Ariel Skelley/Digital Vision via Getty Images

Rewriting Motherhood

How TV Represents Moms and What We Want To See Next

MOMS F1RST

Table of Contents

III Letter from Reshma Saujani, CEO of Moms First

1 Introduction

- 5 The Motherhood Penalty
- 7 The History of Working Women
- 8 Moms on Television
- 9 The Progression of the TV Mom

12 Methodology

13 Findings

- 14 Modern Family: What kinds of moms are we seeing on TV?
- 18 Bewitched: How do these women look so put together?
- 21 Home Improvement: How do they keep those houses so clean?
- 24 The Nanny: Who is watching the kids?
- 26 Workin' Moms: How realistic is working motherhood on TV?
- 31 Growing Pains: How difficult is TV motherhood?

34 Conclusion

35 Recommendations

MoMo Productions/DigitalVision via Getty Images

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

LETTER FROM **Reshma Saujani**

CEO of Moms First

TV requires us to suspend our disbelief. In fact, it's an essential part of entertainment. We can't think too hard about how a "flux capacitor" turns a DeLorean into a time machine, or we'll ruin the fun.

But sometimes suspending disbelief warps our perception of reality, so much so that we internalize it as truth — that's when it becomes a problem. What we see on TV, for better or worse, shapes our perception of what's normal. And when the pervasive portrayal of moms on TV doesn't match with reality, it's easy to see how that has detrimental effects on the people who play moms in real life.

This analysis explores how well moms on TV reflect our society, and how much their depiction distorts our sense of reality.

We like to think of the days of June Cleaver, the archetypical TV mom, as distant history. After all, it's been over six decades since *Leave It to Beaver* went off the air. And to some extent, that's true — we do see TV depictions of moms today that break conventional stereotypes. But how much progress have we actually made?

What this report finds is, despite this progress, the moms we see on screen today are still typically white, slender, and effortlessly attractive. They manage to keep their houses spotless without any effort. They're usually the household's primary caregiver but they never seem to wrestle with childcare. And if they're working moms, their motherhood almost never shows up at the office.

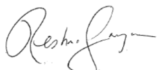
It's no wonder that mom guilt in society today is through the roof. The moms we see on TV when we unwind after our kids go down for bed aren't just having it all — they're making it look easy. TV erases the duality of our identity as moms and forces us to choose one identity and hide the other. The reality is that moms are everything all at once. Regardless of how working moms appear on screen, moms cannot simply leave their motherhood at the door when they show up to work — nor should that be the expectation. Freedom means the ability to hold both identities and move in and out of the workforce and throughout society without penalty or judgment. While television is sometimes meant to offer an escape into a reality where motherhood is easy, we cannot ignore the impact it has on all of us. Reinforcing such unattainable expectations in our culture doesn't just affect moms. Our partners and employers and loved ones and elected officials are all set up for failure as well.

At Moms First, we spend a lot of time focusing on policy solutions to the problems that moms experience every day. Paid leave, affordable childcare, equal pay — those three structural changes would go a long way toward helping working moms thrive in America.

But these changes won't be enough if the way our culture reflects motherhood doesn't shift as well. In fact, it's hard to even imagine rallying lawmakers or inspiring a grassroots groundswell for change on issues that just aren't major concerns for the TV moms our society knows best.

So let this report be a challenge to casting directors to show us realistic moms. It's a challenge to set designers to embrace clutter. Writers, keep in mind that your moms do have to be moms sometimes (and I have to imagine there's plenty of comedy fodder in childcare falling apart). And to the producers and networks who work so hard to keep us entertained, we urge you to hire and support moms with the paid leave and childcare they need so they can write authentic stories of moms that not only entertain us but also resonate with our own lives.

It's time to greenlight a rewrite of motherhood. Trust us, we're watching.



