

Hegemony, Feminist Criticism and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*

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□—*This essay claims that the feminist premise of The Mary Tyler Moore Show is contradicted by the patriarchal relationships and role definitions developed within its narrative, hegemonic devices that are bolstered by the conventions of the situation comedy genre. The conclusion explores the ideological tension produced by the show's narrative that allows for differing evaluations of the program's message, and discusses the implications for feminist criticism of television's hegemonic patterns.*

Recent scholarly essays call for greater attention to feminist issues in media studies (Dervin, 1987; Treichler & Wartella, 1986). The feminist agenda in communication is a broad one, encompassing a myriad of issues, contexts, methodological approaches, and goals. This situation reflects the fact that feminist analysis of communication is a dynamic and growing concern. This essay contributes to this dialogue through a critical study of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, illustrating the hegemonic processes at work in television discourse about women.

Initially, this essay offers a brief review of feminist perspectives on popular culture and discusses the place of this analysis within a feminist critique of television. Moreover, the essay details the basis for a critical approach to television that focuses on its hegemonic effects, particularly in the negotiation of oppositional ideology. The usefulness of these concepts will be illustrated through an analysis of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (TMTMS) as an example of television programming that was, in many ways, an early response to social changes brought about by the feminist movement of the late 1960's. TMTMS will be used to illustrate conclusions about the working of hegemonic devices that contradict feminist ideology on television. Finally, this analysis will be used as the basis for discussing the further implications of an awareness of hegemony for a feminist critique of television.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON POPULAR CULTURE

"Feminist perspective" may be an ambiguous phrase to some. The recent interest in popular culture criticism with a feminist focus has produced a variety of works from differing perspectives. Some critics appear to view popular culture as a sphere that is largely opposed to valorization of the female in any form; much feminist

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psychoanalytic work on film contains this discouraging message (De Lauretis, 1984; Kuhn, 1982; Mulvey, 1989). Other perspectives argue for a resistant reading through which discourse of the seemingly dominant ideology can be interpreted as empowering for women (Byars, 1987) or through which we can begin to discover a "feminine aesthetics" (Modleski, 1982, p. 105). In addition, Radway (1984) has highlighted the usefulness of reader-response methods in understanding how women read romance novels and through her critique of the politics of mass culture analysis (1986). More recently, a collection of essays edited by Baehr and Dyer (1987) has extended the feminist critique of television to examine women's situations as writers-actors, producers, and audiences.

All of these perspectives contribute to the ongoing dialectic about the role of women within popular culture, as producers, products, and spectators. The present analysis is intended to add to the body of work on feminism and popular culture by illustrating the possibilities for contradiction of feminist premises through hegemonic processes. One of the projects of an ongoing feminist critique (Press, 1989) must be to examine how women are devalued in the process of cultural reproduction. The critical perspective chosen here explores the subtle manifestations of hegemony in television by focusing on narrative structure and character interaction.

While literary study is the birthplace of feminist criticism, television and literature cannot be easily transposed. For example, while feminist critics of literature can focus on literature produced by women as a way to explore a feminine poetics or to ameliorate the historical white male bias of literary studies and the literary canon, feminist critics of television always deal with the discourse of the dominant ideology. Despite recent labor gains by women, it is no stretch to acknowledge that the institutions that sponsor and produce popular television are largely controlled by men and are permeated with patriarchal ideology that is revealed in television programming. However, in the years since the resurgence of the feminist movement, the television industry has attempted to respond to the changing social climate. Thus, we now have more women in television production, as well as increased numbers of women in more powerful roles on the screen, in both news and entertainment programming (Baehr & Dyer, 1987). Despite these numerical increases, however, the hegemonic process limits possibilities for substantive change: the effects of that process are the focus of this analysis.

HEGEMONIC PROCESSES IN TELEVISION

Gitlin's (1982) work on television and hegemony provides a compelling and persuasive account of television's incorporation of social change and oppositional ideology. Drawing on Gramsci, Gitlin (p. 429) offers what he calls "a lexicon for discussing the forms of hegemony in the concrete." Generally, hegemony or hegemonic processes refer to the various means through which those who support the dominant ideology in a culture are able continually to reproduce that ideology in cultural institutions and products while gaining the tacit approval of those whom the ideology oppresses. In Gitlin's view, television furthers hegemony through incorporation of radical ideology, or what Barthes (1973, p. 150) has called "inoculation." In this process, one protects the dominant ideology from radical change by incorporating small amounts of oppositional ideology.

