TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE 1960s
CASE STUDY: SITUATION COMEDIES OF THE SIXTIES
THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW, BEWITCHED, I DREAM OF JEANNIE

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by
Aruna Jagtiani, B.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1995

Master's Examination Committee:

Felecia Jones Ross
Ojo Arewa

Approved by

Joseph P. McEvers, Adviser
School of Journalism
To My Parents
Kishinchand and Saraswati Advani
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was inspired by the seminar on Historical Methods in Mass Communication by Dr. Joseph P. McKerns. I sincerely appreciate the guidance and comments provided by Dr. McKerns throughout the research. I am indebted to Dr. Felecia Jones Ross for her time and encouragement and her willingness to answer my questions. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the influence of Dr. Ojo Arewa whose teaching had a great impact on me and whose suggestions were invaluable. To my husband, Arjan, and my daughters, Serena and Shari, I thank you for your unshakable faith in me and for your help in keeping me on track.
VITA

November 27, 1945 . . . . . . Born - Karachi, Pakistan

1966 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., St. Xavier's
College, University of Bombay, India

1967 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . P.S., Davar's College of
Commerce, Bombay, India

1968 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Left India for the U.S.

1969-1970 . . . . . . . . . . Secretary, Chevron Oil
Europe, Inc., New York City

1970-1972 . . . . . . . . . . Secretary, Caltex
Petroleum Corporation, New York City

1972-1974 . . . . . . . . . . Secretary, Revlon, Inc.
New York City

1974-1982 . . . . . . . . . . Homemaker

Secretary, Worthington
High School, Worthington, Ohio

1992 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., The Ohio State
University, Columbus, Ohio

1993-Present . . . . . . . . . Graduate Student, The
Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Journalism
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................ iii
VITA ............................................................................... iv
INTRODUCTION ............................................................... 1

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .............................................................. 1
II. THE NATURE OF TELEVISION IN THE 1960s, PROGRAMMING DECISIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE MASS AUDIENCE .................................................. 32
III. THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW ........................................... 53
IV. BEWITCHED ............................................................... 76
V. I DREAM OF JEANNIE ...................................................... 99
VI. CONCLUSION ............................................................... 123

LIST OF REFERENCES ....................................................... 143
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The sixties have been heralded as the decade of social change, the counter culture, the drug culture, the sexual revolution, the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and man's ascent to the moon. It was a decade in which protest became a household word and established society was under threat of change. Never before has one decade inspired so much nostalgia, dialogue and writing.

It was during this decade that television took hold as the medium of choice for the American public and instant communication transformed the world into a global village. The experience of real life became one option among others as media input dominated people's lives.\(^1\) In the realm of entertainment network television featured comedy, action, drama and adventure.\(^2\)

While the real world of the 1960s saw the appointment of a presidential commission on the status of women in 1961, the enactment of the Equal Pay Act and the
publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (which helped spark a revolution) in 1963, the passage of the Civil Rights Act with a provision against sex discrimination in 1964 and the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966, the television world of the 1960s resisted change and doggedly reinforced the status quo.\(^3\)

Entertainment programming featured images of middle-class, small town, white America, where people lived in houses with picket fences and where young and pretty wives never worked outside the home. If there were any single parents in this idealized setting, they were widowed, never divorced. The poor, the minorities, the working-class and older women did not exist in this mythical representation.\(^4\)

One genre of entertainment programming that flourished in the 1960s was the situation comedy which serves as a microcosm of a society's habits and culture in the way it portrays gender roles and the relationships between men and women.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Using three popular situation comedies that aired in the 1960s as an example of media portrayal of women, this thesis will attempt to examine the themes presented in the shows as they pertain to women and determine if they match the reality of women's lives in the sixties. The programs selected for analysis are *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*. These shows were aired on prime-time network television at a time when there was growing debate about the status of women and their changing roles.

After World War II, millions of women who had sustained the economy during the war, lost their jobs and status to the men who returned home and had to adjust to the new economic climate. Forced into the domestic sphere, middle-class women attended to their husbands and children while working class women were relegated to low-paying jobs. Racial segregation was strictly enforced in the south, contraceptive devices were not available and feminism was not an issue. It was not surprising that the 1960s culture reacted to the injustice that had
become part of the post World War II scene and struggled for liberation.7

When the decade began, African-Americans who had been fighting segregation in the south, launched a sustained campaign. Middle-class women who were attending college in increasing numbers saw a world beyond the hearth and the Pill which was introduced in 1960 changed the marriage-and-sex game.8

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the struggle for women's rights and women's suffrage movements which grew out of the abolitionist movement. The 1960s women's liberation grew out of the civil rights movement.9

What role did television, which became extremely popular in the 1960s, play in reflecting changes in the status of women? What themes relating to women's roles in society are evident in the portrayal of the female characters in the three programs? Is there any evidence in the three programs to suggest that media failed to reflect reality and instead reinforced the dominant ideology?
BACKGROUND ON THE THREE PROGRAMS

The three networks competed with each other for a share of the audience and offered programs that had proven to be successful in the past. There was a tendency to avoid controversy because television had many critics. Its desire to reach the largest possible audience and its success over other media had led to the formation of congressional committees, appointed to study the effects of television on culture. Because of television's visual impact on the audience, radio and print media joined the FCC in condemning the new medium for becoming too commercialized. To silence their critics, networks adopted a risk-free strategy in the area of entertainment.10

The decade of the 1960s was a time of endings and the beginning of a new era of television with many comedies and cartoons aimed at the young. It was goodbye to puppets, playhouse, dramatic anthologies, and I Love Lucy, and a beginning of fads; cartoons such as The Flintstones in prime-time and super-agent shows such as I Spy and Mission: Impossible. There were westerns like Bonanza and Gunsmoke and medical dramas such as
Dr. Kildare and Ben Casey. There were monster comedies like The Addams Family and The Munsters and simple-minded situation comedies, most of which had a gimmick to attract attention. The Beverly Hillbillies put a rural family in high society; Uncle Martin on My Favorite Martian, Samantha on Bewitched and Jeannie on I Dream of Jeannie all had supernatural powers. The Flying Nun and Batman had strange and comical characters and slapstick was featured on Gilligan’s Island, Hogan’s Heroes and other shows.\(^1\)

Situation comedies were a safe bet for ratings success because they had been successful in the past on radio and early television. Most of the sitcoms, especially those premiering in the early sixties showed little change from the programming of the 1950s. They bred similarity and quite often, a new series resembled an older one that had proven to be successful.\(^2\)

The Dick Van Dyke Show was a sitcom with a fresh approach. It evolved from the idealized fifties sitcom by showing for the first time the workplace of the lead male character. It was a highly successful series and was considered one of television’s classic comedies.\(^3\) It
made its debut on prime-time television in October 1961 during the Kennedy era and was the first adult situation comedy of the decade. The characters on the show were funny but not silly. Actor Dick Van Dyke played the part of the lead male character, Robert Petrie, who was the head comedy writer for a New York based television series. Robert Petrie lived in New Rochelle with his wife Laura and their son Ritchie. Rob and Laura, a full-time housewife, were a loving couple quite comfortable with their roles in life. Although Laura had many talents she truly believed that her only choice in life was to be a wife and mother. The series acknowledged the presence of single, professional women in the character of Sally Rogers, one of Rob's co-writers but portrayed her as plain-looking, middle-aged and man-crazy. Buddy Sorrell, the other co-writer was a wise-cracking sexist and Jerry and Millie Helper were Rob and Laura's New Rochelle neighbors.

The popularity of the sitcoms continued throughout the decade. Two-thirds of the programs premiering in September, 1964 were situation comedies of which sixteen had successfully been on the air during the past
season. One instant hit premiering in the fall of 1964 was a situation comedy called *Bewitched* which went straight to the top of the ratings chart. It aired during a period of cultural upheaval in the U.S. when every aspect of the way things were was being questioned. Because situation comedies believe in harmony, network producers reacted to the cultural scene by avoiding it.

*Bewitched* combined fantasy in a modern, suburban world and was a well-written show which earned several Emmys. During its first season it was rated number two among all programs on the air. It ran on the ABC network from 1964 to 1972 and featured an exceptionally pretty witch named Samantha and her earnest attempts to abandon her witchcraft to please her mortal husband, Darrin, an advertising executive at McMann & Tate, a New York agency. Samantha was a non-working housewife whose attractive appearance was the ideal of beauty for American women of the period.

The series portrayed an idealized version of middle class America and the underlying premise in every show was that Samantha was a happy housewife who did not regret curbing her powers to please her husband. Regular
cast members included Samantha's mother Endora, Darrin's boss Larry Tate and his wife Louise, neighbors Gladys and Abner Kravitz and daughter Tabitha who was also a witch. Other supernatural relatives appeared as guests.

Contrary to the turmoil of the period, the series portrayed stability by maintaining the established status quo interspersed with incidents of witchcraft that were always resolved in the end when things returned to normal. At the conclusion of every show the sanctity of the family unit was maintained with the husband firmly in place as head of the household.

It was a perfect scene of domesticity except for the fact that Samantha's supernatural powers had to be controlled. The series suggested that it was all very well for women to aspire to power, but that power had to remain a fantasy. Danny Arnold, the show's first producer, suggested that one of the show's conflicts was "the power of a woman versus the ego of a man." Just as witches could not be accepted by society neither could powerful women.

The success of Bewitched spawned similar programs and one of them was I Dream of Jeannie which was the NBC
network's attempt to achieve success in the realm of fantasy. It did not achieve the top billing that *Bewitched* consistently received, but it was a popular show and enjoyed one of the longest syndication records in television history.19

A normal, ordinary astronaut named Tony Nelson of the NASA Space Center in Cape Kennedy found a sexy, beautiful genie in a bottle when he crash-landed on a desert island in the South Pacific.20 She called him "master," arranged for his rescue and followed him home to Cocoa Beach, Florida.21 Jeannie was a genie who had been imprisoned in her bottle by a powerful genie because she had rejected his offer of marriage.22 When Tony Nelson opened the bottle the curvaceous genie became his slave and episodes revolved around her efforts to serve him, often causing confusion that was eventually resolved with her magic.23

The chief cast members in the series were Dr. Alfred Bellows, the base psychiatrist, his wife Amanda, and Tony's friend and fellow astronaut, Roger Healey. The central theme in every show was the inappropriate use of
Jeannie's powers causing Dr. Bellows to always wonder whether it was he who was crazy, or Tony Nelson.24

Jeannie was naive and unsophisticated because she had been locked in her bottle for thousands of years and knew nothing of the world.25 Her indiscriminate use of her magical powers caused many problems suggesting that powerful women were not suited to the world of men. Jeannie was often ordered by Tony Nelson to remain in her bottle similar to the way women were confined to the suburbs. Viewers were reminded of Jeannie's subordinate status every week on every show when she called Tony Nelson "master."

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY - A LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars studying the sixties culture are divided in their opinions regarding the effects of television as well as the reality or lack of it portrayed in its entertainment programs. One thing is certain -- it secured the attention of the masses, forced changes in radio programming as well as the motion picture industry, and eventually in television itself which went on to portray reality more effectively in the 1970s.26
The 1960s questioned the gender ideology of the 1950s, along with its "cult of motherhood" for women. There was a tension between society's domestic ideals which limited women to traditional roles and the actual context of women's lives which included a combination of their domestic role and paid employment. The liberal social climate emphasized personal fulfillment and groundwork was in progress for the feminist movement of the late sixties and the early seventies.

Media coverage of the events of the sixties is a broad and extensive topic for research. There were various issues of concern covered by the media during the sixties. So much happened during the decade and so much has been reported and written about the sixties that it would be difficult to portray, completely and accurately, the coverage of events by even one medium.

