movie industry caused modification in the portrayal and characterization of women and paved the path for determined female individuals. Such women do not feel obliged to marry and create a family, they are rather individually oriented with a clearly set career or life goal.

2. Female Roles in 20th and 21st Century American Television

As to how exactly the female roles have changed in the last century is shown in a study by Elasmar et al. who have analyzed female characters of prime-time television in the nineties era. The portrayal of a woman as a housewife has become a rarity and we see the starting points for the role of a businesswoman:

> Employment for females was as follows: 9.9% held professional, white-collar positions. The largest percentage (19.1%) of females with a clear occupation was employed in blue-collar positions, including non-management roles and manual or assembly line roles. There was also a relatively large percentage (15.4%) of females employed in the entertainment business . . . Only 3.1% of females were represented as housewives as their occupation. (Elasmar et al. 11)

From the following data surprising information can be noted that women were most often portrayed as blue-collar workers which includes manual labor. Manual labor was typically thought to be more of a "manly" choice of profession. To put that in perspective, Elasmar et al. included a study from the 1970s by McNeil who found that although women on TV had various occupations, they were much less authoritative as compared to men's occupations. This shows that in the time stretch of twenty years, female roles have changed to influential and hardworking.

2.1. Women and Crime Television

A role on television which has significant authority and respect is the role of an intellectual. The ever-growing empowerment in female roles has led producers to have more and more actresses portray crime fighters. According to Kang and Patterson, women in the genre of crime have mostly been victims of crime but the modification of women becoming investigators of crimes has introduced an evolution in portraying many other significant roles (130). The role Kang and Patterson list as an example is Dr. Joan Watson. In Sir Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes,* as well as in many other television and movie adaptations, Watson is a male character, and having a woman play that role in the television series has included variation and significance, especially since the field of law used to be largely male-dominated (Kang and Patterson 130). It is imperative to mention that the show not only switched the gender of the character but gave an insight into a problem area for women – a career and the environment's opinions that go with it. Joan Watson is initially a surgeon who left her former job to join Sherlock as his sobriety coach. This decision led to her family and friends' disapproval, and overall, the environment's dissatisfaction. *Elementary*

is to a great degree a revolutionary show, because even in its crime-based genre, it covers the social issue of sexism, as seen in an example that Kang and Patterson point out:

> In her first solo case, Watson confronts a male suspect whom she suspects has murdered his wife. The man lashes out by belittling her judgment as a woman: 'You're just some woman with a crazy story. You want me to be guilty so you created this elaborate fiction to accommodate your theory.' . . . Women detectives in popular culture often contend with (male) suspects who challenge their expertise based on their gender, be it through sexual harassment, suspicions of mental instability, or accusations of having man-hating vendetta. (Kang and Patterson 133)

Having such sexist and hypercritical characters, the viewers can vaguely sense the difficulties a woman in crime experiences and female viewers can easily sympathize. Another series from the crime genre that modernized the female position in law affairs on-screen is *Rizzoli & Isles.* This television series revolved around two successful women in the Boston Homicide Unit. Jane Rizzoli (Angie Harmon), a police detective, and Dr. Maura Isles (Sasha Alexander), a medical examiner, make up a famous female duo, which is quite uncommon on television, especially in shows involving crime. However, the show's critics stereotypically commented on Rizzoli's authoritative stand and Harmon's acting skills as "badass" and having lesbian tendencies, to which the actress defended her character. Harmon commented on her observation of women's position in police investigations:

> Unfortunately in those types of arenas – you know – I saw that the women had to hide their femininity . . . but, you know – um – and sort of just kind of dumb it down a little bit – and – and – be as, sort of fade into the group as much as possible. Um, I'm sure that's – that's changing . . . that's what I saw and that's what I observed and, you know, I gave Jane a lot of tomboyish qualities. I mean, I – look – and I don't mean this in an arrogant way, I know what I look like, I can't exactly solve crimes and run around in a dress. (HuffPost Live 1:17-1:53)

Harmon clarified the relationship between femininity and being a professional and again proved that a lack of feminine behavior should not influence a woman's worth or sexuality.