Thus, television adjusts to social change by "absorbing it into forms compatible with the core ideological structure" (Gitlin, 1982, p. 450). So, for instance, the demands made for increased minority and female representation result in higher visibility for these groups on television, although the situations and characters through which they are depicted may implicitly work to "contain" the more radical aspects of the changes such representation implies. Some limited changes in content result, but the general hegemonic values remain intact (Gitlin, 1982). Thus, those who champion the oppositional ideology may be satisfied that their demands are having an impact on television, while those who create the programming actually have made only cosmetic changes in representation of the disputed group.

However, the hegemonic system is not a perfect monolith; it does not produce inescapable ideology. When subversive ideology is incorporated, some of it sticks, albeit in a less stringent form. To retain its dominance, the hegemonic system must change, and these changes produce "leaks" or contradictions (Gitlin, 1982, p. 449). The point of a hegemonic perspective is not that television never changes—it clearly does—but that it is less progressive than we think. The medium adjusts to social change in a manner that simultaneously contradicts or undercuts a progressive premise.

***TMTMS*, FEMINISM AND HEGEMONY**

The enormous popularity of *TMTMS* in its first run (1970–77) makes the program a particularly appropriate subject for an analysis of how television responds to social change. After a slow start, the show was consistently in the top twenty rated programs for six of the seven years it was broadcast (Brooks & Marsh, 1985). *TMTMS* was popular with critics as well as viewers. Hough (1981, p. 221) described it as "one of the most believable, lucid, and lovable portrayals of the single woman in American society of the seventies" and noted that, "while there are a thousand sitcoms in television history, 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show' will probably still be among the top ten in terms of historical and social significance."

Moreover, the point in social and television history at which the show appeared makes it noteworthy as a feminist text. Arriving as it did on the crest of the developing women's liberation movement, *TMTMS* was informed by and commented on the changing role of women in American society. One of the show's creators, James Brooks, observed that although the show did not explicitly address the issues of the women's movement, "we sought to show someone from Mary Richards' background being in a world where women's rights were being talked about and it was having an impact" (quoted in Bathrick, 1984, pp. 103–104).

Indeed, the character of Mary Richards as an independent career woman on *TMTMS* challenged a television tradition that had stereotyped women as "goodwives," "bitches," "victims," and "courtesans" (Meehan, 1983). Although the "single woman" premise had been successful in *That Girl* (1966–1971), its Ann Marie character had been watched over and protected by her father and her fiancé. Her adventures in the big city seemed like little more than a premarital fling, and by the end of the series she was headed for domestic bliss. In contrast, Mary Richards was in her thirties, mature, and ambitious. When the show ended, she was thirty-seven and remained romantically unattached.

TMTMS was undoubtedly influenced by the developing women's liberation movement. If the show had appeared even five years earlier, its chances for success would have been lessened (Gitlin, 1983). Both James Brooks's comment and the premise of the show itself demonstrate that *TMTMS* was intended to be a departure from the tradition of sexist portrayals of women on television. Consequently, the show's popularity is surprising, both because of the audience's exposure to decades of traditional depictions of women on television and because of general resistance to many aspects of the feminist movement. Thus, analysis of *TMTMS* reveals ways in which television adapts to social resistance as well as social change.

A number of hegemonic devices work to contradict the progressive feminist premise of *TMTMS*. This section concentrates on three: family roles, intra-gender relationships, and the generic constraints of situation comedy. In the following sections I argue that, despite its workplace setting, *TMTMS* offers a traditional picture of the female within the family through Mary Richards's implicit roles as wife, mother, and daughter. The relationship of Mary Richards to the larger female community reinforces the public/private dichotomy that devalues women's relationships as well as positioning Mary as an idealized token version of the successful, single woman. The conventions of the situation comedy as a genre constrained the development of positive and progressive female characterizations on *TMTMS*. Arguments are supported by examples of specific episodes that exemplify dramatic patterns in the program's history.