The winds of change blowing through the sixties had the makings of a major hurricane threatening to blow to smithereens all of society's cherished traditions. The media had to ensure that this would not happen. Change had to be accommodated within the established order and it was to the benefit of the media, whose power is
derived from the culture it reflects, to reinforce the status quo.\textsuperscript{29}

Susan Faludi holds the media responsible for perpetuating and exaggerating its false images of womanhood which find their way into popular culture.\textsuperscript{30} Culture is mass-mediated and transmitted through the agency of the media. There is double mediation because people communicate through technologies as well as the organizations that create the technologies and own these channels. These institutions and the broader institutional framework are a major shaping force in the cultural life of modern society.\textsuperscript{31}

People have become accustomed to viewing society through invisible gender lenses. Sandra Bem maintains that there are three types of lenses through which we see the world. The lens of biological centrism, based on the fact of women's fertility, was used by the culture to create masculinity and femininity creating a division between males and females that went beyond biology. The lens of gender polarization sees women as fundamentally different from men. While women stayed home with the children, men secured education and training to prepare
for paid employment. Whatever men did became more valued over whatever women did because men's work had economic worth as opposed to women's work. The lens of male androcentrism is the notion that men are inherently superior to women who are viewed as sex-specific deviations from the male norm. Man is treated as human, woman as other. These lenses are firmly embedded in the culture and reinforced by mass media.\(^{32}\)

Media decision makers who chose the messages to be transmitted to the public in the 1960s were mostly men. Although it was possible for the media to be agents of change in society, these men had sexist views and transmitted ideological views of male hegemony to which they unconsciously remained bound. In television, movies, commercials, radio, newspapers, magazines and books, women were portrayed in relation to men and as secondary to men.\(^{33}\)

Advertisements also conveyed similar messages through their images of males and females to sell products. Advertisements are a depiction of masculinity and femininity to make it function socially regardless of the actual reality and experience of men and women.\(^{34}\)
The repetitive pattern of television's mass produced images and messages cultivates shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics. Images are myths and ideologies that are used to define the world and legitimate the social order.35

By depicting homemakers as models to be emulated, the media presented a version of reality that did not exist anymore. There was a "cultural lag" which contrasted sharply with the changes in women's position that had already occurred in the economy and the family.36

The myth of the suburban housewife as the keeper of the American dream was the message that was transmitted through various media as the ideal to strive for. In 1960, actress Doris Day was portrayed as a happy, middle class homemaker with four children in Please Don't Eat the Daisies. She went on to portray similar roles until 1965 in movies like Lover Come Back, That Touch of Mink, and Send Me No Flowers. Her real life did not epitomize the mythical happiness she portrayed on the Hollywood screen.37
A *Saturday Evening Post* poll of suburban housewives conducted by George Gallup and Evan Hill in 1962 revealed that women believed in the traditional values indoctrinated by the culture. They felt that "being subordinate to men is part of being feminine." However, 90 percent of the women did not wish their daughters to lead the same kind of life they did and desired higher educational levels for them.38

Critic Molly Haskell sees the period from 1962 to 1973 as "the most disheartening in screen history from a woman's point of view." There were no working women on the screen, no smart or mature women, and no goddesses. She explains this phenomenon as a backlash against the demands of women in real life. Women were portrayed as emotional cripples, whores, spinsters and psychotics. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte* are examples of such films.39

The few strong female roles were found in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *The Miracle Worker*. Among films that showed a woman's perspective were *The Group* and *Diary of a Mad Housewife*.40 Hollywood also acknowledged the sexual revolution of the sixties with
films like *Sex and the Single Girl* and *The Apartment*. *Bachelor Flat* and *I'll Take Sweden* were examples of the bad girl image. An emphasis on sexuality was explicit in *Viva Las Vegas*, *The Pleasure Seekers* and the James Bond movies which exploited women as sex objects, easily seduced or victimized.41

The making of these movies was influenced by the dominance of television in the 1960s. As TV became more popular, Hollywood had to compete for audience attention. The only way it could do that was to offer entertainment that television could not because of the restrictions imposed by the networks.42 Television enforced the status quo keeping the sanctity of the family unit alive for millions of Americans. Married women were approved on television, divorced parents were non-existent and single and working women were condemned. Only 20 percent of the women were portrayed as employed in 1963 on prime time TV, with the figure falling to 18 percent by 1971. Two-thirds of TV women were either married or engaged. Forty percent of the women were featured in situation comedies, and were limited in their roles by cultural expectations.43
Judy Klemesrud concludes that the only female TV character who was her own woman and successful in her own right was Miss Kitty, saloonkeeper on *Gunsmoke*. Most of the other female characters were featured as sex kittens, kooks or ding-a-lings that appeared on shows such as *Laugh-In.*

As in television, magazine articles and short stories portrayed few women who worked. Those who did, quit upon marriage or the birth of a child. Margaret Lefkowitz's study of women's magazine short stories between 1957 and 1967 showed that women who pursued careers were portrayed as unwomanly. The main character in these stories was an attractive, married, middle-class housewife ranging in age from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties. Another study of the roles of women in women's magazines between 1956 and 1970 looked at the theme of employment of women and concluded that "twice as many articles were unfavorable as were favorable."

Contrary to the portrayals of women in television and magazines, where two-thirds were either married or engaged, and employment among women was disapproved, reality was quite different. Economic necessity had
pushed two-thirds of American women in the work force by 1963 while media continued to portray visions of suburbia. As a result, prejudice against working wives remained strong. Aside from a steady surge into the work force, there was a tremendous decline in the birth rate, a rise in the marriage age and an increase in the divorce rate. Thus a definite cultural lag existed between media images and reality, between the mass media's portrayal of women and their actual roles in society.

In popular fiction, well-plotted Harlequin romances with happy endings, and mysterious, gothic romances with dark castles and mansions were popular. They were analoguous to the suburban dream houses that now appeared sinister to the women living in them as they discovered Betty Friedan's feminine mystique as "a problem with no name."

Women were also exploited in popular music as gender roles were reinforced through women singing about getting husbands through dating and men having "women under their thumbs." Marcie Blane's *I Wanna Be Bobby's Girl*, and Peggy March's *I Will Follow Him*, were hardly battle cries
for women's liberation. The Dixie Cups and *Chapel of Love* reinforced traditionalism and Lesley Gore's *It's My Party* and *Judy's Turn to Cry*, although indignant, were still in the "weeper" category.  

*Will Power* expressed the young woman's predicament over the changing sexual scene and *Baby Love* and *You Can't Hurry Love* by The Supremes questioned the consequences of the sexual revolution. The first feminist demand in pop music was Aretha Franklin's *Respect*. Janis Joplin's acid rock was rebellious against the traditional female roles.

In literature, Phyllis McGinley was the promoter of the traditional housewife's role in *Sixpence in Her Shoe*, published in 1964. Her poems and essays were about husbands, children and suburbia. Mary Allen, speaking of women in major American fiction of the sixties, said that women in literature were primarily creations reflecting the ideas of men. "Woman is created in man's image, not God's," she said. She felt that women in the literature of the period had a certain blankness that came from their not having a real identity in society that was independent of men. As social movements
progressed throughout the sixties, there were new subjects and new ways of treating them. Journalism and popular culture mixed with the traditional forms of literature and produced work that reflected the uncertainty of the times. The personal voice became heard in literature and women's writing became public.\textsuperscript{53}

The mass media could not ignore the changing social scene of the sixties and did their best to acknowledge it. During the mid to late 1960s, the sitcoms were finally reflecting single parenthood and escalating divorce rate in shows like \textit{The Partridge Family} and \textit{My Three Sons}. In this same period, the optimistic, single, working woman was acknowledged by shows like \textit{That Girl}. A rare example of a television show featuring a young woman was \textit{Julia} in 1968. It was a significant acknowledgment of the changes in society because it showed a young, African-American woman in the lead role as a professional, reflecting both civil rights as well as women's liberation.\textsuperscript{54} In general, however, evening television was dominated by family sitcoms such as \textit{Ozzie & Harriet}, \textit{Make Room for Daddy}, \textit{Father Knows Best}, and \textit{The Dick Van Dyke Show}.\textsuperscript{55}
Most of the images in the various media were still those of middle-class housewives with children. The full-time working wife, the part-time working wife, the single working woman, the career woman with a husband and family, the professional, intellectual woman, and the African-American woman were all excluded by the media. Even the Gallup poll survey had paid no attention to working wives who were trapped in low-paying, traditional women's fields.56

While mostly idealized portrayals of women from the decade of the 1950s continued to be etched in the psyche of the American public by the mass media, change was brewing in the real world of the sixties. Racial segregation led to women's involvement in the Civil Rights movement, over a decade of stagnation for feminists led to the publication of The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan and the need to retain the "woman's vote" led to the creation of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. These events were "turning points," separating the apparently conservative decade of the 1950s from a new 1960s era of "political activism, social reform and feminist revival."57
Friedan claimed in her book that the ideology of the feminine mystique limited women's aspirations by depriving them of self-esteem and identity and presenting them with "a problem that has no name." Women were told by experts, advertisers, and magazines to find fulfillment as wives and mothers. As a result, women had no personality and were unhappy. A late 1950s survey of Friedan's Smith college class revealed that of these college-educated women, 89 percent were housewives with an average of three children. Sixty percent of these housewives were not fulfilled as homemakers but few had the drive to succeed because of the societal expectation that women should be homemakers with children.

Reality was different for every woman living in the sixties. "A survey of American women's lives in that decade is a perilous project subject to correction by participants who experienced it." There were women who became very active in the Civil Rights movement which resulted in rising consciousness about oppression at the end of the sixties. There were also women who were content with the status quo and then there were those who joined the radical left.
METHODOLOGY

For the sake of convenience the three sitcoms analyzed for this study were selected from programs of the 1960s that air on cable TV's Nickelodeon channel. Since the purpose of this thesis is to determine the roles women played on television versus the reality of the times, the programs selected had to feature the relationship between men and women. Situation comedies featuring a male and female lead were best suited to this purpose because it was the only genre where women had an equal role. Drama, action and adventure programs did not have a female lead in the regular cast.

The three networks had to be represented to give an example of the type of entertainment fare being served to the audience by each network during the 1960s. Each show selected also shared a common time period during the sixties. The Dick Van Dyke Show represents the CBS network and aired from 1961-1966. Bewitched represents ABC and aired from 1964-1972. I Dream of Jeannie represents NBC and aired from 1965-1970.

At least 30 programs were viewed from each of the three series for analysis. These programs were viewed for
six weeks as they appeared daily on the cable channel. The programs aired represented each season of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *Bewitched*. In the case of *I Dream of Jeannie* all the programs that aired during the 1969-1970 season were aired first and later the Nickelodeon channel switched back to programs that aired during 1965, the first season of the series. Therefore for *I Dream of Jeannie* only the first and last seasons are represented in the research.63

In analyzing the programs, attention was paid to the race and class of the women portrayed on the programs and whether these women were married or single, divorced or widowed, working outside the home or full-time homemakers. Other facts such as women being treated like children, losing their minds, appearing weak or exercising power in any realm were also noted.

It is the object of this study to describe and analyze the way these three sitcoms portrayed women in the sixties, the way they handled changes in the status of women, and the commonalities and differences between their themes.
NOTES


15. Baughman, 102.


17. Brooks and Marsh, *TV in the 60s.*


26. Baughman, xiv


33. Butler & Paisley researched media portrayals of women in the sixties and seventies. Only research pertaining to the sixties was used for this paper. (Butler and Paisley, *Women and the Mass Media*).

34. Goffman analyzed the dominant positioning of men and subjugated positioning of women in advertisements and discovered implicit messages about the secondary status of women. (Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979]).

35. Gerbner's contention was that television had an indoctrinating effect on the mass public which was similar to the effect of religion. (George Gerbner et al, "Living With Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process," in *Perspectives on Media Effects*, ed. J. Bryan & D. Zillman [Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986]).


38. Ward and Green, Changing the Future, xi, xii


40. Ward & Green, 202.


42. Baughman, The Republic of Mass Culture.


46. Ibid.

47. Women were forced to accept boring and menial jobs and lacked the opportunity for self-expression. Typing skill was important even for college graduates to gain an entry into the job market where they were trained for secretarial positions while their young male counterparts were given management training. In addition, women were burdened with guilt because of the societal preference for non-working women. (Ward & Green, 92-6).


51. Janis Joplin was a white singer who had a tough blues-mama style and image. During her performances, she would stomp and scream and drink Southern Comfort. See Ward & Green, 247.

52. Ward & Green, xi.

53. Mary Allen, The Necessary Blankness: Women in Major American Fiction of the Sixties (Chicago: University of Illino

54. Stern & Stern, 8, 11; Weibel, 86.

55. Ward & Green, 206.

56. Woloch, Women and the American Experience, 492.

57. Ibid., 493.

58. Ibid., 484.

59. Ward & Green, Changing the Future.

60. Ibid., xiii, xiv.

61. Woloch, Woman and the American Experience.

62. Bewitched continued to air till the early 1970s. For the research only programs that aired during the 1960s were analyzed.
63. The original intention was to analyze five episodes per season from each series but that was not possible because a selection had to be made from those presented on Nickelodeon, the cable channel. However, all seasons are represented at least twice for The Dick Van Dyke Show and Bewitched. For I Dream of Jeannie only the first and final seasons are well represented. In all three programs there was no change in the portrayals of women in response to the changing social scene. The basic themes remained constant throughout the duration of each series. Even if it had been possible to select a scientific sample for study there would have been no significant change in the conclusions drawn.
Chapter II

THE NATURE OF TELEVISION IN THE 1960s, PROGRAMMING DECISIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE MASS AUDIENCE

Many theories have been advanced to explain the myriad of events that took place during the sixties. There is a wealth of literature on the decade, as well as a wealth of perspectives. Television has been mentioned as an influential force during this period with much disagreement among researchers as to its actual impact. The medium was studied, criticized and regulated by governmental agencies, as well as the networks themselves, but the events that occurred during that famous decade have not been directly attributed to the advent of television. However, it is entirely possible that the popularity of television in the 1960s could have been a contributing factor in spawning the many momentous happenings of the 1960s. A mass community of citizens were brought together by the mere flick of a switch and people thousands of miles apart shared the same events.

Not that television was new, of course. The world's first experimental television was demonstrated by Charles
Frances Jenkins in the early 1920s but it was not until the late 1930s that the first television sets were sold in America.\(^1\) TV first gained mass acceptance in the 1950s and at that time it drew from previously established sources of entertainment for much of its programming. Former vaudevillians adjusted their acts to present comedy/variety on TV. Live theater converted to new TV anthology series for home audiences. TV in the 1950s was mostly an outgrowth of radio in the 1940s. Even *I Love Lucy* the most popular situation comedy of the 1950s was based on a radio show.\(^2\)

By the early 1950s the American public had accepted television's characters as part of their daily life making it difficult for a new generation of Americans to distinguish between the fantasy world of television and their real world dreams. Viewers became so caught up in the lives of the television characters that the January 19, 1953 episode of *I Love Lucy* practically overshadowed the live television coverage of President Eisenhower's inauguration that same night. Although it was the first time that the American public had witnessed the transfer of power and pageantry, there was equal or more interest
in the fact that the main character on *I Love Lucy* was giving birth on an episode that aired on the same night.³

Visionaries who had expected television to be the "savior of our culture" were disappointed that television was paid for by commercial advertisers who wanted the largest possible audience. Television was ruled by high ratings because of the business interests that had developed it. The networks were unable to offer high quality programming consistently because they had to cater to the masses in order to make a profit from their operations. High class programming did not appeal to the masses who wanted to be entertained.⁴

During the mid-1950s, increased advertiser demand for television resulted in the networks scheduling more popular programming. Advertising companies were powerful until the late 1950s and had their programs produced by independent producers because of the complexities involving television production. They battled with network executives over programming; as buyers of time, advertisers could practically force a program on the schedule. If an advertiser's proposal was rejected by one network, it would be accepted by another network.
However, during the late 1950s, independent producers began to control program content reducing the power of the advertising companies. Quiz shows, also derived from radio, became so popular on TV that movie attendance dropped from 82 million in 1946 to only 46 million in 1955. Quiz shows were aired during prime-time and attracted a large audience. To make the shows more interesting, producers found people with expertise in areas contrary to their professions. Later, it was discovered that participants were coached and the shows themselves were rigged so more people would watch.