2.2. Women Scientists in *The Big Bang Theory*

Continuing with women scientists, a notable mention is the sitcom *The Bing Bang Theory*. The series premiered as a humoristic show which follows the lives of four young scientists Leonard, Sheldon, Rajesh and Howard, and their new female friend Penny, who is a waitress. Initially, Penny, played by Kaley Cuoco, was the only female leading role and her character was

portrayed in quite a degrading way. Penny was an attractive woman but played the "dumb blonde," a role that served mostly as entertainment. As the show progresses, Penny's role begins to have a more positive impact. The four nerds lack social skills and Penny, being quite an extrovert, mentored some of them to meet girls and helped develop their relationships. The main love story of the show is that of Penny and Leonard whose on and off relationship can be seen through most of the seasons. To show that an authoritative role has an impact on the audience, it is important to mention the moment when Leonard developed a romantic relationship with Raj's sister Priya. Priya (Aarti Mann) studied law at Cambridge University and graduated at the top of her class. Penny undoubtedly felt intimidated by Priya and was jealous of her and Leonard's relationship. As the show progresses, two other characters diversify the cast, Amy and Bernadette. Amy is a neurologist that is first introduced as Sheldon's love interest and Bernadette, a microbiologist, as Penny's work colleague and Howard's potential girlfriend. Amy was quite an unusual character and at first seemed to be a female version of Sheldon. The audience learns that Amy is far from feminine and has slim to no experience in dating and sexual relationships. Her friendship with Penny helped her become aware of her sexuality and familiarized her with new activities: "Penny and Bernadette have to teach Amy basic 'feminine' activities: how to paint nails, apply makeup, and wear heels, activities that American culture assumes that all women understand" (Stone 201). Amy resembled many women in America and sent an important message that because she does not practice what is generally thought to be feminine or girly, it does not make her less of a woman and that the majority of women are not like Penny. According to Stone, Bernadette is a very intriguing character. Stone argues that Bernadette's appearance suggests ladylike behavior and her apparel is characterized as feminine. Amanda Stone's arguments contradict Lauren Sele's, as Sele describes Amy's behavior and looks as genderless and not feminine enough but in contrast, sees Bernadette's behavior as too feminine (qtd. in Stone 201). Furthermore, Stone's analysis of the character of Bernadette is an embodiment of obliterating female stereotypes on American television:

> Bernadette admits openly that she does not necessarily enjoy children, and she can be rude and acerbic at times – traits that successful, beautiful women are not usually allowed to possess in American mainstream television. Her high-pitched voice seems to encapsulate the "little girl" image that is in need of saving by the domineering male character, but that stereotype is eradicated as we see her change from a background character to one of the driving forces of the entire show. (Stone 202)

Stone continues to support her theory with examples from numerous episodes. One of the more notable is when she confesses to earning more than her partner, Howard, which sets him in

an uncomfortable position as the breadwinner in a different-sex relationship is usually thought to be the male partner. In season eight, episode seven "The Misinterpretation Agitation," a very important feminist remark was said by Amy. Bernadette was asked to take part in an article about the sexiest female scientists and was flattered at first, but Amy had an opposing opinion. Although Bernadette and Penny did not see the negative side of it, Amy explained the negative way in which such portrayals affect women scientists and make them objectified:

> "Bernadette is a successful microbiologist. She should be celebrated for her achievements, not her looks . . . I just don't think a professional woman should have to flaunt her sexuality in order to get ahead . . . Maybe it's different in the world of sales but it's already hard enough for women to be taken seriously in science." (Lorre and Prady 00:00:41-00:01:21)

Overall, what these shows succeeded in was showing the rise of the powerful and successful woman and presenting relationships in which a male does not always dominate. They uncovered the many existing sexist issues in the field of crime and the STEM[1] sciences and how they affected women's femininity.

2.3. "Bad" Girls on Television

In understanding the meaning behind a "bad girl" character, Young offers the following description: "those who challenge, ignore, or cross over the patriarchal limits intended to circumscribe them" (1). This definition shows the beginnings of a character that has been turned into a rather negative one. The epithet "bad" has been given to the women who first broke the norms and decided to diminish male dominance and patriarchy. The first "bad" girls in culture were Pandora and Eve (Young 2). They refused to play by the rules and have entered the culture as the most memorable women. Young further analyzes this frequent character: "In fact, today's bad girl clearly occupies a conflicted space. We can find evidence across the pop-culture landscape of supposed resistance to gender norms that actually exploits and commercializes the bad-girl image" (3). Young raises the question whether such roles of transgressive women truly portray the displeasure of gender inequality women face not only in the television industry but the environment. The problem with this specific role is that female empowerment used to be expressed through livid characters seeking vendetta. The vengeful woman on television serves as a response to patriarchy and a feminist counterattack to dominated masculinity: "Violent women upset not only the binary between "masculine" and "feminine" but threaten the foundation of patriarchal ideology, which requires ongoing violence in the service of an imagined (but never realized) future