THE *TMTMS* "FAMILY"

The presentation of a family structure is common to many of the most successful comedies in television history, from *I Love Lucy* to *All in the Family* to *The Cosby Show*. Because a sitcom is short in length and typically limited in setting, the situation and the characters tend to change little from episode to episode. Consequently, the characters have strong connections to each other and to the situation.

The "domestic" situation comedy inherently limits role possibilities for women. In the sitcoms preceding *TMTMS*, leading female characters were primarily wives and/or mothers who had no identity beyond the home and little real power within it, at least in comparison to the husbands/fathers. Programs such as *Father Knows Best*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *The Brady Bunch* are examples. The patriarchal structure of the traditional, white, middle-class family was reinforced in years of sitcom programming in the 1950's and 1960's.

Although *TMTMS* was not the first comedy to feature a woman in the workplace, the program is often noted as the precursor of a number of successful comedies in the 1970's that used a workplace setting. The regular cast of the show, which was set in a Minneapolis television newsroom (WJM-TV), included Lou Grant, producer of the news; Mary Richards, associate producer and later, producer; Murray Slaughter, news writer; and Ted Baxter, anchor. For the first four years of the show, Mary Richards's neighbor and best friend, Rhoda Morgenstern, and their landlady, Phyllis Lindstrom, were also regulars. Although scenes were occasionally set in Mary's home, the majority of the action took place in the newsroom, the focus of the show. In the last four years of the show, the character of Sue Ann Nivens, the hostess

of the *Happy Homemaker* show at WJM, was added, and the role of Georgette Franklin Baxter, Ted Baxter's girlfriend and later his wife, was expanded.

It can be argued that these characters behaved in many ways as an extended family. Although "all sitcom is 'domestic' or family-oriented if we expand the definition to non-blood-related groups that function as families" (Mintz, 1985, p. 116), programs differ in the extent to which the groups they feature function as *traditional* families. Indeed, it could further be argued that, while programming had previously concentrated on blood or legal relations, *TMTMS* ushered in an era of nontraditionally structured television families that included such programs as *Laverne and Shirley*, *Kate & Allie*, and *Who's the Boss*. All cases involve a group of people who care about each other, are committed to their relationships, and form bonds because they live and/or work together. Allowing this broader "family" circumscription, then, the concept of "patriarchy" may refer to "any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms" (Rich, 1979, p. 78).

In considering *TMTMS* as representing nontraditional family relations, we can analyze Mary Richards in terms of her three major roles: daughter, wife, and mother. While these roles are not always kept distinct, each plays out repeatedly.

MARY AS DAUGHTER

TMTMS may be characterized in terms of Lou Grant's paternalism toward Mary Richards and, in turn, her submission to his professional and personal authority. Mary consistently seeks Lou's approval and advice; he guides and protects her. For example, in one episode, Sue Ann Nivens's boyfriend makes a pass at Mary. Mary becomes upset and takes her problem to Lou, who with fatherly indignation, offers to "kill him" and then, more seriously, advises Mary to tell Sue Ann. Ultimately, Mary listens to Lou and comforts Sue Ann, and the situation is happily resolved. This illustration echoes the pattern of the classic father-and-child problem-solving plot familiar from *Father Knows Best* or *Leave It to Beaver*: The child has a problem and goes to the father, who tells the child to do "the right thing," which the child intuitively knows she should do anyway. With the advice and pressure of the parent, the child overcomes her reluctance and does what is required; the situation is happily resolved, demonstrating the father's wisdom.

An episode in which Mary asks for a raise also demonstrates the parent/child nature of Mary and Lou's relationship. Lou tells her that they must confront the station manager together, arguing that the station could afford to lose one of them but not both. When they are refused and threaten to quit, the station manager does not object. Mary is thoroughly demoralized by unemployment, but Lou is confident that the station manager will eventually give in. At the end of the episode, she and Lou go back to see the station manager, who offers them a \$5000 raise for them to split—double what Mary had expected. Once again, despite Mary's reluctance, Lou's recommendation proves successful.