The quiz show scandals forced the television networks to exercise caution in the area of programming. They had chosen to avoid acting decisively because the shows were profitable and viewers were accepting them at face value. The scandals disappointed viewers who lost their admiration for the contestants and consequently their interest in the shows. Congress condemned television and threatened to increase regulation. The nation's leading newspapers and magazines joined in to criticize the networks' desires for the largest possible audience at the lowest possible cost. To placate their
critics, television's leaders tried hard not to offend any significant segment of the public. To achieve this end, they offered escapist entertainment and "neutral" news programs. Documentaries featured safe stories presenting no point of view and entertainment programming practiced "majority TV" to maximize their sales potential. Filmed weekly series became popular with the producers and creative performers became limited to these programs on television as dramatic anthologies left the air and action dramas began to fill the airwaves.² By the late fifties westerns began to achieve top billing.¹⁰

In terms of popular network programs the fabulous fifties gave way to the silly sixties. Though Westerns still enjoyed top 10 ratings, programs like I Love Lucy, The Ed Sullivan Show and Gunsmoke were replaced by witches, monsters, Munsters and Martians in the top 10. The Beverly Hillbillies (1962) inspired other country programs and there were many corny shows on TV. Reality saw the assassinations of beloved leaders, the "living-room war" in Vietnam, protest marches and unrest in the cities.¹¹
It was during this decade that television became firmly established as the medium of choice for Americans and became the common carrier of the national standard. Over 90 percent of the population owned television sets. The 1960s brought the world closer, making it possible to become connected. The average household TV viewing time was now five to six hours a day. The popularity of the medium led to concerns among officials that television was distorting what the citizenry saw and understood of reality. Influential executives spoke out against television both at the opening and the closing of the decade.

From differing perspectives, Chairman Newton N. Minow of the FCC in 1961 and Vice-President Spiro Agnew in 1969 attacked television. Minow had come to the FCC after an era of scandal during which FCC commissioners allegedly took bribes and collaborated with the businesses they were supposed to regulate. Minow not only favored increased competition and diversity, he felt the FCC could influence the quality of programming. At the annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters held on May 9, 1961, Minow declared American
TV as "a vast wasteland"\textsuperscript{16} saying he was not convinced that the people's taste was as low as industry executives assumed. He described TV programming as

"a monotonous procession of game shows, violence, audience-participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, murder, gangsters and westerns....And most of all, boredom."

Minow called upon local stations to make an effort to give the people what they needed in addition to what they wanted. Network presidents were asked to infuse imagination and creativity into programming to make it excellent. Though industry officials agreed with some of Minow's comments about television it was too late to change the fall schedules.\textsuperscript{17}

However, Minow's attack spurred the networks to offer news shows in primetime and nightly news programs gained strength.\textsuperscript{18} But those who had expected television to provide uplifting culture called it a "mental wastebasket for the dregs of American creativity."\textsuperscript{19} Minow believed that any public service programming was better than the programming offered for profit because he believed that the public had given the television
stations and networks the use of the airwaves, a scarce public resource.  

Some scholars agreed with Minow that programmers were underestimating what the TV audience really needed by providing programs of low intelligence and low taste. Others felt that denying a license on the grounds of poor program performance would give government undue power over what was televised. They wanted TV to remain free to be good as well as bad. In the end, such questions were purely academic because the FCC had little real power.  

Decades earlier Congress had passed laws which provided broadcasters with many guarantees against quick and arbitrary decisions. Congress refused to reform these old laws that were cumbersome to enact giving broadcasters a great deal of advantage. Thus the FCC was unable to decide anything quickly in spite of President Kennedy's backing of Chairman Newton Minow. Historically the FCC had always been reluctant to dictate program quality and Kennedy's liberal appointments on the Commission did not lead to reform because the FCC had to abide by the old laws which did not favor punitive measures against broadcasters.
Contrary to Minow's view that networks were responsible for public service programming, television stations regarded public service as free airtime donated by the networks. News programming was generally unpopular and did not bring in advertiser dollars. The only way networks could continue to maximize their profits was to cater to the largest possible audience at the lowest possible cost in the area of entertainment programming.24

The principal concern of the three networks was ratings supremacy. Critics bemoaned the corporate fever that had gripped TV by the early 1960s and they regretted the fact that the public airwaves were being manipulated to make greater and greater amounts of money. But a survey indicated that most Americans viewed TV as a diversion in 1960. They wanted to be informed but not at the expense of entertainment. Network executives defended their programming in terms of its success in appealing to the mass audience. William S. Paley of CBS felt that the networks had achieved "that elusive, fragile, ideal mixture of programming that caters to some of the more specialized, more refined tastes and yet pleases a large part of the mass audience most of the time."25
It was a profitable time for the television industry whose profits rose from $1.3 billion in 1962 to $2.5 billion by 1968. Advertising costs per minute became dependent upon ratings and networks increased their charges to advertisers. This resulted in the elimination of exclusive sponsorships the advertisers had enjoyed with the networks through the 1950s. By the mid-1960s the independent producers worked directly for the networks rather than for the advertisers. Networks oversaw the production of a series presented by a producer if they agreed with the idea and proposal for a show and received a share of the profits in return for production costs. By 1964 independent producers were responsible for 71 percent of network programming. The networks produced twenty percent of the programs and the advertisers were responsible for only nine percent of programming. 26

Because the networks invested in production costs, they adopted a risk-free strategy. There was a tendency to repeat a successful formula or a trend that found favor with the audience. Thus, there were action series about spies, shows about World War II and dramas about doctors. Situation comedies flourished in the 1960s but
the scripts were bland and imitative because the networks had imposed taboos on sex and politics to avoid offending anyone. The filmed sixties series on television lacked creativity and the FCC believed that was largely because of network control over the production of programming. To encourage diversity, the FCC attempted to limit the networks' role in creating the series to 50 percent. The networks fought it and Newton Minow, who resigned in 1963, received little support from President Johnson who enjoyed a good relationship with network executives. Minow's successor, E. William Henry, agreed with Minow that TV was imitative and barren but he also had little success because the FCC had always been reluctant to dictate program quality and content. Mrs. Lady Bird Johnson, the first lady, owned a TV station and President Johnson did not wish to battle station owners and network chiefs whose help he needed on legislation. Thus, programming did not change because TV was a private business and profits were maximized because of the scarcity of channels.

The sitcom, which was the most common type of program, did not change in general from the 1950s. There
was no real alternative to network programming in spite of the proliferation of UHF stations because these stations mainly ran reruns of network programs on an inferior frequency. In 1967 the Johnson administration passed the Public Broadcasting Act combining the educational TV (ETV) outlets into a Public Broadcasting System (PBS). However, there was no provision for permanent funding of PBS leaving only community antenna or cable systems (CATV) to provide some diversity in programming. CATV was developed in the 1950s for improving reception to certain areas and became an alternative medium picking up signals from more stations. The FCC decided to slow the spread of cable to boost UHF television and the three networks continued their dominance in programming commandeering over 90 percent of the viewers by the late 1960s.29

The risk aversion strategy adopted by the networks to self-regulate themselves resulted in the avoidance of reality. During the latter half of the decade, sociologist Muriel Cantor interviewed producers of television programs to determine how they viewed their audience. Cantor observed that most producers believed
their audiences lived in small towns although this population was shrinking. Single parents were presented as widowed, never divorced and the Vietnam war did not exist in network entertainment. There was confusion about casting African-Americans in regular series until the mid-1960s because civil rights advocates encountered resistance from some station managers to improve the portrayal of African-Americans on TV.30

It took until the late 1960s for entertainment TV to finally catch up with its other half -- news programming, in finally reflecting some of the social changes of the decade. Because of Newton Minow's statements condemning television and the harsh criticism TV endured from other media, network executives strove to make television a source of mass enlightenment that had unanticipated social implications. The struggle for civil rights, the Vietnam war and protests against the war, the ecological and women's movements and alternative lifestyles all had a great impact because TV was a visual medium. It took an issue, and personalized and dramatized it serving as a companion to the real-life events. More attention was paid to the issues covered by TV news, and the presence
of TV cameras triggered riots and demonstrations intended to influence the viewers. Many felt that American politics were being shaped by what was televised and what was left out. By giving importance to some issues and ignoring others, viewers were being told what to think.  

In 1969 Vice-President Spiro Agnew said that national broadcasting was politically biased with newsmen presenting their own version of truth to viewers. He claimed that President Nixon's speeches were dissected and presented to the public framed by the prejudices of hostile critics. Agnew argued that TV should serve minority viewpoints and that it needed more alternatives than the one story carved out by a few dozen men and presented to a diverse nation as the single truth. Agnew received little support within the industry but millions of viewers agreed with him. Only 33 percent of those polled in an ABC survey sided with the networks. Fifty-one percent agreed with Agnew. A majority of calls and letters to affiliates also supported the vice-president.

While Agnew referred only to political news, television throughout the 1960s was guilty of presenting
its version of truth to viewers even in the realm of entertainment programming. Although TV had remained popular, viewers were becoming restless because entertainment programming avoided reality. The small-town setting featured in sitcoms was no longer the norm. There was a readiness among viewers to see on their television screen something beyond country flavor, nuclear families, non-working wives and widowed spouses.\textsuperscript{34} Television began to mature in the final years of the decade with programs like That Girl and Julia featuring single, professional women making it on their own.\textsuperscript{35} But it was in the decade of the seventies that programs became more relevant to the social and political transformations that had occurred during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{36}

In general, throughout the 1960s women were portrayed on television solely in sexual terms: as wives, mothers, love objects, dishwashers and general servers of physical needs but never as persons. The image of women as inferior and incapable of contribution to society, built up since World War II, was projected on television to an extreme.\textsuperscript{37} The only type of evening programming that portrayed an even balance of male and female
characters was the situation comedy. Network officials were convinced of the popularity of the sitcom among women and portrayed them occasionally as superior to men. Early fifties comedies like the *Life of Riley*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *The Honeymooners* and *Make Room for Daddy* set a pattern of the foolish husband and sensible wife that was repeated in the sixties. 38

The housewife's obsession with the need to control the house and the husband's stupid portrayal was condemned by television critics concerned about the declining power of the American male. But even where the wife was intelligent and the husband silly, the wife always had to lose the battle in the end in order to retain her "femininity." 39 No matter how sensible the women were, there was no question that men were breadwinners and women homemakers. Men were the heads of the households that women controlled. 40

Besides sitcoms the portrayal of women on television was insignificant to negligible. In drama/adventure programs men were heroes and women were victims or window dressing. 41 Men were portrayed positively in all types of programs featuring the world of work and women not at
all. They were shown as cowboys, detectives, doctors, teachers and in other roles that go beyond intramarital warfare. Producers maintained that if they cast women in decisive roles, those women would appear masculine and dominant and alienate real housewives who would react against successful women.42

Contrary to the portrayals of women on television, the real world saw two-thirds of American women working outside the home in industry and skilled professions by 1963.43 Millions of real American educated housewives shaped U.S. culture, politics, art and education. They were involved in the PTA, the League of Women Voters and local political parties. These facts could not be confirmed on television because none of the dramatic shows, commentaries, documentaries or reporting of news and issues around the world ever featured women. Women virtually did not exist on these programs.44

Because the situation comedy was the only genre of programming in which women were prominently visible on television, this thesis will examine the portrayals of women on three popular situation comedies that aired during the 1960s. The Dick Van Dyke Show aired from 1961-
NOTES


4. Ibid


11. Ibid


15. Ibid

16. The term "vast wasteland" has become part of the history of television during the 1960s. Several authors and critics who have detailed television's history have attributed those famous words to Newton R. Minow, FCC Commissioner during the Kennedy administration. James L. Baughman and J. Fred MacDonald are two among many. (James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992]; J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* [Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1994]).

17. MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV*.


23. MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*.


25. MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*.


27. Ibid.
30. MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid, 158.
34. Ibid.
Chapter III

THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW

The Dick Van Dyke Show was among the first situation comedies of the new decade. It debuted on network television in October 1961, five months after FCC Chairman Newton Minow's "vast wasteland" speech attacking television.\(^1\) Critics had condemned the entire industry for the disappointing lack of imagination that had allowed imitative, mediocre programming to continue into the new decade.