Reshma Saujani

FatCamera/E+ via Getty Images

Introduction

The United States ranks second to last among the world's wealthiest countries when it comes to childcare and parental leave policies, according to a 2021 United Nations report.[1] The report finds childcare investment in the U.S. to be weak and the costs to be high, even for childcare that is subsidized for low-income families. The current state of childcare in the U.S. leaves parents to balance work and caregiving duties on their own, even as childcare costs rise.[2]

Childcare shortages, school closures, and employment precarity during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the lack of care infrastructure in the U.S. to the forefront. The absence of policies that support caregivers disproportionately impacts working women, especially those in relationships with men. In the 70% of U.S. households where both parents work,[3] mothers are still doing more of the household labor and shouldering more of the "mental load," which is the cognitive effort that goes into the invisible tasks necessary to run a household.[4, 5, 6] A 2020 study found that working mothers with young children spent about eight hours a day on childcare, compared with their husbands' five hours.[7] And for opposite-gender marriages[8] where partners earn about the same, wives are spending two more hours on childcare and three more hours than husbands on housework each week.[9] There is a clear imbalance of leisure time, as well.[10]

Why are working moms still shouldering the majority of caregiving in their homes? In part, it can be explained by the prevailing social belief that women's financial contributions are still not necessary

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

for their family's economic security, despite the fact that the share of women who earn as much or more than their husband has tripled over the past half-century.[11] In 2019, 41.2% of working mothers were either sole or primary breadwinners, earning at least half of their families' wages, and 24.8% were co-breadwinners, bringing in at least 25% of their household income.[12] And while women's roles in the workforce have changed, childcare policies haven't kept up. Caregiving solutions continue to largely fall to individual families despite strong public support for a larger governmental role in facilitating care and paid family leave.

Although many factors contribute to the persistent belief that working moms should also be their families' primary caregivers, this report is interested in the degree to which fictionalized portrayals of mothers in media reinforce or disrupt this reality. Given the influence of popular media on social norms and expectations, this study investigates the "cultural meaning of motherhood," as told in scripted television. The study explores whether those portrayals reflect the diverse experiences of mothers in the U.S. and if those representations speak to structural changes that would benefit moms and increase gender equality.

More accurate and authentic depictions of motherhood in entertainment media can positively change beliefs about unpaid labor, caregiving roles and responsibilities, working motherhood, and what the "ideal" mother looks like. And these beliefs can impact not just individuals' behaviors and moms' mental health but also public understanding and demand for social services and workplace policies to address sexist systems.

> More accurate and authentic depictions of motherhood in entertainment media can positively change beliefs about unpaid labor, caregiving roles and responsibilities, working motherhood, and what the "ideal" mother looks like.

aldomurillo/E+ via Getty Images

Executive Summary

Our analysis of scripted television programs from 2022 that feature mothers in the title cast finds authentic portrayals of motherhood intermingle with portrayals that reproduce unrealistic expectations for moms, likely contributing to the guilt and shame they experience, while setting fathers up for failure too. The following key findings represent opportunities for more realistic portrayals of mothers on television.

Moms on TV are mostly white, young, and thin. Of all TV moms of kids under age 18, 57.5% are white, 23.8% are Black, 9.2% are Latina, and 7.0% are Asian or Pacific Islander. Only 1.8% are fat, 6.2% are queer, and no moms are disabled — a stark contrast to the demographics of the American population. An intersectional analysis of motherhood highlights the potential for more diverse depictions of motherhood on screen that reflect moms in reality.

Why we say "fat"

We use the word "fat" as a value-neutral descriptor that is not rooted in medical practices (such as "obese" or "overweight"), nor is it suggestive of being outside of some sort of "norm" or "average" (such as "plus size" or "bigger"). Destigmatizing the word "fat" helps to combat anti-fat bias.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

When a TV family has a clear breadwinner, nearly 9 out of 10 times it is a dad. In real life, the myth that moms' salaries are not necessary to their families' finances is pervasive, untrue, and limits moms' earning potentials. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, among families with children ages 6–17 in the U.S. 44.4% of mothers earned at least half of the family income, with another 24.8% earning at least a quarter of it. TV does not reflect this reality.