Lou's patriarchal superiority is underscored by the negative consequences that result when Mary refuses his advice. After being promoted to producer, Mary meets

a female swimmer and is convinced she would make a good sportscaster for WJM. Lou ridicules the idea, and Mary accuses him of sexism. However, Lou grants Mary the ultimate authority as producer and Mary hires the woman. In her first broadcast, the new sportscaster reports nothing but swimming news because, we find out, she does not believe in contact sports. Mary is forced to fire her. At the conclusion, Mary tells Lou that she was wrong about the sportscaster and bemoans her failure to strike a blow for women. Lou assures her that she has indeed proven something: "that a woman has the chance to be just as lousy in a job as a man." Like a good parent, Lou allows Mary to make and learn from her own mistakes, (and it is doubly interesting that this object-lesson involves female "incompetence").

TMTMS was replete with similar episodes in which Mary, the daughter figure, solicits advice from the older and wiser Lou, the father figure.¹ Under Lou's tutelage, Mary copes with her problems. The daughter role can be viewed as a hegemonic device that works to contain Mary's independence. *TMTMS* tells us that Mary cannot really "make it on her own" either personally or professionally without fatherly guidance. In this fashion, Mary's independence is domesticated.

MARY AS WIFE AND MOTHER

At the same time that Mary is Lou's dutiful daughter, she also acts as a nurturing wife/mother to Lou and to other characters. It is her general responsibility to maintain interpersonal relations, and she does this through personal advice, support, and mediation of conflict.

Mary is constantly accessible; her friends, who drop by at any time, are received warmly. When Ted Baxter cannot have a child, he comes to Mary, who reconciles him to the idea of adoption. When Ted has sexual problems, his wife Georgette comes to Mary for advice. When Sue Ann feels threatened by her sister, she seeks comfort from Mary. Later in this same episode, Sue Ann becomes so demoralized that she takes to her bed, convinced that she is no longer wanted or needed. Although Sue Ann has consistently treated Mary unkindly, Mary assumes nurturing responsibility.

Mary's role as nurturer is established in the series' first episode, when Lou shows up drunk at Mary's apartment the night after he hires her. His wife is out of town and he decides to write her a letter on Mary's typewriter. Despite the fact that he interrupts a visit from Mary's former boyfriend, she accommodates him, viewing his behavior as "kind of sweet" rather than intrusive. Later in the series, Lou decides to redecorate the living room as a surprise for his wife. He seeks Mary's advice, and she enlists Rhoda, her neighbor, for the job. Following Lou's divorce, he consistently turns up at Mary's apartment for dinner, seeking the wifely/motherly functions that he misses. Whenever a "woman's touch" is needed, Mary is there.

Mary is the ideal mother-surrogate in these situations. Like other typical sitcom mothers such as Harriet Nelson or June Cleaver, she is other-centered, sublimating her own feelings or needs to those of her "family." The idea that only Mary can adequately fulfill these "womanly" functions is reinforced in the rare instances in which she flatly refuses to perform. Even when she attempts to assert herself, she returns to her accommodating patterns by the end of the episode. For example, when a former WJM staff member returns for a visit, Lou decides that a party at Mary's

home would be appropriate (most social interaction outside the office takes place in Mary's apartment). Mary refuses this imposition, suggesting Lou's house for the party. On the given night, she arrives early at Lou's to assist with preparations, only to find Lou in a state of total and carefree unreadiness. It is clear that Lou has counted on Mary's last-minute assistance, and when, recognizing the manipulation, she refuses to comply, Lou redirects his manipulation. The guests, he claims, knowing Mary, will *assume* that she helped him, and so she will be blamed for the mess. Mary frantically begins to clean.

Two aspects of this situation are significant. First, Mary is obviously concerned about how others assess her traditional "womanly" qualities and would not want to be viewed as an inadequate homemaker or hostess. Second, this example emphasizes Mary's role as social facilitator for the group. Lou's confidence that Mary will take over the preparations demonstrates his (and the guests') realization of her role, and Mary's acceptance of it is clear when she in fact gives in. The nurturing aspect of Mary's character is not just an extension of the fact that she is a "nice" person. Her friend and colleague Murray Slaughter is a nice person too, but he does not perform the nurturing and interpersonal facilitation that Mary does.