There was the expectation that something had to be done to improve the offerings on television immediately following the speech. But the 1961-62 schedules had already been decided and sold since March, two months before Newton Minow spoke to industry executives. They could not be changed now. The new season again presented some programs that were terrible but fortunately for network officials other programs were good enough to defuse the criticism and The Dick Van Dyke Show was one of those programs.\(^2\)
The series represented the next developmental stage in the genre of the sitcom by showing the office scene in addition to the home life.\textsuperscript{3} It combined the vaudeville of the fifties sitcom with the refined charm that came to distinguish quality comedy in the seventies.\textsuperscript{4} The series was set in New York City as well as suburban New Rochelle featuring Rob Petrie who starred as the head comedy writer for \textit{The Alan Brady Show}, a popular comedy series based in New York. Episodes revolved around Rob, his wife Laura, their son Ritchie and co-writers Sally Rogers and Buddy Sorrell who were close friends of Rob and Laura. Much of the show's humor was at the expense of the balding Melvin Cooley, brother-in-law of Alan Brady and producer of the comedy hour. Rob and Laura's neighbors, Jerry and Millie Helper, were also regular cast members. Alan Brady was referred to in the show but appeared only occasionally.\textsuperscript{5}

The series presented situations that viewers could identify with. Its characters lived in a real middle-class town in which real people commuted to and from real jobs. Carl Reiner, the creator and producer of the show derived his scripts from his own experiences or the real-
life incidents of his cast members. The program replaced the interchangeable blandness of the programs of the 1950s with a generally real view of the successful middle-class life of the early sixties.\textsuperscript{6} Though the truth was stretched on this show, it wasn't abandoned. The everyday life of Robert Petrie and his sitcom family was quite plausible.\textsuperscript{7}

The Dick Van Dyke Show defined the sitcom for the Kennedy era just as surely as I Love Lucy had defined it for the Eisenhower era. The show was described as symbolizing the early sixties capturing the feeling and sense of the Kennedy years.\textsuperscript{8} The show's connection to the Kennedy clan extended to President Kennedy's father Joseph P. Kennedy who had financed the program's original pilot.\textsuperscript{9}

It was still a family sitcom with the house in the suburbs, the nice-looking wife, the adorable kid and the friendly neighbors. But the difference was that Robert and Laura Petrie were television's first modern couple - intelligent, liberal, upwardly mobile. Laura was Rob's partner and enjoyed a more equal relationship than
situation comedies had ever seen. Although still a housewife, she was hip, witty and sexy.\textsuperscript{10}

Though Laura could not combine a career with being a wife and mother, Carl Reiner wanted the character of Laura Petrie to be a little better than female characters on previous sitcoms. She was Rob's worthy adversary and had a high level of intelligence. Mary Tyler Moore, the actress who played the character of Laura Petrie, said she wanted to establish Laura as a woman who was liberated enough with her own point of view and who could have a good fight with her husband, if necessary. But that was about how liberated Laura was allowed to get.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to imbuing Laura with a sparkling personality in contrast to the shows of the 1950s, Mary Tyler Moore did her bit for the prefeminist movement that was yet to happen during the 1960s and that would lead to the feminist revolution in the latter half of the decade. Before Laura Petrie, television housewives did their housework in a dress and high heels. Moore suggested to Carl Reiner that she should wear pants when vacuuming the rug.\textsuperscript{12} Reiner agreed and the capri slacks she wore on the
show set a fashion trend and became a Laura Petrie trademark.\textsuperscript{13}

In its first year, \textit{The Dick Van Dyke Show} received disappointing ratings because CBS president Jim Aubrey, who did not have faith in the program's success, had given the program a very poor time slot. In those days, sponsors were more powerful than the networks. Sheldon Leonard, who had produced the pilot for the series, worked very hard to convince Proctor and Gamble and General Foods, two very powerful sponsors, that the program had merit. The sponsors had forced the program on CBS and their huge advertising budget ensured that it would become a weekly series.

When the program failed to find its audience after changing the time slot in midseason, the sponsors withdrew their support and the series was cancelled. It was renewed the following season because Sheldon Leonard, executive producer of the series refused to give up. He worked hard to convince Proctor and Gamble to back the show and found an additional sponsor after Proctor and Gamble eventually agreed to offer half its support. The sponsors once again forced CBS to renew the program but
the network remained skeptical. Convinced that the program did not appeal to viewers, CBS did a survey that indicated most women wore a dress at home. A reluctant Mary Tyler Moore was forced to change into a dress for housework, but viewers complained to say that they liked her better in pants. CBS reached a compromise and allowed Moore to wear slacks in one scene of her choice in every show.  

The program went on to become extremely popular and won several Emmy nominations. In its five-year run, the show was never cut of the top 20. Although the series acknowledged the intelligence of women in its character of Laura, the program's updated housewife, the messages it brought to the viewers were sexist. Women were encouraged to choose marriage versus career. There was no question that men were breadwinners and women homemakers. Laura was basically at ease with herself as a housewife and contributed to meaningful conversations and matters beyond the household but she was dependent and insecure as an independent person. Whenever she tried to accomplish something on her own, her husband would become tense and uncomfortable. Although outwardly supportive,
he would secretly hope that things would not work out for
her so she could continue to be a full-time wife and
mother.16 The conclusion that Laura reached in all such
instances was that she would rather stay home and look
after her little family than struggle with the tension of
a career. After all, she had willingly given up her
career as a dancer when she married Robert Petrie, a
sergeant in the Army.

In one of the first season's shows, Rob and Laura
invited their friends and Rob's co-workers to their home
for a party where everyone sang and danced, including
Laura. Her performance impressed Mel Cooley, the producer
of The Alan Brady Show for which Rob wrote comedy
sketches. He offered Laura a dancing role to fill in for
someone. But he did not ask her directly -- because Rob
was Laura's husband and head of the household he asked
Rob to think it over first and to ask Laura only if he
approved of her dancing professionally. Buddy Sorrell,
one of the two writers who worked with Rob, advised him
not to mention the offer to Laura because she would jump
at it and neglect the house. Being the honest person that
he was, Rob decided to tell Laura, confident that she
would merely feel flattered by it and then turn it down. When she accepted, he was quite upset and surprised. He always vented his frustrations to his co-workers and Buddy told him that since he had made the mistake of telling her he should have taken her skiing over the weekend so she would break her leg and not be able to dance. For the next few weeks, Laura rehearsed all day and had no time to keep house or cook dinner.  

Rob went crazy during this time and the situations presented to the viewers clearly evoked sympathy for Rob who after a hard day at work unsuccessfully tried to cook dinner for himself and his son. It also glorified the homemaker’s role presenting it as an essential element in the functioning of a family. In one scene, their son was shown eating a banana for dinner after rejecting the meal his father had attempted to cook saying he only liked his mother’s cooking. After viewing the starving child, the frazzled husband, and the domestic scene turned upside down, viewers were apparently quite satisfied when Laura turned down the offer for a permanent position. The conclusion of the episode had her making that decision and portrayed her sense of relief. She told Rob, "I
always wondered if I could make it again as a dancer but I don't want to be a dancer, I want to be your wife." 

Laura's decision was very much in the spirit of the times. Theodore Sorensen has written that one of Jacqueline Kennedy's contributions to the Kennedy era was providing a peaceful home for her husband and a normal life for her children. She had regarded that as her most important role. 

Throughout its five-year run, the series toyed with the idea of Laura Petrie exploring her talents outside of her homemaker role. And each time she tried to do something, it never worked out. In an episode aired in December 1965, Laura wrote a story for children to go along with some sketches she had received. Rob assumed she would ask him for his help and was very surprised when she completed the story after two hours. He offered to review it for her since he was the professional writer, instead he changed the story so much that he unwittingly destroyed hers. A very upset Laura managed to rewrite her story and later both of Rob's co-workers, Buddy Sorrell and Sally Rogers concluded that Laura's story was better. The petulant Rob then took both
versions to a publisher who also liked Laura's story better. Unable to accept that she could be a better writer than himself, Rob became extremely defensive. It turned out in the end that Laura had derived that story from one that she had heard when she was a child, therefore, it could not be published. Her talent was explained away to the viewer as plagiarism. 21

Each time that Laura accepted her dependence on Rob things were different. And acceptance meant embracing the wife/mother role and defending her place in the household. If she felt threatened for example when Rob worked with a beautiful woman it was justifiable for her to become unreasonably jealous. When Rob had to work late several nights with Miss Blake, a beautiful television star, Laura became worried. Their friends and neighbors Jerry and Millie Helper did not help the situation. Instead Jerry insinuated that Rob might be attracted to the movie star causing Laura to become paranoid. Insecurity finally drove Laura to visit the hotel suite one night where she was embarrassed and shame-faced to find Rob's co-workers as well as the show's producer, Mel
Cooley, also working in the hotel suite with Rob and the television star. \textsuperscript{22}

Sentiments of jealousy and insecurity within her flattered Rob and endeared her to him even when she became unreasonable, whereas sentiments of independence such as the time he discovered her private checking account left him feeling very threatened. When Rob came upon Laura's secret bank account by accident, he became very puzzled. After discussing the issue with Jerry Helper as well as his co-workers, Rob concluded that his wife was saving the money to buy him a projector for his birthday. When he received only a shirt for his birthday, he was once again very surprised. The following night, unable to contain himself any longer, he wanted to know why she needed her own money. Laura became very upset that he had discovered her secret and after much sobbing and quivering, she finally told him that the money was indeed for him. She had planned to buy him a sports car sometime in the future. \textsuperscript{23} The episode appeared to be tackling the issue of a married woman's need for economic independence and its effect on men but the conclusion was disappointing. She may have controlled funds he had no
knowledge about but in the end it was still for his benefit.

Throughout the duration of the series the role of the housewife as embodied by Laura Petrie was presented as the ideal to strive for. It was a flattering portrayal of an intelligent, attractive young woman who had willingly given up her career as a dancer and was comfortable with her suburban lifestyle. Though she was capable of accomplishing a great deal when the opportunity presented itself, she always chose to give everything up in favor of her role as keeper of the house.

The program acknowledged the existence of the single career woman in the character of Sally Rogers, Rob's co-worker at The Alan Brady Show. But it portrayed Sally as a man-hungry staff writer desperate for a husband. There was too much of a fuss made over Sally's single status and in virtually every episode there was some remark from Sally to the effect that she wanted to meet men. Her remarks, "if he's single, he's my type"24 or "for a woman who's desperate to be married I could put an ad in the hobo news"25 said it all. Even in the final episode aired
in May 1966 which was a dream of Rob's, had Sally was portrayed as so desperate for a man that pointing to the most wanted criminals she told the sheriff: "don't forget, when you catch them, I want that one and that one and that one."26

In one episode Laura asked Rob why Sally had never been married and he told her it was because she came on too strong with her jokes and scared guys off. Laura decided to introduce Sally to her cousin, a lab technician, and just as Rob had predicted, Sally made jokes all night long while Laura's cousin said very little. The next day at work Sally was very upset with herself because she felt she had ruined her chances at a relationship because of her aggressive personality.27 Such a portrayal sent an implicit message to female viewers to be less assertive, to talk less and to maintain a demure profile in order to be attractive to men.

Sally's life as a single woman was the subject of many plots. In one episode Sally was shown entering her apartment alone on her birthday with mournful music playing in the background. Rob had told Laura earlier
that day "when a woman is single after a certain age every birthday becomes a milestone, and every milestone becomes a millstone." Sally was very depressed and refused to be cheered up by her friends until an old high school male friend stopped in to have dinner with her.28

Laura's neighbor Millie Helper was the third regular female cast member on the series. She was shrill and hyperemotional and functioned as a sidekick and sounding board for Laura. By contrast with Millie's personality Laura appeared calm and reasonable.29 Her portrayal of the neighbor and best friend was very similar to 1950s sitcoms of the bored housewife who had too much time on her hands and not enough substance to her conversation. Some of the episodes featuring Millie were reminiscent of *I Love Lucy* the favorite sitcom of the 1950s where the lead character Lucy Ricardo became involved in many zany episodes with her neighbor and best friend Ethel Mertz.

In the episode entitled "Long Night's Journey Into Day" Laura and Millie were portrayed as nervous and childlike and in need of protection in the absence of their husbands. The Helpers and the Petries had planned to go off on a fishing trip. Laura became ill with a cold
and couldn't go. Millie asked her to stack tin cans by the door, gave her a burglar beeper and advised her not to take a shower. This served to frighten Laura who kept hearing noises and became very tense. Later, Millie decided to return home on the train and entered the house with a spare key while Laura was in the shower. They frightened each other and what followed was total chaos. Both women were unable to sleep and turned on all the lights, the TV and the radio. Later, the power went off at the same time Rob was returning home because he too had developed a cold. He tripped over the furniture causing the two women to think there was a burglar in the house. The episode left the clear impression in the mind of the viewer that it was essential for a woman to have a man around the house to protect her.

The portrayal of women as children went hand in hand with a lack of respect for them. The language used to refer to the women in several episodes illustrates the fact that women were treated like children and were accorded very little respect. Buddy Sorrell, Rob's co-writer on the show was responsible for most of the
wisecracks regarding his wife, who was rarely portrayed on the program, and other women.

In "Coast to Coast Big Mouth" Laura was tricked by a game show host into accidentally revealing that Rob's boss Alan Brady was bald. At work the following morning Buddy said to Rob, "What else did you do to Laura? After you kicked her and hit her and yelled at her?" When Sally asked where Laura was Buddy replied, "She's at the Smithsonian, they're making a statue of her mouth." When Rob found out that Laura had come in to apologize to Alan Brady he told her that it was a man's place to take the blame and that he (Rob) was responsible for her.31

When Laura wanted to become a dancer on The Alan Brady Show Buddy told Rob "one rip of smoke and they're ready to bust out of the stable."32 There were also others guests on the series who referred to women as they would to children. In one episode Rob wanted to use an ugly dog for a show. He and Laura took the dog to a groomer who told them it would take several hours to get the dog ready. He suggested to Rob to get a haircut and told Laura, "Go with him, and if you're a good girl, they'll give you a balloon."33 Other episodes had Buddy's
brother Blackie referring to Laura as "cute little wife you have there"\(^{34}\) the game show host calling her "this little lady"\(^{35}\) Laura asking Rob for twenty dollars and Rob asking her what she had done with the twenty dollars he had given her the day before.\(^{36}\)

Sexism was also evident in the series. When Rob wanted to report a flying saucer he asked for a scientist. When the woman who answered the phone told him she was a scientist he asked for a man scientist.\(^{37}\) When Buddy heard that Laura had asked Rob not to fight in a boxing match during his army days he said "looks like Laura was wearing the pants in the family before there was any family to wear the pants in."\(^{38}\) Or his remark to Sally, "you're too good a nag to be single."\(^{39}\) And while Rob waited for a publisher to decide whose story was better Laura appeased her husband with, "No matter what happens, you are still the best writer in the family."\(^{40}\) And then there were the women of the Ladies Club who gushed over Rob when he ran for councilman.\(^{41}\) They asked him questions about his height and other trivia ignoring his intelligent opponent who was well-informed about the issues.
The *Dick Van Dyke Show* in general confirmed the viewpoint that producers, directors and others in charge of programming were generally conservative in their viewpoints. And that meant that it was more obligatory for women than men to be married. The one single, unmarried woman portrayed on the show was presented as middle-aged and unattractive. She was also assertive and aggressive and was the career woman Laura wisely chose not to be.42

The show was realistic enough for viewers to identify with but it was not reality. It may be argued that entertainment television was intended for escapist fun but the fact that viewers identified with the program was evident in the fuss made over Mary Tyler Moore's wardrobe. The world of the Petries appeared very real because the characters portrayed the world of television and poked fun at it.