[1] "STEM": science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (*Merriam Webster*)

peace" (Kramer 17). The transgressive female character does not use violence against men, but rather as a defense mechanism against overall society. The "bad" girl cannot simply be distinguished as "good" or "bad." As an example, Kramer mentions *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a character in which we see a violent woman but one with good intentions: "Violent women are, of course, "bad," but *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* interrogates the moral power that judges and classifies women as "good" and "bad" and repositions these qualifiers in relation to violence" (20). Secondly, the definition of "good" and "bad" are analyzed. "Good" often resembles patriarchal expectations of a female character, and "bad" has a direct connection to power. With that, a "bad" girl is not necessarily immoral, but often powerful. Case in point, *Game of Thrones* series showed great examples of such female characters:

> The Swedish novels, trio of Swedish films, and the American remake all present a heroine who is truly subversive, refusing to follow both traditional gender-role prescriptions and the rule of patriarchal law . . . . Finally, the series Game of Thrones—in both its literary and televised forms might be identified as the site of every imaginable type of bad-girl incarnation. (Young 4)

Daenerys Targaryen has risen from being a submissive wife of a leader to a leader herself: "Daenerys's application of contemporary feminist principles in her patriarchal society reflects and exemplifies emerging 21st Century feminism, giving fans of this series an example to follow in order to combat inequality in their own world" (Reeves 3-4). Daenerys fights the inequality and dishonor women like herself have experienced. In episode four of the sixth season, Daenerys was objectified and humiliated by fellow Khals for no reason other than being a woman. In order to prove she is an equal leader to them, she called them "small men" and unable to lead the Dothraki, a barbarian nation. They again degraded her as a woman to which she showed no remorse and burned them in a fire. Another female character from the same series has experienced equally dishonorable treatment. Cersei Lannister, indicted for incest and murder had to undergo an inhuman exploit:[S]he is punished for her actions by being forced to perform a "penance walk" where she walks miles through a city, naked, in front of thousands of people. After this, Cersei plots to destroy the church, literally blowing it up, along with all of its occupants, and she even has her guard, a seven-foot tall soldier, rape and torture a nun" (Reeves 7).

Much like Daenerys, she avenged her shame by having all those who harmed her position be killed. Another fascinating "bad" girl character on American television has alternated the portrayal of the female character. Eve from *Lucifer* is based on the first ever woman in existence who sinned. In the show *Lucifer* the character of Eve serves as a rebellious individual who will modify the existing image of Eve, the first woman created. As she is introduced in season 4, she

mentions her reasons for leaving Hell is that she wanted to be her true self. She says she was not created as an individual, but to serve as a wife to Adam. Not being able to express herself in Hell, she visits Earth and her friend Lucifer, the demonic angel. They develop a romantic relationship but soon after, Eve realizes how inappropriately she is being treated by her boyfriend Lucifer. What makes her character significant is that she refused to endure such behavior. Because Lucifer often missed their dates and went out with other girls, Eve, knowing her worth, decided to retaliate by doing the same things as Lucifer in the relationship and, predictably, Lucifer was jealous. What her actions proved is that women like Eve, Cersei, and Daenerys managed to break the norms of the expected patriarchal image society has of women.

From a feminist perspective, these disobedient women were influenced by feminism, as Young argues: “At the same time, we can discover a renewed feminist drive to address the continued existence of gender inequity” (3). Concluding, although still labelled with the adjective “bad” they are not entirely negative characters but have heroic traits and serve as an example to men and women, contributing actually quite positively to American television.