Mary's sensitivity, relationship skills, and willingness to spend her time and energy on the problems of others are symptomatic of her status as mother to the group. Like the traditional mothers of domestic sitcoms, she derives her value as a person from what she can do for others. Interestingly enough, the lyrics of the theme song from *TMTMS* echo this assumption: "Who can turn the world on with her smile? / Who can take a nothing day and suddenly make it all seem worthwhile?" In *TMTMS* Mary is a woman in a man's world, and her primary function is to enhance the lives of others in ways men supposedly cannot: "The patriarchy looks to women to embody and impersonate the qualities lacking in its institutions . . . such qualities as intuition, sympathy, and access to feeling" (Rich, 1979, p. 80).

This analysis illustrates the contradictions that exist within *TMTMS*. Although it took the sitcom from the home to the workplace, it did not significantly alter the traditional male/female roles of the genre. Superficially, *TMTMS* seems progressive, but the interaction of its characters demonstrates the hegemonic patterns that undercut Mary's status as a liberated woman.

THE FEMALE COMMUNITY ON *TMTMS*

The above section demonstrates how Mary Richards' situation as a familial adjunct to other characters can be seen as a hegemonic device defusing the threatening aspects of the "independent" woman. In their traditional forms, as they are used on *TMTMS*, the daughter/wife/mother personae are demeaning to women, suggesting that their judgments and concerns are less important than those of others, particularly males.

This section examines Mary's relationships with other women. Assessing the portrayal of female relationships on television can provide insight into the nature of women's valuation as a group. Two major issues arise from the portrayal of interaction within the female community on *TMTMS*: the division between Mary's public and private lives, and the extent to which Mary is depicted as a token successful female.

It can be argued that television, by focusing on women's relationships with men and thereby assuming their ultimate importance in women's lives, undermines the importance of female community (see Tuchman, 1978). *TMTMS* conforms to this pattern. Mary's relationships with women are consistently depicted as secondary to her relationships with men. In the primary dramatic arena, the newsroom, Mary is the only woman. While this may suggest that Mary is a woman who can make it in a man's world, it also suggests that women's public success depends on them cooperating with male-defined structures of power. Sue Ann Nivens enters the show not as a "newsman" but as the host of the *Happy Homemaker* show, her character is sketched so as to prevent female bonding. Sue Ann's job and her interests fall in traditionally female areas. She is man-hungry and constantly in pursuit of Lou, which makes her relationship with Mary competitive rather than cooperative.

In the first four seasons of the show, Mary has close relationships with Rhoda Morgenstern, her neighbor, and Phyllis Lindstrom, her married landlady. Because Rhoda and Mary are closer in age and both single, their bond is closer. In many ways, the relationship between the two women is positive; they are supportive, caring, and cooperative with each other, and neither views their relationship as a substitute for satisfying relationships with men (see Bathrick, 1984). However, Mary's successful interpersonal relationships with Rhoda and Phyllis at home further extend the division between the public and the private in *TMTMS*.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALMS

Traditional thought prescribes that women are suited for the private, personal realm, and men for the public, professional one. The stereotypical characteristics assigned to men and women reflect this division; men are aggressive, competitive breadwinners, and women are passive, nurturing homebodies (see Welter, 1966). *TMTMS* does not deny this perspective. Mary's interaction with close female friends is home-centered and largely involves personal rather than professional issues. At work, Mary is surrounded by men, and her one female relationship (with Sue Ann Nivens) is neither close nor supportive.

Another aspect of the private/public division is that its boundaries are more fluid for men than for women. Men are able to work and compete successfully in the public sphere and still return home to fulfill private roles as husbands and fathers. This is evident in *TMTMS* as well. While Rhoda and Phyllis rarely appear in work contexts, Mary's male colleagues are frequently seen outside of the newsroom.