In one episode, a TV weather girl from Rob's hometown wanted to audition for *The Alan Brady Show* making Laura very jealous. Rob told her she sounded "exactly like one of those wives in a situation comedy."43 Here was a fictional writer in a situation
comedy making fun of a sitcom very much like the one he was acting in. This made it easier for the viewer to relate to the television family as reality. The images presented cleverly incorporated real-life concerns that were mildly exaggerated to provide comic relief. A sense of identification with the characters facilitated the acceptance of many implicit messages from the program dictating the type of lifestyle that was approved as the American ideal. And that ideal did not include the married career woman, the divorced woman or the African-American woman. Its portrayal of the one single, professional career woman clearly advocated that it was a choice that should be avoided in favor of the housewife's role.

This sitcom was of early 1960s vintage with its sophisticated dialogue and its comedy was similar to the plots of I Love Lucy. The program tried to identify with the rhetoric of liberalism, progress, youth and energy that had heralded the decade. But as far as the portrayals of women were concerned the series, like the Kennedy administration, was a triumph of image over substance.
NOTES


14. Ibid.

15. Mitz: *The Great TV Sitcom Book*.


18. Ibid.

19. Theodore (Ted) Sorensen was President John F. Kennedy's speechwriter. His major contribution to Kennedy's inaugural speech was "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

20. Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*.


29. Marc, Comic Visions: *Television Comedy and American Culture*.


39. Ibid.


42. Marc, Comic Visions: *Television Comedy and American Culture*.

Chapter IV

BEWITCHED

_Bewitched_ made its debut during a period when several significant events that now define the sixties as a decade of change were in process. The series went on the air a year after Betty Friedan's publication of _The Feminine Mystique_, an attack against the myth that justified a woman's inferior status in society. Friedan's work set the stage for a revival of feminism during the later years of the decade. The middle to late sixties were an era of tension and turbulence and saw the questioning of the status quo, the mobilization of the women's movement with the formation of the National Organization of Women, the sexual liberation of women and the emergence of the counter-culture in the United States.

During its eight-year run reality saw the assassinations of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., race rioting and the pain and anger of the Vietnam War.\(^1\) Into such a polarized

76
climate and cultural ambiguity the sitcom, which is committed to harmony, went into a period of "deep escapism."2

*Bewitched* was one of those escapist fantasies that became an instant hit. It rated number two among all programs on the air in its first season and remained in the top ten for several seasons after that. It was about a beautiful witch named Samantha and her mortal husband, Darrin Stephens, an advertising executive at McMann and Tate, a New York agency.

Slim, attractive and blonde, this powerful witch made the decision to give up her supernatural powers to become a normal housewife in a Connecticut suburb. Samantha's mother Endora, Darrin's boss Larry Tate and his wife Louise, the Stephens' nosy neighbor Gladys Kravitz and her husband Abner were included in the regular cast of characters for the series. Daughter Tabitha who was born two years later was featured regularly after that period and son Adam was shown only in the final season in the early seventies. Darrin's parents, Frank and Phyllis Stephens, and Samantha's
supernatural relatives also appeared as guests on the show.³

The program's blend of fantasy and reality was so believable that viewers could identify with the issues presented. Like other sitcoms of the 1950s and early 1960s, the reality presented on the series was an idealized version of middle-class America featuring a nuclear family with a non-working wife. Although this wife was a witch, her husband Darrin was the only mortal who was aware of this fact. In appearance and behavior, she was indistinguishable from any normal housewife. She used witchcraft only to set things right when one of her supernatural relatives interfered with their mortal world or to help Darrin when he was in a jam.

Most of the havoc on the show was caused by Samantha's mother, Endora, who took great delight in tormenting her mortal son-in-law. Mother-in-law jokes were common during the 1960s and mothers-in-law were likened to witches because they undermined the authority of their sons-in-law. In the case of Darrin, his mother-in-law was really a witch earning for him the sympathy of the viewer and a distaste for the powerful woman who
flaunted her power. In contrast to her mother whose independence was the 'evil' in the story, Samantha defined herself by making herself dependent on Darrin. The sitcom advocated the behavior of Samantha who controlled her powers versus the actions of her mother whose powers were unchecked. Her flattering portrayal embodied the characteristics desirable in a sixties wife -- namely to give up her independence and desire for a career once she was married. Thus, Samantha was shown as intelligent, attractive and sensible because she was happy with her decision to devote her life to her husband, children and her suburban home.

The celebration of domesticity was intended by the advertisers to attract the housewives to their products. The theme of the intelligent wife that began with The Dick Van Dyke Show continued in the sitcom world to woo the housewife as consumer. Programs depicted the homemaker as powerful in her sphere and reduced the power of the sitcom Dad. This was evident in the character of Darrin, a successful advertising executive, who was no match for his wife's relatives. They often ridiculed him over his protests and turned him into every living
creature imaginable. Samantha was portrayed as the housewife who controlled her only sphere of influence -- the household. She was the embodiment of the perfect housewife because the television world was not ready for women with power. And in that role, she willingly curbed her powers to maintain her husband's ego as the head of the household.

*Bewitched* made its debut with "I, Darrin, Take This Witch, Samantha," on September 17, 1964. Samantha informed her husband after their marriage that she was a witch who could make magical things happen with a twitch of her nose. When she finally succeeded in convincing him, a very disturbed Darrin went to the local bar and got drunk. He informed the bartender that his wife was a witch. The sympathetic man told Darrin, "So is my wife."6

It was the age-old association of women with witches that was continued throughout the sixties as more and more women demanded equal rights. After Darrin adjusted to the idea that his wife had supernatural powers, he told her that she could not use her powers and would have to learn to cook and keep house. She promised to be a good wife, reinforcing in the very first episode of the
show, the societal expectation of women as homemakers. Women could not have any power and if they did, they could not use it, that was the prerogative of men. If they did, it would disturb the balance in the marriage just as witchcraft would disturb the balance in society.

This idea was reinforced repeatedly in subsequent episodes. When Endora saw Samantha cooking from a recipe book instead of zapping up her dinners, she was furious. "Why do you want to change yourself?" she asked her daughter, "You are what you are." Samantha's reply to this was, "I am adjusting to life as a mortal." Married women in the sixties also adjusted to life as wives and homemakers. Just as Samantha had to give up her powers, women had to give up their careers. Most of them did not utilize their education and became instead helpmates to their husbands. They devoted themselves to keeping house and furthering their husband's career.

Tuchman, Butler and Paisley and others have observed in their research that women in the media were not only portrayed as secondary to men, but also in a relational context. The roles of women without husbands were portrayed negatively. 8 Bewitched did its part in such a
portrayal. Once Samantha took 10-year-old Marshall Burns under her wing because his widowed mother was overprotective and would not let him play baseball. Samantha encouraged him to play in Little League games and used witchcraft to help him gain confidence. When his furious mother found out that her son had run away, Darrin and Samantha drove her to the game to find Marshall. When she met the coach who offered to help Marshall, she realized how happy her son was to be a valuable member of the team.9

Marshall's mother was portrayed on the program as a woman who was unable to attend to some of her son's needs in the absence of her husband. Her life and her son's life were not seen as normal. Marshall would run away from home because she would not allow him to do the things boys were supposed to do. The entry of the coach, a male figure, into their lives indicated that things would work out well for them from that point on.

Women always had to be engaged, married, or at least have a romantic interest. If they did not fit into those categories, they were portrayed as problematic. A few Bewitched episodes portrayed Darrin's former girlfriend
Sheila Sommers as a snob who constantly upstaged Samantha and tried to get Darrin interested in her. In such cases the storyline built up to a justification for Samantha to use witchcraft to get even with Sheila's unprovoked verbal attacks. The unattached woman was always the villain and the suburban wife who conformed was always the heroine.¹⁰

Even when they were not villains, single women were automatically suspect. In one episode aired in 1966 Endora changed Darrin's client Toni Devlin, who was the vice-president of her company, into a cat because she was an unattached female presumably out to woo Darrin away from Samantha.¹¹ In a similar episode aired three years later, Samantha's cousin Serena changed one of Darrin's female clients, an attractive, single woman into a monkey for the same reason.¹²

Such assumptions conveyed the impression that the lives of single women were so incomplete without men that they would even try to steal someone else's husband. The voices and pictures of suburbia transmitted into people's living rooms through the mythical images of television
said that being single for a woman was an undesirable, desperate state.

Another theme that received much play was the notion of bored, crazy women who imagined things and needed psychiatric help. Gladys Kravitz, the Stephens' next door neighbor, was typecast in that role throughout the series. In some episodes, Samantha's Aunt Clara, Darrin's mother Phyllis Stephens, and Louise Tate, the wife of Darrin's boss Larry Tate, also played the role of women not deemed to be in total possession of their mental faculties.

The audience was introduced to Gladys Kravitz when Samantha and her mother stopped by to look at the house Darrin had selected. Kravitz, who lived in the house next door, became the Stephens' neighbor when they moved into the neighborhood. Unfortunately for Gladys Kravitz, she witnessed many supernatural occurrences at the Stephens household because of Samantha and her supernatural relatives. These were rendered unbelievable because witches were not in the realm of reality. Her husband thought she was crazy and she became known as the
busybody whose only occupation in life seemed to be to spy on her neighbors.

During their visit to the new house, Samantha and her mother used witchcraft to decorate the house and the yard just to see what it would look like. When Gladys Kravitz looked out of her window and saw a lawn and shrubbery, she dragged her husband Abner to the window to look. By the time he agreed to do so, Samantha had already twitched the landscaping out of existence causing Abner to think his wife had imagined everything. Her curiosity further aroused, Gladys ran over to peek at the interior of the house and saw beautiful furniture and drapery. By the time she knocked on the door and went inside, it was gone.13 The negative portrayal of Gladys Kravitz was a consistent feature of the show throughout its duration. It provided comic relief while sending a message to viewers that women were meddling busybodies with too much time on their hands in suburbia.

Samantha used witchcraft generally to resolve problems caused by her mother's supernatural powers. Later she also had to deal with her daughter Tabitha's indiscriminate use of witchcraft. After a business lunch
with Darrin and his client in Chicago, Samantha called her Aunt Clara who was babysitting and found out that Tabitha had changed her toy monkey into a real one. She used her witchcraft to get home immediately and while she was there, Louise stopped by to check in on Tabitha and the babysitter. Confusion followed when Louise told her husband Larry Tate that Samantha was not in Chicago.

When the client called Larry to offer him the account Larry apologized for Samantha's absence. Wives were very important in their husband's careers and Darrin's client had been very impressed with Samantha. When Larry told him that Samantha was not in Chicago, he refused to deal with the agency assuming that Darrin had brought another woman to the luncheon. The misunderstanding was eventually cleared up but the victim in this episode was Louise Tate, who was forced by her husband to see a psychiatrist. It was the same theme of women imagining things that did not happen. The audience knew that Louise Tate had seen Samantha in her home just as the audience knew that Gladys Kravitz did not imagine anything. Apparently women of that period suffered a great deal of mental anxiety and depression probably due
to their lack of fulfillment as human beings. Men, however, were always quick to translate these symptoms into mental weakness.

In a different episode Darrin's mother Phyllis Stephens left her husband and arrived at Darrin and Samantha's house with her bags. Samantha's Aunt Clara, whose powers of witchcraft were failing, happened to visit at the same time. Clara's spells caused much confusion in the Stephens household because she had difficulty reversing them. During Phyllis Stevens' visit Samantha's voice was mistakenly thrown out of synch by Clara and her face developed green stripes as a reaction to the witch doctor's medicine. When Frank Stephens came to take his wife home, he readily believed that his wife had imagined the things she had seen and took her to see a doctor.15

Abner Kravitz, Frank Stephens and Larry Tate were examples of husbands during that period of time who believed that their wives had overactive imaginations and needed psychiatric help. The psychiatrists themselves were all male and were equally biased into believing that women were weak. Louise Tate did not have the confidence
to believe in what she had witnessed, and allowed her husband to tell her that she had imagined Samantha's presence. Samantha later used her look-alike cousin Serena to reassure Louise that she did not need psychiatric help. Phyllis Stephens also felt sure she had been hallucinating, especially since everything was restored to normal by the time her husband arrived. Her husband took her to the doctor for a check-up. Abner Kravitz always kept his wife's medicine ready and he forced her to take it each time she witnessed something strange next door.