The realities of childcare are invisible on TV. Only 1 in 5 TV parents with kids under the age of 11 mentioned any form of childcare. The rest of the time, audiences are left to assume that these children are cared for safely and effortlessly. This glosses over the difficulties of securing, coordinating, and affording childcare. In reality, 85% of primary caregivers in the U.S. reported that their focus at work and commitment to work are negatively affected due to challenges with childcare.

TV homes are spotless, but we almost never see the work involved to keep them that way. Less than 1 in 10 TV parents had a messy house, and yet only 15.0% were shown doing domestic tasks like cleaning. In the real world, research shows that even when both partners have jobs, 70% of moms take on more domestic tasks and more of the mental load — the cognitive effort that goes into the invisible tasks necessary to run a household. This is a shared experience among the majority of moms in the U.S., and yet it is invisible on TV. Furthermore, when domestic tasks *were* shown on TV, they were carried out by a mom twice as often as a dad. These disparities reinforce pervasive gender roles that relegate mothers and sideline fathers, even though surveys show that, in reality, dads want to be more involved.

TV moms are effortlessly attractive. Over three times as many moms were depicted to be desirable to the viewer (or desirable to other characters) as were characterized as unattractive. Nearly 8 out of 10 moms were slender, as were 6 of every 10 moms with a child under the age of one. The necessary steps to achieving this level of physical beauty are not shown on screen. TV moms rarely explain how they can afford beauty products, flattering clothes, and a gym membership or how they find the time to apply a full face of makeup, style their hair, iron their clothes, and exercise regularly. These unrealistic standards broadcast a message that attractiveness is effortless and affordable and thus should be attainable for the everyday mom.

LordHenriVoton/E+ via Getty Images

The Motherhood Penalty

Women's high workforce participation and significant financial responsibilities have become the status quo in the U.S.,[13] and yet progress on gender equity in the workplace is slowing.[14] Working mothers are, on average, more productive than women with no children, and provide greater economic gains for both individual companies and the U.S. economy as a whole;[15] however, they are consistently passed over for promotions, demoted, given lower-track responsibilities, and disadvantaged when requesting flexible schedules. This contributes to working mothers earning just 62 cents for every dollar earned by dads,[16] a phenomenon known as the Motherhood Penalty.[17] In contrast, men who become fathers see their pay increase, thereby receiving a Fatherhood Bonus.[18]

While the U.S. is one of few countries in the world with no paid parental leave, many employers do offer it. However, employers generally provide more generous maternity than paternity leave, which exaggerates the double standard tied to gender expectations about caregiving and breadwinning.

For the 25% of workers[19] who had access to paid family leave in 2022, those who took it still spent the vast majority of their time on care work, such as feeding, pumping, changing diapers, and cleaning — tasks not limited to an eight-hour workday. And families without access to paid leave must choose between spending a significant amount of money on childcare, finding friends or family members who have the resources and physical capacities to help them, or leaving the workforce altogether.

For many families, the cost and scarcity of childcare programs makes them inaccessible. This disproportionately affects people of color and low- and middle-income families. For parents who do

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

find licensed programs accepting new enrollments, they face spending an average of $16,000 a year on care.[20] It is no wonder that so many parents leave the workforce to become a full-time caregiver, which mothers are much more likely than fathers to do.[21]

These disparities significantly affect mothers' mental health. According to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, mothers were 13 percentage points more likely than fathers to say that being a parent is tiring "all or most of the time," and 9 points more likely to say that parenting is stressful "all or most of the time." Moreover, a higher share of mothers than fathers expressed that they feel judged for how they parent by those they interact with online, their friends, and other parents in their community — and this highlights the differences in perceived expectations and additional social pressure that mothers feel.[22] In light of all this, it is no surprise that 92% of moms feel society does a poor job understanding and supporting mothers.[23]