3. Women in Advertising

Advertisement, printed or digital, has proven to be the key in profiting on the market and has reached its peak in the 21st century. It is no longer just marketing or economics; it is a part of the popular culture. The portrayal of women in advertising has suffered gender bias, discrimination and sexism. Gallagher observes, "Indeed, the depiction of men and women in advertising often portrays gender stereotypes. Traditional gender roles are hierarchical, as men are more often presented in a higher position, whereas women are more often depicted in inferior and passive roles" (qtd. in Zotos and Tsichla 36). The female roles that are repeatedly shown in advertising are oversexualized and objectified minor roles. To fulfill the aim of an advertisement, which is to attract customers, Bhullar's study shows that the most liked role women play in advertisements included maternal roles and the role of the working woman as well as the roles of the housewife with the latter one being most liked by males, though the factor of likeness was more dependent on the age than the sex of the respondents (qtd. in Nagi 77). Further, women are most likely to play an inferior role in an advertisement and have a rather child-like behavior and will show no authority or superiority as opposed to men: "Hence, whereas pictures of men reflect confidence, competence, and authority, women are cast as deferential and childlike. Goffman developed a coding scheme based on the observation of subtle cues encoded in hands, eyes, knees, facial expressions, head and body postures, relative sizes, and relative positioning" (Zotos and Tsichla 38).

Goffman's coding scheme and the category of relative sizes suggests female inferiority because women are depicted in lower positions or as shorter than men and consequently occupy visually less space. Such gender bias and sexism destroy the worth and reality of women in society. Women are pushed to only a maternal role as if the only purpose of a woman is reproduction.

The tactile performance in advertising shows the distinction of a superior man and an inferior woman. The men in advertisements are muscular and handsome and they are portrayed standing tall or grasping at objects, while the women are usually shown looking for the support of a man, often seen kneeling and in a vulnerable position (Zotos and Tsichla 38-39).

The portrayal of these roles is clearly seen in deodorant commercials. In advertisements for men's deodorants the central role is a muscular man sending a message to the consumer. For example, in the 2010 "Old Spice" commercial, the male role (played by Isaiah Mustafa) speaks to the female audience and sends the message that their male partner could be as attractive as him if he stopped using lady scented wash, alluding the partner were not as masculine as the male role in the advertisement (Old Spice 00:00:00-00:00:32). In "Fa" women's deodorant commercials the main

female role is either seen showering or slightly grazing her body (Fa Body Wash commercial – Spirit of Freshness (featuring Lara Fielding) (1999) 00:00:13-00:00:15). Stereotypically, the female roles show more nudity in comparison to male roles in advertisements. Zotos and Tsichla note that "[t]hese studies attest that females wear revealing clothes and present a higher level of nudity more often than males . . . 'Nudity' refers to females and males whose body forms are observed under apparel and lingerie, models clothed in nothing except a towel, or models depicted with no clothing at all (40-43).

However, the studies mentioned date back fifteen or more years and there are brands today that have erased the stereotypical role and minimalized objectification of female bodies in advertising. Two such examples are the menstrual pad brand "Always" and the skincare brand "Dove." The "Always" brand has introduced a campaign #LikeAGirl in 2014 in which they encourage young women and girls to deal with the issue of confidence and to raise awareness of the confidence crisis, especially the drop in self-assurance levels during puberty. In their initial advert for the #LikeAGirl campaign, they asked the participants (from different age ranges and of both genders) to perform activities, e.g. throw a ball like a girl would. After interviewing the participants, they wanted to know whether the simile was insulting to which many young girls expressed dissatisfaction as if it lowers their confidence. "Always" also broke the norms of stereotypes when they introduced female roles that did not match with society's expectations of femininity. The women in their commercials were not passive, vulnerable or naive. The roles they play are professional soccer players or tennis players who show that authority and power does not come from gender. Finally, the #LikeAGirl campaign was able to turn the expression 'like a girl' from an insult into a compliment.

The skincare brand "Dove" released in 2013 an inspiring commercial also debating confidence in women. The participants in the advertisement were taking part in a brief research. The women (mostly in their 30s or 40s) were asked to describe their appearance and an artist portrayed them based on the descriptions they gave. Then the artist viewed the participants and drew their portraits as to how he saw them. In the self-described drawings, the women looked gloomy and disinterested and only after seeing how they were truly seen by others, they were shocked because they had been unaware of their own beauty (Dove US 00:00:00-00:06:35).

Having advertisements be not just a marketing tool but also a source of influence is important as well as the qualitative aspects of these advertisements. The consequences of forcing stereotypes and unrealistic expectations distort the realistic image and have negative effects on society: "Because cultural stereotypes question women's ability to succeed in any traditionally masculine domain, women are susceptible to stereotype threat in all fields considered inherently

masculine" (Davies 1617). The habit of stereotypes does not only have an effect on confidence but also on the quality of one's performance. Davies further suggests that stereotypes affect the professional and academic performance of women: "Spencer et al. emphasize that the risk of being personally reduced to a negative stereotype can elicit a disruptive state among stigmatized individuals that undermines performance and aspirations in any alleged stereotype relevant domain—a situational predicament termed 'stereotype threat'" (qtd. in Davies 1616).