Many episodes advocated the woman as helpmate role. Not only did she have to keep the house in order, the suburban woman also considered it her duty to advance her husband's career. At the home of Darrin's client where the Stephens were dinner guests, Samantha twitched a canape in the face of the client's daughter because the young woman was rude and critical of Samantha's dress and appearance. The enraged client refused to give his business to the agency and an angry Darrin accused Samantha of not being a helpful mate. The implied message urged that women did not have the freedom to
react as they pleased. They had to restrain themselves and when they failed to do so the consequences were negative.

When a prospective client, a dinner guest at the Stephens' home, flirted aggressively with Samantha she changed him into a dog. After the party, Darrin found out what had become of his client and he became furious with Samantha accusing her of overreacting. His only concern was that he would lose his account. When she told him she did it to protect herself, he thought she was exaggerating and said, "you are only a wife, he is an important client."17

Samantha's powers were portrayed as problematic in several episodes. In a two-part episode, an executive assistant of one of Darrin's clients asked a private detective to investigate Darrin's home life before deciding to do business with him. The young executive was interested in a wholesome image, and the way Darrin's wife conducted herself would be the determining factor in awarding the account to the agency. The detective, Charlie Leach, after spying on Samantha extensively, concluded that she was a witch and blackmailed her to
make him rich. Later Samantha set things right by putting a spell on the ambitious assistant who admitted to his underhanded methods. The client fired his assistant, apologized to Darrin and Samantha and awarded Darrin the account.\textsuperscript{18}

Again, the show reinforced the notion that the conduct of the wife was an important element in the husband's chance for success. And one of the requirements of good conduct for women was to keep their power restrained. Darrin had asked Samantha never to use her powers even if such use could make her life easier. It illustrated the negative consequences of her independent behavior in defiance of Darrins's orders that caused the spying Leach to blackmail her.

Sometimes just the knowledge that a woman had power could cause a man to lose his confidence. When Darrin forbade Samantha to attend her cousin's wedding in Egypt, Endora threatened to make his life miserable but did not carry out her threat. Darrin became nervous and clumsy at work and when he started making crucial mistakes Larry hired an assistant to help him. The man happened to be unscrupulous and did his best to sabotage Darrin's
presentations causing Darrin to think that Endora had used witchcraft to cause him problems. Thus women could be blamed even when they did not use their powers because they could cause men to work against themselves.\textsuperscript{19}

As a contrast to the suburban lifestyle of the housewife embodied in the character of Samantha, the alternative culture was reflected in the character of Serena, Samantha's cousin. While Samantha was portrayed as the noble ideal, Serena was portrayed as silly and impractical. The character of Serena was portrayed as a chaotic female force causing trouble for serious businessmen like Darrin Stephens and Larry Tate. Unlike the conservative Samantha, Serena was a free spirit who wore mini skirts, lovebeads and sandals and chanted for peace and love.\textsuperscript{20}

In "Hippie, Hippie, Hooray," Serena dressed as a hippie and pretended to be Samantha as she sang rock and roll. When she was arrested at a "love-in," she caused much embarrassment to the conservative Darrin and Samantha. The counter-culture was thus ridiculed as deviant and devoid of purpose because a "love-in" did not deal with any real issues.\textsuperscript{21}
The character of Serena was used to portray the attitude of the times according to William Asher who produced and directed most of the show's episodes. She was always something Samantha could not be in her portrayal of the perfect suburban housewife. Asher's wife Elizabeth Montgomery, the star of the show who played the characters of both Serena and Samantha on the show, admitted that when she wanted to have fun or do something outrageous she would do it as the dark-haired, mini-skirted Serena who became her alter ego. She could be a flirt or a hippie or a kooky character.22

The success of Bewitched spawned other fantasy shows like The Flying Nun, Nanny and the Professor and I Dream of Jeannie. In all these shows, "normal"-looking female characters had magical powers and were told by the men in their lives to keep those powers confined to the private sphere or not to use them at all. Whenever women used their powers in the public arena they turned things upside down and made the men look incompetent.23

Most people watch situation comedies for escapist fun and they don't look for messages. However, the makers of television shows, like other media, inhabit the same
culture and the messages get into the show, sometimes on a conscious level, but mostly subconsciously. Barbara Avedon, a writer for Bewitched, acknowledged that there usually was a message in every script of Bewitched that she worked on. She said, "the Stephenses marriage may have even been the basic metaphor for the male-female relationship of the 1960s -- when women really kept their own strengths hidden within the prescribed boundaries of marriage." An assistant director of Bewitched, Marvin Miller, said the messages on Bewitched were clear. He felt that television comedy was a great medium to get things across.

Whether they meant to or not, those involved with the show portrayed Samantha's character as conforming; living the role of the suburban housewife and giving expression to tradition. Bewitched succeeded in engaging the television audience and did its part in reflecting reality but its implicit message was that the existing order could not be disturbed. Avedon said Samantha voluntarily chose her lifestyle because of her love for Darrin. She likened Darrin to the voice of society. Samantha held her powers back within her relationship
with Darrin because she wanted to be married to him regardless of what she had to give up. 26

In her role as housewife, Samantha was a representation of the true values in life. Material gains meant nothing to her because she could have anything she wanted through witchcraft. 27 She also represented all the educated women of the period who voluntarily gave up their careers and lifestyles to adopt their husband's way of life. That is why Samantha was very upset when her father Maurice gave Darrin powers and used witchcraft to convince him to want power. Samantha was not ready for her husband to adapt to her way of life because she had accepted and internalized the fact that it was only natural for women to adapt. 28

And therein lies the hidden message imbibed subconsciously by the television audience. Educated women in the sixties in American society gave up their careers and adapted to their suburban lifestyles. Like Samantha, they really wanted to be married regardless of what they had to give up. However, what choices did they have? The voice of society, brought to them by the agency of the mass media from all different directions told them that
marriage and suburbia were the norm, single personhood and employment were deviant paths. Within this society, they had to conform to the norm if they wanted to be happy. Therefore, when Gallup took his poll of educated, suburban housewives, a majority of them seemed content with their lives. They told themselves that they chose this, no one forced them, but in reality they were listening to the implicit messages that made such a lifestyle seem normal.

Such major reinforcement of cultural values makes social change a slow and arduous process. Even the hurricane winds threatening change in the sixties were contained during that decade. In the tug of war between myth and reality, Bewitched and its cultural allies in the mass media had control of the magical, mass produced images that hypnotized consumers of media to slavishly conform to those images.
NOTES

1. Pilato, *The Bewitched Book*.


5. Ibid.

6. This was the first episode of the series which aired on ABC-TV on 9-17-64. (Danny Arnold and William Asher, "I, Darrin, Take This Witch, Samantha," in *Bewitched* [Hollywood: Columbia Pictures Television, 1964]).


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

Chapter V

I DREAM OF JEANNIE

_I Dream of Jeannie_ was another situation comedy involving the supernatural. It aired in the fall of 1965 a period during which the underground culture of the 1960s had surfaced to the beat of loud music advocating escapism through drugs. Male fantasy, which could have been achieved by taking psychedelic drugs, was the theme for this series. A beautiful, curvaceous genie called astronaut Tony Nelson 'master,' catered to his desires and disappeared inside her bottle when he ordered her to. Tony Nelson found the genie in the bottle on a desert island in the South Pacific. He had been forced to parachute onto the island while on a space mission for NASA. When he opened the bottle, a sexy genie dressed in a harem outfit emerged in a pink puff of smoke, proclaimed herself as his slave and gratefully pledged him eternal service in return for setting her free.
Born in 64 B.C., the beautiful, blonde 2,000-year-old genie named Jeannie was determined to dedicate her life to pleasing Tony Nelson. She could perform magic by placing her arms across her chest and blinking her eyes. She procured him a rescue helicopter, slunk back into her bottle and hid in his survival kit. When she emerged again she was at his home in Cocoa Beach, Florida where he ordered her to make herself scarce and refrain from using her magical powers.¹

While Tony was controlling his genie in sitcom kingdom, the world of the sixties was beginning to come apart. The Vietnam War escalated, African-Americans continued their fight for equality, the new feminists established the National Organization of Women in 1966 and Cosmopolitan magazine changed its focus to target the sexually active single woman.²

_I Dream of Jeannie_ featured the power of the genie as a symbol of the bottled up power of women that was threatening to erupt into the world. It was acknowledging the emancipation of young women whose financial independence and sexual freedom combined to make "a heady cocktail that began to fizz as the decade progressed."³
Whenever Jeannie escaped from her bottle, there was no
telling what damage she would do and what problems she
would cause her master or his co-workers at NASA. She was
always out of control and seemed to use her powers
indiscriminately. Like Jeannie, it was feared that the
young, independent 1960s woman would disturb the order of
society with its neat division of labor that gave
economic power to men and suburban confinement to women.

Whereas *Bewitched* cleverly incorporated fantasy into
a modern, suburban world and made its characters
believable, *I Dream of Jeannie* made no attempt to do so.
The series generally featured crazy, outlandish
situations reminiscent of the early years of comedy on
television in which rough play and knockabout methods
prevailed to get laughs. Episodes revolved around the
naive genie running around in her harem outfit getting
her master in and out of confusing situations. She knew
nothing of Tony's world because she had been locked in
her bottle for thousands of years. She was protective of
him and jealous of the women he associated with. She used
her powers to shield him from imagined harm causing chaos
which she eventually resolved by the end of the thirty minutes.

For the first three years, Tony and Jeannie had a platonic relationship and her existence was not known to the world. Later when he decided he was in love with her, Jeannie became known to his friends and associates and the pair were married in 1969, the final year of the series.  

Regular cast members on the program were Dr. Alfred Bellows, the base psychiatrist, his wife Amanda, Tony's girl-crazy buddy and fellow astronaut Roger Healey and General Winfield Schaeffer, Tony's commanding officer. Each episode had the suspicious Dr. Bellows convinced that Tony was suffering from delusions caused by his experiences in the space program. Roger Healey was Tony Nelson's sidekick and loyal friend and the only one among Tony's friends who was aware of Jeannie's existence. He was of great help to Tony in resolving situations caused by Jeannie's magic. Although the explanations offered were generally not very convincing, they were sufficient to get them out of trouble.
Jeannie erupted from her bottle on September 18, 1965 to begin her new life in Tony's suburban home in Cocoa Beach, Florida. Her newly gained freedom was symbolic of the independence of the new 1960s woman, but because she was part of the sitcom culture, there had to be a reinforcement of the status quo which saw the male as the head of the household. This was reflected in her subordinate status on the program with respect to Tony Nelson whom she referred to as 'master' at least ten times per episode. An important issue of the changing culture of the 1960s was the status of women who wanted equality with men and were becoming tired of being passive and dependent. Most programs airing on television during that period of time either ignored the changes or portrayed them in a negative manner. I Dream of Jeannie reinforced the status quo and reflected the emancipation of women negatively.

When the series began, Tony was engaged to Melissa, daughter of his commanding officer, General Wingard Stone. He invited them both to dinner at his house shortly after he had found his genie. This was the only episode featuring Melissa and General Stone who was later
replaced by General Schaeffer. Jeannie offered to cook dinner for them saying "cooking is woman's work." Melissa was portrayed as a dominant personality who wanted to make decisions regarding their married life together and expected Tony to be more ambitious. In contrast all Jeannie wanted to do was to serve Tony. She changed herself into an Asian cook to keep her identity a secret and served them a delicious dinner. Both Tony and Melissa began to have second thoughts about getting married and in the end, Melissa decided she was in love with her former boyfriend. A very relieved Tony went home to his slave Jeannie who would treat his every wish as her command.\(^7\)

Women were urged to keep their strong personalities in check and their powers hidden so they would not frighten the men away from them. The program repeatedly assured viewers that women could never be completely independent because they needed a man in their lives. Jeannie was portrayed as insanely jealous of every woman in Tony Nelson's life. She was a powerful woman with magical powers and she could blink herself anything she desired yet all she wanted in life was to be married to
Tony and to make him happy. That is why she changed herself into Bonnie Crenshaw, a former girlfriend of Tony's, who was in town for a visit. Although Bonnie was married, she was still a threat to the jealous Jeannie who thought this meeting might rekindle the past romance. Tony fully expected Jeannie to transform herself into Bonnie and much confusion arose when he grabbed and kissed the real Bonnie thinking it was Jeannie. Meanwhile, Bonnie's husband Moose encountered Jeannie and thought she was his wife. When Roger flirted with her Moose knocked him down. Finally after much slapstick, everything was resolved leaving the impression that women were incomplete without men and could only be happy when they had a boyfriend or husband they could call their own.

