

TV encourages sexist stereotypes

By SIOUX ANDERSON
Of the Emerald

Like most people in their mid-20s, I spent a large part of my youth watching television. I still remember the names of characters, of favorite shows, bits of story lines and even theme songs, even though I haven't owned a television for six years.

As a feminist, these memories are significant to me. Since its inception, television has been the most effective and most readily available medium for socialization and propaganda.

By its very nature, television viewing is a leisurely occupation that relies on a mindless, unquestioning audience. And now I realize that like most children, I accepted television characters as heroes, heroines — and, ultimately, as role models.

Years later I'm haunted by values that disturb me, and I can't trace their origins. Although I attribute most of these to my parenting and schooling, I'm sure that many of my earlier perceptions were shaped by these more subtle influences.

Why, for instance, do I cook for my lover? I know it's not my sole responsibility. But if I don't, I'm nagged by guilt.

And that you're-not-doing-your-job feeling hits when company arrives and the carpet hasn't been vacuumed. Or when we're out with friends and I support my opinion with facts that contradict those of my lover and the table suddenly falls silent.

Literary magazine now on sale

The 1981 edition of the Honors College literary magazine *Glyphs* back from the printers.

The magazine is now available in the Honors College on the third floor of Chapman Hall, according to Robert Shepard, one of the publication's three editors.

The 44-page edition of *Glyphs* contains poems, short stories and graphics.

Whether television has been a primary source of values for my generation, it certainly has played a role in the socialization of women.

When young, we saw women as stereotyped by the media. Protagonists were the epitome of the nurturing, the loving, the whiter-than-white middle class female. Likewise, antagonistic female characters often were immoral, profane, unloved and unwed.

A good example from my past is the television show "Bewitched."

We all remember Samantha, the good witch; Darin, the advertising career husband, and their children Tabatha and Adam. And of course we remember the wicked cousin Sabrina, clearly Samantha's alter-ego.

"Bewitched" was a portrait of ideal womanhood as it was "understood" then.

Samantha was the perfect wife, everything a man could hope for. She was blond, slender, very attractive, a good housekeeper (her house always was spotless) and a wonderful and resourceful hostess (Darin forever was telling her at the last moment that an important client was coming to dinner). She was intelligent in her own right but always smart enough to know her place.

And Samantha was tireless — never too tired to greet her victorious husband at the door with a martini.

Of course, Samantha had help. After all, she was a witch and not many obstacles came her way that a little nose-twitching couldn't remedy.

But she was devoted enough to renounce her powers — as Darin requested — until some emergency threatened his job, his reputation and therefore their livelihood.

Such a sacrifice! But clearly the television sacrifice is no less than that made by real women every day when they renounce their jobs and personhood in the name of responsibility to husband and family.

But women painstakingly have uncovered and shared new facts of living. We've realized that although that lifestyle may be rewarding, it's also exhausting and certainly not the only option we have.

Still, knowing the options and uncovering the flaws in role models aren't enough to stop the guilt triggered by the veil of responsibility we assumed

when we were too young to understand.

It's not enough to reject old values in favor of new ones that seem more promising. We have to follow every feeling of guilt or hesitation about a new lifestyle to its roots. Only then can we be certain of our motivations.

We have a responsibility to ourselves and to each other, to question and analyze the values and the illusions we operate under, to develop a firmer commitment to our self-worth and to free choice.

Just the media still sells its stock of ready-made female prototypes, and in buying we can get lost in a pattern of guilt.

But the pattern can be broken by challenging ourselves and our pasts, by building a lifestyle based on personal rather than prescribed values.



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