FEMALE TOKENISM

On the surface at least, Mary is a positive character. She is bright, attractive, well liked, has a good job that she performs well, and is generally happy. The other female characters on *TMTMS* do not fare as well. Sue Ann is constantly seeking fulfillment through men; Georgette is an addle-brained blonde who is devoted to the egocentric and insensitive Ted; Rhoda has a less than satisfying job, is overweight, and is unsuccessful in romantic relationships; and Phyllis is an eccentric, narcissistic wife and mother who often is frustrated by her circumscribed role. Moreover, Rhoda and

Phyllis cannot get along with each other despite their common friendship with Mary, again reinforcing the idea that only Mary can be successful in all contexts, and perhaps, that non-extraordinary women cannot get along with each other.

Mary's isolation as the sole woman in the newsroom and her portrayal as the only reasonably successful and fulfilled woman in *TMTMS* demonstrate her tokenism. Mary succeeds in the public realm only by succumbing to male expectations that she fulfill traditional female roles. She is successful, likeable, and admirable in the eyes of the other women and men on *TMTMS* because she is submissive and unassertively nurturing and, thus, has successfully adapted herself to the male culture. Moreover, Mary's isolation as the only thoroughly positive female character in the private realm promotes perception of her as an ideal woman who is different from most. The token woman is "separate[d] . . . from the wider female condition; and she is perceived by 'ordinary' women as separate also, perhaps even stronger than themselves" (Rich, 1986, p. 6). As the sole well-adjusted female character, Mary is figuratively isolated from and literally outnumbered by the unfulfilled female characters of Rhoda, Phyllis, and Sue Ann.

In the end, Mary is no one's equal. She is inferior to other, specifically male, characters in the public realm, where her success depends more on interpersonal than professional skill, and she is superior to other female characters in the private realm. This imbalance posits Mary Richards as a token stab at a positive portrayal of female independence. In contrast to Mary, *TMTMS* tells us, most women, like Rhoda, Sue Ann, Georgette, and even Phyllis (who constantly looks for ways to improve her marriage), are dissatisfied and continue to seek fulfillment through men. Mary's superiority comes from a particular kind of power that she has gained through compliance with male expectations. She has learned to adapt better than other female characters. In their own ways, Rhoda, Phyllis, and Sue Ann still resist or simply cannot meet the demands of patriarchy, while Mary has met those demands and is rewarded for her efforts. The hegemonic message derived from a comparison of Mary with other female characters is that compliance produces more happiness than resistance.

GENRE CONSIDERATIONS

The hegemonic devices at work in *TMTMS* cannot be separated from generic considerations. The familial roles within which Mary Richards operates are a product of the conservatism of situation comedy as a genre and the replicative nature of television. In his discussion of the medium's "recombinant" nature, Gitlin (1983, p. 63) notes that "executives like to say they are constantly looking for something new, but their intuition tells them to hunt up prepackaged trends and then recognize the new as a variant of the old." *TMTMS* presents us with a "new" premise and old characters. A sitcom about a single, ambitious woman is daring until you surround her with a recognizable husband/father figure and a group of children to nurture. At that point, she becomes Donna Reed repackaged as a working woman.

The tendency of television programming to rehash traditional themes and roles is intensified by the conservatism of the sitcom, which is "committed to the prevention of change and the protection of the present" (Grote, 1983, p. 72). At the end of the episode, no radical change has occurred, and "everything goes back as it was at the

beginning of the episode" (Grote, 1983, p. 68). Once the character's personalities, relationships, and interaction patterns have been established, program makers are unlikely to change them without risking damage to the success of the show. Although one or all of these factors are challenged in some way within each episode, the problem ultimately is resolved in a fashion that requires no fundamental adjustment of the situation (Grote, 1983).

The first few episodes of a sitcom are designed to establish the situation firmly. The elements that make *TMTMS* problematic from a feminist perspective can be seen in the first episode of the series, in which Mary arrives in Minneapolis and gets her job at WJM. In the first scene we see an argument between Phyllis and Rhoda over Mary's apartment. Instantly, Mary is the mediator, trying to satisfy both women. Rhoda, who has been outside washing the windows, is swathed in bulky clothes and looks particularly unattractive next to the perky, pretty Mary. Phyllis reveals to Rhoda Mary's reason for moving to Minneapolis: the man she had dated for two years was unwilling to marry her. Thus, it is established that Mary did not come to the city seeking her independence for its own sake, but as a reaction to being refused the traditional role she desired.³