4. The Future of Female Television

Undoubtedly, in the last 40 years, women on television have gotten a more noteworthy role and have turned it from a, for the most part, men-oriented medium to a gender-equal one. According to Alley and Brown, while we still live in a sexist and racist society, the reason for empowering women in television is the new generation of women as "fighters" (33). Carter observes that "[t]he new generation features women in their 40s who have climbed to executive heights without the burden of being outsiders—earning M.B.A.s, learning the ropes on roughly equal footing with their male peers, establishing themselves as team players rather than individuals" (qtd. in Alley and Brown 33-34).

There is definitely interest in reaching gender equality in the field of digital media and statistically, women directed twice as many of the top films in 2019 as compared to 2018 and 40% had female protagonists, the highest ever percentage ("More Women Than Ever Are Working In Hollywood"). Maybe slowly, but we are nearing a future of equality for both men and women in television and casting women as protagonists shows intentions of introducing a better future: "'Great strides are being made,' she says, with studios now more willing to entrust women with 'high-profile 'prestige' films' . . . Nights and Weekends (2008), Lady Bird (2017) and Little Women (2019) all feature women in leading roles" (Purvis and Shoard, "Hollywood's Gender Divide Laid Bare by Analysis of This Season's Oscar Contenders").

The evolution of television in becoming less discriminative has different stages. Television was introduced to different platforms, many of which include online virtual streaming services. Marge Piercy defines a new stream of feminism called cybernetic feminism: "[It] relies on the use of technologies in every aspect of social interaction (including reproduction) in order to relieve women from drudgery, the oppressive patriarchal family, and masculine violence" (152). Cybernetic feminism's emphasis is on science fiction and the themes that come with its genre, e.g. superpowers, aliens, and the extraterrestrial.

Science fiction and the subject of superheroes has for decades produced content for the male audience and as such, it was often labelled a men-genre. In the last five years, the two largest comic book enterprises, DC Comics and Marvel, have introduced female heroines as protagonists. From the movie *Wonder Woman* to the television series *Supergirl* the genre of science fiction has opened its ways to variety and equality, following that example Harley Quinn's character in *Suicide Squad* earned a female led sequel *Birds of Prey,* released in 2020.

When it comes to gender equality, just one move towards making a change for women and their position in television, offers a positive example that is set for others. We see improvement in

not only casting female roles but having women be part of the process as more and more films and television shows are being directed and produced by women.

Conclusion

Women in television and the portrayal of female roles has been a topic of discussion and much research for decades. In the last forty years, data regarding the female roles in digital media and their influence has shown that post-feminism as a new stream of feminism has had a significant impact on the popular culture. What post-feminism stands for, is the subjectification of women, the power of the individual woman, and having women be aware of their worth and sexuality. As post-feminism flourished in the 21st century, television and film started producing content with ambitious, confident women as leads.

Female roles have varied over the decades and have grown from solely entertaining roles to empowering roles with a powerful impact. These roles have moved on from housewives and non-management roles to women characters presented as blue-collar and white-collar workers. In the genre of crime, which used to be a male-dominated area, intelligent female detectives have transformed the female role in crime from being a victim of crime to a crime investigator, a lawyer, and a medical examiner. Other roles in the field of science included women portraying microbiologists and neurologists. A woman portraying a scientist serves as an intellectual influence and role model to the female audience. Such authoritative roles are crucial for reaching equality in the television industry. Other, stronger characters, like transgressive women, exist as a response to patriarchy and the existing oppression of women. Although these roles are marked as "bad" girls, the roles of queen and Khaleesi as in Cersei's and Daenerys' case showed that their rebellious behavior is not necessarily negative but rather serves as confrontation to toxic masculinity.

In marketing, the roles of men and women have also been keen on stereotypes and objectification of women, however campaigns are branching out showing women in a new light. The examples showed that advertisements have progressed from having women overly objectified to starting advertising campaigns to encourage self-esteem and the female gender, as seen in advertisements by the brands "Dove" and "Always."

This study highlights the progress in the portrayal of female characters but, there is still room for improvement as we witness the continued stereotyping of women according to the traditional roles. There is still much to be done to ensure further progress, so continued research in the field of gender studies is necessary to keep measuring the representation of women in the media against societal change.

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