The theme of women plotting to snare or keep a man to themselves was repeated quite often in this program. In "The Yatch Murder Case," the daughter of Mr. Ferguson, a visiting official to NASA fell in love with Tony and told her rich father she wanted to marry him. Tony was invited to vacation with them in Nassau and Jeannie refused to go into her bottle because she wanted to
accompany him. She always entered and exited her bottle in a puff of smoke and eventually he tricked her into the vacuum cleaner and secured a piece of cloth over it. Confident he would not be bothered by her, he went on the cruise unaware that his maid would use the vacuum cleaner when she came to clean his house. Jeannie escaped and followed him to the yacht. They argued and Jeannie disappeared when she heard Ferguson and his daughter approaching. Ferguson wondered what had happened to the blonde woman Tony was talking to and felt sure she had been pushed overboard. Tony landed in jail and eventually the case was dropped when Jeannie reappeared. Jeannie won this round when Tony promised never to see Miss Ferguson again.9

Jealousy as a theme continued for all five years of the series. Mostly it was Jeannie who was jealous of any woman Tony came in contact with. But after they were married, Jeannie's twin sister, also a genie, was the jealous one. She wanted Tony for herself and was furious at her sister for marrying him. She came to their town, turned her dark hair to blonde to look like Jeannie and flirted with Bif, the handsome new astronaut NASA had
just hired. It was another chaotic episode fraught with mistaken identities and misunderstandings deliberately created by Jeannie's sister. As if the power of one genie on the show was not enough to turn things upside down, this episode gave a double dose of slapstick which served no real purpose except to once again portray women as man-hungry, man-crazy and insanely jealous.10

The clearest message throughout the duration of the series was that Jeannie's powers were a problem and led to confusing situations because she was not familiar with Tony's world. Her existence could not be revealed because genies did not exist in the mortal world. Similarly powerful women did not exist in a man's world. If they did they would cause confusion and disturb society. It was much easier for the program to accept the sexual freedom of the new young woman than her financial independence which gave her real economic power and put her in direct competition with her male counterpart. By the end of the decade the Pill had sexually liberated the female but it was also welcomed by the male because it made it more difficult for a woman to say no.11
For a character like Roger on the program there just had to be an episode to explore that angle. After Tony and Jeannie got married in 1969, the last year the series aired, both of them separately decided to find him the 'perfect' girl. Jeannie consulted a computer dating service and Tony asked General Schaeffer who recommended his niece describing her as "quiet, demure, and old-fashioned." In reality she was quite the opposite -- a modern, liberated young woman who enjoyed her independence and did not wish to correct her uncle's impression of her. She and Roger liked each other and the episode revolved around Jeannie's efforts to persuade Roger to become interested in the woman she had brought along. She used her magic to keep one woman drugged and the other alert resulting in much confusion and chaos as usual. The conclusion was that Roger preferred General Schaeffer's niece, the liberated 1960s woman to the 'perfect' woman Jeannie had arranged for him to meet.\textsuperscript{12}

The episode ended with a strange twist. Eager to get Roger interested in her friend, Jeannie used her magic to place a moustache on General Schaeffer's niece. When Roger remarked on the moustache, the young woman walked
out in a huff because she had no idea what he was talking about. The moustache seemed to indicate that a woman's sexually liberated behavior was unfeminine. The makers of the program were hinting that they did not approve of such behavior. But when Roger finally turned to Jeannie's old-fashioned friend she replied, "I would really like to have a husband, but not that bad." The episode deserves credit for reflecting the reality that young, single women were no longer desperate for marriage although they still wanted it. At the same time the sitcom advocated that it did not approve of women playing around.

The changing scene was acknowledged in other episodes as well. In one episode, Tony became furious with Jeannie for wasting money and asked her to live within a budget. Like Darrin on Bewitched he did not want her to use her magic to provide for them. Not knowing how to save and eager to please him, she skimmed on groceries serving stale bread and a tiny piece of meat to a Russian guest and rented out part of the house to a young "hippie" couple. She even had the water and electricity turned off at a party honoring the foreign visitor. The story ended happily when a group of young
pot-smoking friends of Jeannie's "hippie" boarders arrived and sang songs in Russian to the delight of the visitor. The presence of hippies on the program mingling with senators and other establishment types was an effort to acknowledge the changing social scene of the sixties culture.\textsuperscript{13}

But it mainly illustrated Jeannie's inefficiency in household matters. The storyline built to a point where the viewer became exasperated with Jeannie because she did not know how to keep house. It detailed the important role an efficient housewife played in the life of a family thus implicitly reinforcing the status quo while reflecting the powerful woman who was inept at household tasks.

The feminist movement was gaining great momentum by the end of the decade which was when Tony married Jeannie on the program. Shortly after they were married Jeannie became a member of the Officers' Wives Association and Tony was extremely pleased that Jeannie was becoming accepted by the suburban wives. The women decided to have a contest in which the officer who was the most helpful and sympathetic toward his wife would win a trip for two
to Hawaii. Desperate for Tony to win, Jeannie was anxious to prove that her master was indeed the most helpful around the house. However Tony was out on a space mission the week that the committee was supposed to evaluate the men. Any husband who was out of town was to be automatically disqualified from entering the contest simply because he would not be around to be evaluated. This appeared unreasonable to Jeannie who was convinced that Tony should win so she zapped him out of his space flight while he was sleeping at least three times so he could be present when the women came in to check. She contrived to put an apron on him and had him set up to do several different household tasks.

Committee members who came in to evaluate Tony expected the impossible out of a man who not only had to work all day but had to help with all types of household chores. He also had to remain gentle, protective, and good-natured. If he traveled extensively on business he could not be the most sympathetic husband. The entire episode either missed the point of the women's movement or was a deliberate effort to discredit the movement so viewers would not sympathize with it. It was another
example of television programming reflecting change negatively.  

The portrayal of Amanda Bellows, the only other female regular on the series, was not very flattering either. While Jeannie was the nincompoop turning things upside down with her misguided magic, Amanda Bellows was an exaggerated example of the nagging wife and a busybody who had earned the reputation of being the town's biggest gossip. As Dr. Bellows told Roger when the two were planning a bachelor party for Tony, "I've been married for twenty-five years and the happiest moment was my bachelor party."

Tony did not want a bachelor party but Roger Healey was determined he would have one because Roger wanted any excuse to drink and flirt with the young girls on the base. To get Tony to attend they informed him that there was a meeting on the base and Tony asked Jeannie to go out with Amanda Bellows while he was busy. However Amanda became very suspicious when she discovered that General Schaeffer knew nothing of the meeting. She decided to find out if the men were having a wild party at the base. General Schaeffer, who thought he might have forgotten
the date of the meeting, summoned his entire staff at the base. When they arrived, the bachelor party was in full swing. Roger had managed to smuggle in plenty of swinging, flirtatious, giggly young women and the officials decided to join the fun.

Amanda Bellows also arrived at the base but not before Jeannie warned Tony that Amanda was on her way. What followed was total confusion as Tony and Roger grabbed all the young women and threw them in the closet to hide them. All the men at the party seemed to be afraid that Amanda Bellows would ruin their reputation if she found out what was really going on.16

The portrayal of Amanda Bellows was a reflection of women married to successful men. It gave the impression that the suburban wives were very strong and exercised great power in their sphere as homemakers, and as women who were politically active and informed citizens. They seemed very comfortable in their roles as wives and did not express any desire to do anything other than what they were doing -- taking care of household matters, PTA meetings, clubs and associations.
Amanda Bellows exercised control over her husband who was always afraid he may have done something to upset her -- like forgetting their anniversary or her birthday. She was portrayed as so domineering that her husband did not even have to have a reason to be afraid of her. After Jeannie's arrival in Cocoa Beach and the problems created by the indiscriminate use of her magical powers, Dr. Bellows had become very confused. Tony Nelson would try to explain all of the strange happenings as somehow related to the space program. When Jeannie became known as Tony Nelson's fiancee, Amanda Bellows invited her to lunch to get to know her better. When she mentioned she needed a new type of cream for her face, Jeannie used her magic to procure a jar of genie cream and presented her with it. After Jeannie had left, Mrs. Bellows applied the cream to her face and it turned youthful and pretty. When everyone at the base started to flirt with her she was flattered but couldn't understand why. Finally Tony saw her drop her badge and realized she was Mrs. Bellows. He guessed that Jeannie had something to do with the way Mrs. Bellows looked. He summoned her and in the meantime
with Roger's help he tried to prevent Mrs. Bellows from looking into a mirror.

The show detailed the harassment Amanda Bellows suffered at the hands of Tony and Roger as they pushed her around, locked her up, smashed all the mirrors in her house, even kissed her when Dr. Bellows came in pretending they were flirting with a young woman. In the meantime she screamed and protested all to no avail because no one could recognize her. Only Tony and Roger knew who she really was. In the end after many ridiculously unbelievable situations Jeannie arrived with an antidote that they smeared on her face. After she got her normal face back they tried to explain the entire episode as a secret project. They told her that they had to put the cream on her face without her knowledge. The furious Amanda Bellows confronted her sheepish husband who had no idea what she was talking about because he did not recognize her when she had the genie cream on and later when she questioned him about the treatment she had received her face had returned to normal. The befuddled Dr. Bellows, already very confused by Tony Nelson's strange behaviors, plaintively asked her, "But Amanda,
dear, what did I do?" And the smug Tony Nelson, relieved that Amanda's face was back to normal conspiratorially whispered to Bellows: "Don't worry, she'll forgive you." 17

The way Amanda Bellows was treated in this episode was not forgivable but it implied that women would forgive men no matter how shabbily they were treated. Like most other episodes this one was not believable either. Amanda Bellows was shown standing in front of a mirror when she applied the cream and after she had finished she turned away and the viewer saw her face change into that of a beautiful, young woman but she did not see herself. The program expected the viewer to believe that Amanda Bellows applied the cream to her face and then the rest of her makeup and just drove to the base without consulting a mirror. It did not even explain how she drove without glancing in her rearview mirror because if she had she would not have recognized herself.

Another ridiculous premise featuring Amanda Bellows was the time NASA officials engaged the services of an avant garde artist to decorate the home of Tony Nelson as a wedding present for the young couple. It was mostly a
criticism of the new techniques of art that had found acceptance during the decade. But it was also a criticism of Amanda Bellows' selection of the artist who got rid of all the furniture in the Nelson home and replaced it with the most unusual looking objects. The only thing he liked was a bed of nails that had just arrived as a wedding present from one of Jeannie's relatives. Amanda was in charge of the project and she gushed over the artist whose tastes were most unusual.

While the renovation was in progress, Tony and Jeannie were forbidden to enter so that it would be a surprise. But Jeannie had managed to get in there by magic and Tony had managed to sneak in dressed as a painter. Both of them hated the new decor and Tony had even tried to destroy the artist's work. When the interior was finally completed, Dr. Bellows and the others thought it was ghastly and decided they would redecorate it in a modern style before letting Tony and Jeannie see it. They showed the couple pictures from a catalog, Jeannie selected one and using her magic redecorated the entire house in the blink of an eye. When they re-entered a minute later the interior of the house
looked exactly like the picture in the catalog. Instead of questioning what they had seen before and what they were seeing now the entire group was relieved and everything ended happily. Again, it was not a believable premise.18

Thus the entire cast of characters on the program were repeatedly made to look stupid and foolish week after week for five years. The program featured the powerful space agency and the powerful men working in it. It also featured the sixties culture and touched upon social changes. But it was by no means an intelligent program and can be easily classified as pure escapism.

_I Dream of Jeannie_ was unlike other situation comedies in that it did not portray a nuclear family with a husband, wife and children as the ideal. Maybe it was once again reflecting the sixties culture in trying to say that the ideal was changing. It did, however, feature Dr. Alfred Bellows and his wife Amanda as a suburban couple but there were no children in this setting. The care of children had become an issue in the 1960s and some sitcoms preferred to avoid the issue. They continued to portray the powerful housewife and Amanda Bellows came
across as a domineering wife and town gossip who could be doing better things with her time such as raising children. The main characters were the bachelor and his slave genie whom he later married. The problems caused by Jeannie's magic did not change significantly throughout the series. She meant well but caused trouble anyway and continued to call him 'master' in private even after they were married.

The basic theme of most episodes on the series was that Jeannie's power was unsuited to the new world she had entered. Because she was not aware of the rules of Tony's mortal world, whatever she did was wrong. Jeannie may have had the power to make magical things happen but she did not know how to use that power wisely. She also felt like a failure as a wife thus counterbalancing the threat of her beauty and supernatural power to the housewife who may not otherwise be able to identify with her.

Not that there was any danger that a program like *I Dream of Jeannie* could cause viewers to take its messages seriously or to relate to it in any significant way. If one were to use Jeannie as a symbol of the 1960s woman
that was beginning to emerge after being bottled up for several years, one would conclude that she could not function effectively anymore. Jeannie not only messed things up in the real world she did not even know how to be a wife.

Although this thesis is only concerned with the portrayal of women on the program it is necessary to mention that portrayals of both men as well as women were unflattering. All the players acted as weak, silly, immature or overbearing and the only element that stood out in the entire series was chaos and confusion. And in that sense one could say that it resembled the society of the sixties. There were so many different things undergoing change in the culture of the 1960s that it had become a confused mosaic instead of a uniformly knit fabric of society. The cast of characters on I Dream of Jeannie was always so confused that no one ever knew what to do or the best way to do it. They just muddled along for their five-year run and were actually more popular in reruns providing nostalgic flavor to those who grew up during that period of time.
NOTES


16. Ibid.


Chapter VI
CONCLUSION

The three situation comedies discussed covered the entire decade of the 1960s. The earlier years of the decade were not much different from the fifties in that there was little of the experimental frenzy associated with the decade. Family life was stable and the fact that men were breadwinners and women homemakers was not questioned. But changes were already brewing in the society of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement with its sit-ins and Freedom Rides signalled the start of student radicalism in the U.S. The Berlin Wall went up and The Twist swept the world. The urban environment changed as low-income projects replaced slums and highway construction increased to make more room for cars. The changing environment led to ethnic tension, rising crime and inner city decay. Millions of white middle class urbanites fled to the suburbs and the musical West Side Story featuring gang warfare in New York became the hit
film of 1961. Later, women became active in the Civil Rights movement laying the groundwork for the feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

These events were largely ignored by the sitcom world. The only aspect of reality given prominence was the suburban lifestyle of up and coming young couples. Like their contemporaries on television *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* all featured middle-class, white suburbanites and the three leading ladies were married to successful, all-American men. The three women were also young, slim and attractive and they were all housewives. They did not question their role and truly believed it was what they wanted to do in life.

The changes of the sixties should have been reflected in situation comedies featuring the emancipation of women considering the developments that took place during the decade. The late sixties responded to the changing scene with only a few sitcoms like *Julia* and *That Girl* featuring young, single women living on their own. But most sitcoms still refused to acknowledge the presence of women who were making their mark outside the home. They had gained physical control over their own
fertility with new contraceptives, they were in the workforce in increasing numbers and many were involved in politics campaigning for civil rights and for an end to the Vietnam War. The changing culture acknowledged the liberation of women but that acknowledgment was not followed by equal treatment or equal wages. Television on the other hand assured women that they were liberated but it simply could not accept that women would leave the household. Therefore, they increased their power within the home.