These challenges are experienced differently depending on an individual's race and class, among other factors. Most public narratives about maternity leave in the U.S. focus on the experiences of wealthy white women and leave out how maternity leave plays out differently for women across race, ethnicity, class, and other crucial intersections.[24] For example, Black mothers — two-thirds of whom are equal, primary, or sole earners in their households — have historically had the highest labor force participation among mothers of all races,[25] but on average, they have less access to parental leave than white, Asian, and Latinx women.[26] Less access to parental leave may help explain why Black women disproportionately experience negative health outcomes associated with childbirth, such as increased postpartum depression, lower breastfeeding initiation and retention, and higher maternal mortality rates.[27] Better and more equal access to paid family leave would improve the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of parents across the U.S.

With encouragement from groups like Moms First, mothers are increasingly speaking out in public and on social media about the challenges they experience. In addition to requesting more help from their partners, they are also demanding that their employers and elected officials implement large-scale solutions. For example, in December 2022, Congress passed the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which requires workplace accommodations for covered pregnant people.[28] Another example of policy progress is the newly passed PUMP Act, which will give working parents who are nursing the right to a reasonable break time and place to express breast milk while at work.[29]

These policy solutions are a step in the right direction, but their maintenance, as well as further systemic changes, will require a broader cultural shift in attitudes about the norms of caregiving — and the roots of these prevailing beliefs run deep.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

The History of Working Women

A common misconception in Western societies is the idea that women have become a part of the workforce only in the past seventy years. Following the Great Depression and World War II, women were indeed required to work out of economic necessity to support their families and patriotic duty as men went off to war.[30] But women have always worked, and women who were solely responsible for children and the household were in the minority, among the ultra-wealthy, and typically white.[31] Before child labor laws were instituted in the early 20th century, lower-class working women often did not seek childcare because their children were working as well.[32] Correcting these misconceptions helps to more accurately define the evolution of work and motherhood in the U.S.

While women did enter the workforce in unprecedented numbers following the onset of World War II, this history is largely that of wealthy white women. Black women have long been in the workforce and have worked at disproportionately high rates in domestic and caregiving roles.[33] Furthermore, the unattainable standards of domestic success that women still struggle with stem from norms established during slavery. Wealthy white women were able to live in clean homes, eat hearty meals, and produce healthy children because they relied on slave labor to clean their house, cook their food, and raise their kids. After the abolition of slavery, this work was still performed by underpaid women of color and immigrant women, and caregiving roles are — to this day — filled disproportionately by underpaid women of color.

The Great Depression forced many families to share living spaces, increasing the number of multigenerational homes. This living situation, borne out of economic necessity, contributes to the nostalgic fantasy that extended families have "always" played a major role in the care and raising of children. Further, when more women were needed in the workforce during WWII, the government implemented a national childcare program so that they would be available to work.[34] But this program was disbanded after the war, demonstrating that government supporting families was directly tied to men's experiences — not women's.

The immediate aftermath of WWII, especially the 1950s, saw the rise of the new idea of a nuclear family, which further perpetuated a form of domesticity that relegated women's paid work. This was facilitated by an increase in real wages and the growth of a middle class, alongside new technologies for domestic tasks and chores, leading to women in the 1950s doing more domestic work at home than their counterparts from decades earlier. Just as moms do now, women of this postwar era often struggled with feelings of guilt surrounding their work in the home, and found themselves equating their personhood and femininity with the quality of their housework.[35] Indeed, the popular image of the flawless 1950s white family has always been a reflection of the fantasy and optimism of the time, rather than the reality.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Moms on Television

The history of television production and its cultural prevalence in society played a key role in shaping the prevailing narratives around families and motherhood from the second half of the 20th century through today. What we see on television has never been a true reflection of reality, rather a projection of social norms, social change, and insecurities produced in a context of appealing to the middle class — particularly its white and straight members. Television, more than many other art forms, sits at the intersection of storytelling, economics, and technology. It developed in a time when creators could not tell their stories on TV without the infrastructures of studios, networks, and advertisers. Further, the resulting shows could not reach audiences without government-regulated signal frequencies being transmitted to physical sets in homes. Government regulation also required that some hours of programming each day serve the public interest; however, outside of those times, stations had programming hours to fill that were less valuable to advertisers, such as the early afternoon hours, when kids might watch after school but parents were working or doing household chores.[36] Beginning in the 1950s, these time slots were often filled with syndicated programming, like the family sitcom, and these reruns left an indelible imprint on viewers, especially on young ones.