The next scene shows Lou Grant interviewing Mary for a job at WJM. Mary clearly has no qualifications for the job, yet Lou comments on her "spunk" and decides to give her a chance. Thus, we have the first example of Lou's paternalism toward Mary. Lou tells her, "If I don't like you, I'll fire you. If you don't like me, I'll fire you." It is interesting that Lou's standards for Mary are based on personal factors rather than professional ones, indicating that Mary's success in the newsroom will depend upon her likability rather than her professional merit. At this point, we have already seen several indicators of patterns that will recur in the series: Mary's superiority to Rhoda, Lou's paternalism, and the importance of Mary's interpersonal qualities.

Indeed, the first episode displays most of Mary's eventual roles; by the end of it, she is nurturing a drunken Lou in her apartment. In this scene, Mary is saying a final good-bye to her boyfriend, who has followed her to Minneapolis. On the surface, Mary's refusal to continue a relationship with him seems to testify to her conviction to be independent. However, the fact that Lou is there as well suggests an opposite conclusion: that Mary is able to reject her possibilities for traditional bliss with the boyfriend because she has found new possibilities in her developing daughter/mother relationship with Lou.

Having established its basic premises in the first episode, in typical sitcom fashion *TMTMS* does not tamper with them. Mary grows older and more mature, but her patterns do not change significantly. Many episodes center on threats to these patterns, as Mary variously tries to reject Lou's authority, assert herself, and reject the nurturing role. However, the show always travels its circular path and returns Mary to docility by the conclusion. Indeed, in the last episode, the patriarchal patterns remain. As the WJM "family" prepares to split up after the station has been sold, Lou, in his paternal role, arranges to bring Rhoda and Phyllis, who have left Minneapolis, back to console Mary. Even on this occasion, Phyllis and Rhoda bicker over Mary's attention, reinforcing Mary's superiority and bringing her

mediating skills to the fore. Significantly, Mary acknowledges the relationships she has formed, saying, "Thank you for being my family."

The problems of *TMTMS* and its portrayal of women are neither minor nor obvious. To depict Mary as a truly self-sufficient and self-determined woman would have required a complete reworking of the very basics of the series' situation. The hegemonic devices are there from the beginning, and they are reinforced throughout. Mary Richards is a successful single woman, but only at the expense of conforming to traditional expectations in the roles she plays for others. In addition, although Mary's friendships with women enhance her private life, the contrast between her success and their lack of it implies that the route to happiness is found in compliance with patriarchal norms; the resistance that Rhoda, Phyllis, and Sue Ann represent leads to dissatisfaction.

ON READING MARY RICHARDS

Two issues growing out of this analysis deserve attention. The first, the value of recognizing strategies of hegemony in television discourse about women, is integrally related to the second, which concerns the validity of critical readings of television.

WOMEN, HEGEMONY, AND TELEVISION

Feminist critics need to attend to the tension that exists between the poles of feminism and patriarchy in narratives such as *TMTMS*, as well as to how audiences might negotiate that tension. As a product of the dominant ideology, television may never be all that feminists desire, but its problems require continual redefinition. Viewing a program such as *TMTMS* with the benefit of hindsight permits such redefinition and offers possibilities for future investigation.

Such investigation likely would show that variations on the family paradigm have been used in other instances to devalue women within television programming. For example, although *Kate & Allie* has been touted as a positive portrayal of women (Alley, 1985), the fairly clear allocation of traditionally male/husband/father and female/wife/mother characteristics between its two female leads indicate elements of a patriarchal family paradigm.

Other distinct methods perform hegemonic functions similar to those explored here (for an example, see D'Acci, 1987). A recent situation comedy that has been compared to *TMTMS* is a strong candidate for this type of analysis. *Murphy Brown*, which focuses on the life of a woman who is a successful television journalist and avowed feminist, depicts the title character as embodying traditionally male characteristics; she is aggressive, competitive, and often insensitive. Moreover, her public success is counterbalanced by difficult family and romantic relationships and, in general, loneliness. It could be argued that these factors work hegemonically to contain positive evaluations of a feminist character by exploiting myths about the masculinity of feminists and their sacrifice of personal happiness.