As managers of the household, women were important to the medium as consumers of household products. Instead of featuring more heroines on television programs as independent, industry officials responded to the women's movement by reducing the power of the husband/father figure and portraying his wife as the preserver of his fragile ego. The ads conspired with the women to bring them household products that would cut the time required for housework setting them free for lunch but not for a full-time career. Women with supernatural powers were introduced into the land of sitcoms with Samantha the witch on Bewitched, a genie on I Dream of Jeannie and a
robot on *My Living Doll*. All these characters were powerful and did more than the average woman. All of them fell in love, were forbidden to use their powers, and tried to obey.⁴

Both Tony Nelson on *I Dream of Jeannie* and Darrin Stephens on *Bewitched* had glamorous, well-paid professions yet both felt threatened by wives who had powers leading to the assumption that female power was too dangerous to remain unchecked. There is the implication in these two programs that the worst thing that can happen to a man is for the world to know that he is married to a woman of power. Thus Jeannie had to hide in her bottle or turn herself into an ordinary, normal female when Tony Nelson had company.⁵ And Samantha had to be the perfect little housewife who cooked her dinner on the stove, cleaned the kitchen with her vacuum cleaner and bought food for her family in the station wagon. She used her incredible power not to make her own life easier but to help Darrin look good and to defend his ego.⁶

Although both men refused help both women often had to use their magic to get them out of jams. Because they had powers that the ordinary housewife lacked these women
were shown as inept at domestic tasks in order to make the housewives watching in their homes feel superior to them. When Samantha needed her house cleaned in an instant she actually did the housework and used her magic only to speed herself up when she had the power to just wave her hand like a magic wand and have it clean. 7 When Jeannie wanted to knit a sweater for her master from cashmere wool she conjured up a Tibetan goat rather than buy the wool. After much confusion created by the smelly goat Jeannie became depressed because she considered herself a failure as a wife. 8 Thus clever women were portrayed but they were brought down to the level where they would seem impractical and inefficient at household tasks. The implication was that even powerful women were happiest when they were successful in performing domestic chores.

Television emphasized to the housewife that the household sphere was hers to manage and one in which she made the decisions. While the career woman was secondary in a man's world the housewife was primary in her own world. Men allowed women to control this sphere and expected them to remain contented despite their
abilities. This division of the male and female worlds was much more pronounced in sitcom kingdom in the 1960s mainly because the ads targeted the woman as consumer.9

None of the sitcom husbands wanted their wives to work but the most sexist of them all was Darrin Stephens in Bewitched. During its eight-year run the question of Samantha entering the work force was never even discussed. It was taken for granted that she would serve her husband, his career and his ego and care for the children. And she could not make her life easier by using her powers even though she constantly entertained her husband's business clients. Here was an intelligent, sixties woman with her own point of view who was buried in suburbia with no life of her own. Even her neighbors, Abner and Gladys Kravitz were unlike the friendly neighbors featured on other situation comedies. They were not the type of people she could associate with. Abner Kravitz was indifferent and his wife Gladys was a Peeping Tom whose main occupation in life seemed to be to spy on the Stephenses household. It was a pathetic portrayal of a suburban neighbor whose behavior bordered on harassment.10
By contrast even Robert Petrie, television's resentful sitcom Dad on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was more politically sensitive in his handling of his wife Laura. In "To Tell or not to Tell" Rob told Buddy he knew what his wife wanted. But when she decided to combine dancing with her homemaker role he did not use his husbandly authority like Ricky Ricardo did in *I Love Lucy* to prevent her; he did not say "no wife of mine will ever work" like Ralph Kramden did in *The Honeymooners*, he did not forbid her from using her talents like Darrin Stephens did in *Bewitched* and he did not say "you are my wife and you're going to have to learn to live on my salary" like Tony Nelson did in *I Dream of Jeannie*. Instead he did his part in trying to help with household chores for two weeks while she rehearsed. In the end he got the same results when Laura told him she wanted to be his wife not a dancer. He had wanted that all along but he had to convince her that she was indispensable within the home so that she would reclaim her area of influence.11

The knowledge that only she could handle household tasks efficiently led her to believe that it was her only
choice in life. She cheerfully attended to her husband and son every day waking up early to fix breakfast and ready with dinner and a bright smile at the end of the day. Samantha Stevens did the same for her family but calls for her service to her husband were much more frequent because of the high volume of entertaining for business clients often at short notice. In addition to her busy day, her supernatural relatives dropped in and out of the house at all hours generally causing problems during the course of their visit. She walked a tightrope between her relatives and her furious husband who was always mad at something she or a member of her family had done with their magical powers. And yet she was always calm and collected bemused by her immature relatives and sympathetic toward her highstrung husband. Samantha embodied every behavior an ideal housewife should follow and through her portrayal, the makers of the program exhorted housewives everywhere that there was great power in keeping their strengths hidden. By using their wisdom and intelligence quietly behind the scenes, homemakers had the power to create a wonderful environment for themselves and their families.
The glorification of the housewife's role continued throughout the decade in spite of the changes evidenced in society. All three programs had different ways of emphasizing to young women across the country to give up their talent, jump into suburbia and embrace the homemaker role. The Dick Van Dyke Show made its housewife glamorous capturing the feeling and sense of the Kennedy years. Laura Petrie even had a dark, bouffant hairdo like First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Although clearly a housewife, she was modern, artistic, talented and sophisticated. She tried her hand at writing, dancing, typing and even comedy but always returned home to her hearth. The message to housewives was loud and clear; don't envy the career woman because underneath her calm exterior she's a bundle of nerves -- frazzled, overworked and sleepless. Laura Petrie told homemakers that the responsibility of running a household was the most important for her and made her the happiest. As for the women who wanted something beyond housework she told them not to bother, she had tried it and it was too much work.

Bewitched portrayed the good witch Samantha as noble, intelligent and very mature. The mischievous smile
that would break out of the corner of her mouth suggested that she was in control because of the way she handled every situation that arose. Housewives could identify with her even though she was supernatural because she never used her powers to make her own life easier and expressed no desire to work outside the home. Her contentment with her situation served as a role model for those who might experience dissatisfaction with their role. I Dream of Jeannie portrayed the well-meaning Jeannie as misguided because she went ahead and used her powers indiscriminately. But when she did nothing good came out of using them. She sent the message that power was too confusing for women because they did not know the rules. Therefore they should stay happily confined in suburbia and let the men take care of the world. The actions of the three women were different but the message was similar; things would work more smoothly if they could just refrain from using their powers or talents.

Basically all three programs advocated curbing female talents to save a marriage. Laura Petrie had many talents but whenever she tried to explore them her household would fall apart and her husband would suffer a
blow to his ego. The opening credits clearly suggested that her place was in the household where she waited to greet her husband when he returned from work. Samantha Stevens and Jeannie Nelson had extraordinary powers but the opening credits on *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* showed the young women not merely at home but confined as well. They seemed to spell out the nature of the women's domestic contracts. *Bewitched* had the image of the pretty, carefree witch Samantha flying on her broomstick signifying her independent life. She then appeared in an apron in her kitchen, turned herself into a cat and snuggled against her husband's feet before she jumped into his arms and changed herself back to Samantha much like a bride being carried over the threshold. *I Dream of Jeannie* opened with a dancing girl in a harem outfit who became a pink cloud and disappeared into a bottle which retained her face and batted its eyelashes.13

The implication was that Samantha had to remain in her kitchen because of her relationship with Darrin and Jeannie had to stay in her bottle because of her relationship with Tony Nelson. Both women inhabited the sitcom world in the second half of the sixties, a period
of time when the decade was experiencing major upheavals in ideology, culture and politics. Apparently they missed much of it because of their confinement. Laura Petrie, the sitcom woman of the early sixties, appeared to be less confined. She explored her talents and articulated her views with great energy but in the end of course she always came back and appreciated her primary role as homemaker.

One possible explanation for the progressive ideology on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* regarding the character of Laura Petrie could be the actress who played the part. According to Carl Reiner, the show's creator, Mary Tyler Moore was originally hired to play Laura Petrie as a sounding board for Rob Petrie. But her role was expanded because of her personality and talent and her suggestions regarding her wardrobe, for example, were taken seriously by Reiner who strove to bring an element of realism to the series.14 She was the first television housewife who did not wear a dress for housework. In the spring of 1965 *Time Magazine* reported that "Mary Tyler Moore has helped make capri pants the biggest trend in U.S. casual attire."15
Judging by the standards of the time during which the program aired, it was intelligent and believable and set a standard of excellence for television comedy that programs premiering during the second half of the 1960s in general could not match. By the time *The Dick Van Dyke Show* went off the air in 1966, situation comedies had escaped from realism and families became really strange with monsters, Martians, genies, flying nuns, witches and hillbillies. *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* were two sitcoms that belonged to this escapist period of the mid-sixties.

It was a problem for the networks to portray the new woman in a positive manner because they did not want them to appear as a threat to the housewives watching the programs. That is why so many programs of the 1960s ignored the power and independence of women and chose to deny their existence in the land of sitcoms. Those who chose to reflect reality had to achieve a fine balance for the viewers who could trip up their profits. They acknowledged reality but portrayed it negatively.

Ironically the portrayal of Laura Petrie, the most progressive of the sixties sitcom women was on a program
which was named after the leading male actor who portrayed the character of Robert Petrie. Episodes revolved around his life at work and his life at home. But his co-workers were equal to him even though he was the head writer and his wife formed half of the most equal male-female relationship ever seen on a situation comedy even though he was the head of the household. His home was not his castle but just a nice place to live.¹⁹

On the other hand, both Samantha Stevens and Jeannie Nelson were the stars of their shows which were named in reference to them and episodes revolved around the use and misuse of their supernatural powers. But they did not appear to be equal to their sitcom husbands. Jeannie's use of her magic always created problems and confusing situations causing the viewer to agree that her power had to be curbed. She was a grown woman yet she was portrayed as an immature child who needed guidance and control in the absence of which she would run amuck strewing problems in her path.

Samantha was very controlled and indulged in magical acts only to undo the damage her relatives had done or to help Darrin in his career. She was a role model to be
emulated because she voluntarily abdicated her great powers so that her husband could occupy the throne in the castle she managed for him. Supernatural relatives, especially Endora as the classic witchy mother-in-law, were used to test her incredible resolve. But time after time she passed with flying colors answering to no one but Darrin, the powerless mortal who did not stand a chance in the face of such power. Yet episode after episode he emerged shaken but not stirred, bruised but not beaten and more determined than ever to stand his ground regarding his imagined strength which really came from her. She was the power behind his throne.

And all the time he was unaware that his male privilege was not something he had inherently possessed or earned. It was his only because she had given it to him internalizing the culture that told her that he was primary and she was secondary. It was the same culture that had Jeannie call Tony 'master' and told Laura Petrie not to question the limitations of her role. And it was the same culture that the network executives inhabited. Laura Petrie, Samantha Stevens and Jeannie Nelson were three sitcom women among many who were used by the makers
of television programs in the 1960s to transmit their own views regarding what should and should not be approved in society.

Although material changes such as women's participation in the labor force were changing rapidly in society, these were not reflected in the programs because of a cultural lag. This lag is a delay by the media in reflecting reality because ideas and attitudes which are non-material conditions change very slowly. Television had become the common culture especially during the 1960s. As a system of messages that cultivates the images fitting the status quo, the main function of culture is to cultivate resistance to change.²⁰

And it was this resistance to change that characterized programming in the sixties. Contrary to the reality of increased participation by women in the labor force, a rise in the divorce rate and a decline in the birth rate, television continued to advocate the homemaker's role in a nuclear family setting. By the time the decade ended the pendulum had swung too far in the opposite direction and producers finally began to reflect the changed reality of the 1960s with programs like All
in the Family and The Mary Tyler Moore Show which aired in the 1970s.

The sixties began by leaving behind the innocence of the fifties family-oriented shows like Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet and Leave It to Beaver. Yawning at the conformity and complacent materialism of the fabulous fifties the national mood swung toward youth and sophistication in the early sixties. This mood gave way to frustration and disillusionment as national and civil rights leaders were assassinated, an unpopular war divided a nation, the status quo was questioned and women realized they were oppressed. It became a period of great activism and social reform. Unable to handle such chaos, television took a backslide into silliness and by the end of the decade it finally achieved maturity and began to reflect the changes that had occurred during the famous decade.

The balance of female power in sitcoms that was in the role of the housewife throughout the 1960s finally shifted toward career women in the 1970s. Laura Petrie, the spunky New Rochelle housewife and mother who charmed audiences from 1961-66 on The Dick Van Dyke Show, became
Mary Richards, an independent, single career woman in 1970 on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Actress Mary Tyler Moore who played both these roles almost a decade apart from each other had planted the seeds of her independence back in 1961 when she rebelled against vacuuming the rug in a dress and insisted on wearing pants as housewife Laura Petrie.\(^23\)

The characters of Jeannie Nelson and Samantha Stevens made their exit from network television when the new decade of the 1970s began. *I Dream of Jeannie* went off the air in 1970 and *Bewitched* took its bow in 1972. Their themes which escaped reality even in the sixties were beginning to tire the audience of the 1970s. The sixties which began with the call for change ended with the call for reflecting the change that was achieved during that decade. The gaping hole between reality and its portrayal on television was finally beginning to get smaller.
NOTES


5. Ibid.


10. Marc: *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*.

11. Ibid.


22. *Grant, The 1960s.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


143


SECONDARY AND CONTEXTUAL SOURCES