As television's popularity boomed in the late 1950s into the 1960s, the number of affiliate stations also exploded, creating a demand for affordable programming, and the rerun became a cultural staple. Additionally, the goal of syndication was intrinsic to the development of any new primetime show,[37] especially sitcoms, which catered to syndicated airings because of their structure. Sitcoms were designed to be easily digestible, self-contained stories where nothing major ever changes. This allowed audiences to follow the plot of the individual episode even if they turned it on halfway through, had a small TV set or a bad signal, or had the show on in the background while doing other tasks. Sitcoms were ideal for reruns and incredibly profitable for studios.

All told, the rerun became a mainstay of television throughout the 1960s and 1970s, heavily impacting the culture. In particular, in the wake of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, many people, especially those who felt threatened by the social progress of the 1960s, experienced nostalgia for the postwar era, and reruns served as a salve. The idealized, TV-friendly version of reality that lived on in reruns from the 1950s and early 1960s shaped the popular memory of the time, replacing the realities of that former era.[38] This continues today, as our popular imagination of the way things once were are inextricably intertwined with what we've seen in reruns.[39] In different ways, all of these factors contribute to the types of television programming that were made for the airwaves and consumed by audiences, and the ripple effects are still felt today.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

The Progression of the TV Mom

To understand the imprint of culturally resonant ideals of motherhood portrayed on television and how they reverberate today, it's critical to explore a brief history of moms on TV since the 1950s.

THE 1950S

Collective memory remembers the 1950s TV mom as a flawless, white, domestic goddess who was deferential to her husband, doting on her children, and fastidious in her appearance, with June Cleaver from *Leave It to Beaver* serving as the exemplar. This "domestic goddess" version of the TV mom is perhaps the most powerful in our shared imagination. However, this was just one of three main types of mom on TV in that era, alongside matronly mothers who leaned into their ethnically marginalized backgrounds (e.g., Molly Goldberg on *The Goldbergs*) and over-the-top zany moms played by talented female comics (e.g., Lucy Ricardo in *I Love Lucy*). Although the latter female characters were more dynamic than the domestic goddess, they too were established in domestic, feminine contexts — their primary roles were as wives, mothers, and caregivers.

Sitcoms in the late 1950s mostly centered around white middle-class family life because such shows were being produced in a postwar context by networks seeking to do two things: 1) appeal to the expanding and — thanks to postwar government programs and economic prosperity — financially secure white middle-class people for advertisers; and 2) project this idealized fantasy as the "typical" American family to reinforce a white, patriarchal status quo. This coincided with women's return to the home after the war, as well as the development of suburbs all over the country, which redefined communities both figuratively and literally, as segregation was built into urban planning. Television was seen as a new way to set the standards of mainstream American culture. The sitcoms of the late 1950s featured families welcoming audiences into their homes, accompanied by neighbors who were often lifelong friends. These shows were designed to elicit a sense of familiarity and comfort to an audience that was recovering from war, surrounded by new and expanding technologies, and building families in new types of neighborhoods that hadn't previously existed.