These examples underscore the idea that television is recombinant and that strategies proven successful at defusing feminist content in one situation are likely to be used in another. In developing a feminist critique that includes the development of feminist theory for television (Press, 1989), critics must make note of such patterns.

CRITICISM AND AUDIENCES

On another level, however, this reading of *TMTMS* may very well not be viewed as definitive. (See Grossberg & Treichler, 1987; Radway, 1986; and Rakow, 1986 for rejection of "preferred" reading claims.) While this essay has argued that the hegemonic patterns in *TMTMS* are both evident and troublesome, some may read *TMTMS* differently. Byars (1987, p. 294), for example, notes that a previous negative reading of *TMTMS* was countered during its presentation by an audience member who claimed that "Mary had meant a great deal to her, and to other women: she had represented for them 'independence'" and "had inspired them."

This contrast in opinions should not be surprising. It is precisely such divergent readings that ensure the success of television (Fiske, 1986). In the end, Mary is threatening to no one. She is passive, deferent, and womanly enough within her surrogate family to quiet the fears of those uneasy with women's liberation. For champions of feminism, Mary is a symbol of the possibilities for women—she is independent and still happy. This is the process through which hegemony is maintained. Enough difference is introduced to give the appearance of change, yet enough remains the same to avoid upsetting the balance within the dominant ideology. Thus, the claim is not that television "*manufactures*" ideology, but that it "*relays and reproduces and processes and packages and focuses* ideology." (Gitlin, 1982, p. 430, italics in original). However, in this processing, some "ideological seams" (Radway, 1986, p. 110) are exposed, allowing for contrasting evaluations as audiences assign "different values to different portions of the text and hence to the text itself" (Condit, 1989, p. 108). Not all viewers saw Mary Richards as a "contained" feminist symbol, but the text of *TMTMS* offers mixed messages that limit claims for the program's progressiveness.

Although different evaluations of a program's message are possible, the hegemonic patterns isolated here are not my own creation. They exist within the *TMTMS* narrative and are available for conscious or unconscious articulation by viewers. In the 1970s, it was not necessary to watch *TMTMS* to know that the program was about a single, "liberated" woman. Nonetheless, audience research has recently promoted a methodological vision that threatens to obscure the legitimate functions performed by the type of criticism offered here. As critics we assume that we are able to see and explain what others cannot because we are trained to do so. Scholarly readings should be expected to be different from audience readings; the former must be considered and attuned to the subtleties that audience members may experience but not articulate.

Although audience research can enhance our conclusions and perhaps offer some sociological comprehension, it does not replace critical insight. To act as though it can is to erode our own credibility. Feminist critics are in a particularly precarious position with regard to this issue. Those critics with the knowledge and training to recognize and interpret patriarchal ideology in television discourse should not be silenced simply because audiences caught in cultural hegemonic patterns may not acknowledge what is happening. In that context, critics need to go beyond what audiences might tell them.

Each type of criticism offers a different type of insight. They are complementary, and each can add to a feminist critique (Rakow, 1989). The commitment to the need for real change that is part of the feminist agenda makes it imperative that we explore every reasonable path that enriches the diversity and usefulness of a feminist critique of television. □

NOTES

¹Interestingly; the proscription against incest that typifies a true father-daughter relationship is implicitly revealed in an episode late in the series in which Mary asks Lou for a date. Lou comes over to Mary's house for dinner, and both are extremely nervous and uncomfortable. They decide to end the suspense and they kiss, during which both begin to giggle. Agreeing that a dating relationship will never work, they settle down to talk about the office. Clearly, the patterns created in their father-daughter relationship prohibit romance.

²There are a few exceptions to this general rule, and Grote (1983) cites *M*A*S*H* as an example.

³The creators of *TMTMS* had originally conceived of Mary Richards as a divorced woman, but CBS executives vetoed the idea, explaining that viewers would not accept such a character because of Mary Tyler Moore's previous popular role as the dutiful and happy wife on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. But "the network feared that the mass audience wouldn't accept the proposition that an attractive and competent woman on the far side of thirty had never been married" (Gitlin, 1983, p. 214). These incidents show hegemonic considerations at work from the outset of the show's creation.

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