But the moms in these shows were mostly one-dimensional and peripheral to the narratives, which usually centered more on the children (especially when the young actors playing them added value through teen appeal) and the family as whole. Moms' storylines were much less important than the feelings of comfort and security their characters were meant to elicit from their audience. Television scholar and historian Lynn Spigel explains that the programming of the time focused on a sense of hyperrealism as a way to incorporate theatrical storytelling elements that appealed to audiences, as well as a method to ease viewers into a sense of comfort and connection with the shows they watched.[40] This hyperrealistic aesthetic was an effective marketing strategy, but it also emblazoned those images in the collective consciousness, inducing viewers to think the images were a replication of reality instead of a distortion of it, thereby contributing to the larger nostalgia problem.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

THE 1960S

In the 1960s, television families evolved because writers were both reacting to the social and technological upheaval of the decade, and seeking creative twists on the popular sitcom formula, leading to an era of fantasy sitcoms, like *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched*, and *The Munsters*. While the characters remained largely white, they often represented otherness by contrasting the fantastical family with their "normal" suburban neighborhood,[41] and writers used supernatural characters to comment on the feminist movements of the time. This is especially prevalent in shows with powerful or magical female characters who are partnered with mortal men and consistently find their power in conflict with their relationship and their suburban lifestyle. Unlike the "domestic goddess" moms before them, these moms were the stars of their shows and had more dimension and dynamism as characters. Further, motherhood as a whole was less salient to their characters than their power and their romantic partners.

The 1960s also saw the rise of another type of sitcom: the broken family. This introduced many more single-parent families to TV, such as *Bonanza, My Three Sons,* and *The Andy Griffith Show*. As divorce rates in the U.S. rose, the idyllic white suburban nuclear family was becoming less relatable to audiences. Several shows depicted single-parent families, usually focusing on a widower and his child(ren). In 1960, there were over six times as many single mothers than single fathers,[42] yet these shows primarily featured single dads — the mom was essentially eliminated altogether. Just as the late-1950s TV mom was one-dimensional because she was peripheral to the story, the deceased 1960s mom was relevant only through her absence, which was used to serve the stories of the husband and children she left behind. This is emblematic of how moms are deprioritized in our cultural imagination while still serving as a symbol for broader anxieties around social change.

THE 1970S

In the early 1970s, sitcoms started to embrace depictions of single women, divorced women, and working mothers, in light of the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, and the Vietnam War. Sitcom writers were leaning into social commentary and relevance, and as more women entered the workforce, the working woman became an important advertising demographic.[43] As the concept of the workplace family started to grow more popular, women — especially moms — were less defined by their role in the home and were often childless (e.g., Mary Richards in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* Jennifer Marlowe in *WKRP in Cincinnati,* and Laverne DeFazio and Shirley Feeney in *Laverne & Shirley*). However, this seemingly feminist development in how women were portrayed was not without its limitations. Working moms, such as Julia Baker in *Julia* and Anne Romano in *One Day at a Time,* were present in the era. And while many of these moms were shown raising families on their own, starting new lives for themselves, and succeeding in the workforce, they were nearly always presented in the context of the individual, or personal choice, rather than tied to a larger social or cultural movement. TV moms of the 1970s were shown struggling with work–life balance and navigating motherhood; however, because they were in sitcoms, they nearly always found a happy ending that returned the characters to where they started. These patterns continued into the next decade.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

THE 1980S

By the 1980s, the purchasing power and consumer appeal of the working mother grew further, leading to even more types of moms on TV. Working moms had become the fastest-growing segment of the labor force but were still running things at home — they had their own financial assets while also making most of the household purchasing decisions. Furthermore, even women who were either not working or not mothers still aspired to be like working moms, making them the ideal target audience for programming.[44]

As so many moms were now working, there was a massive cultural demand for childcare at the same time that President Ronald Reagan's administration was cutting childcare funding. Debates were waged over whether childcare should be a social or individual responsibility, and this social concern was reflected in the TV families we saw at the time.[45]

Sitcom moms in the 1980s were typically successful working women (e.g., Clair Huxtable in *The Cosby Show,* Angela Bower in *Who's The Boss?,* and Maggie Seaver in *Growing Pains*). However, their success was made possible by the support of men (husbands, family members, and live-in domestic laborers), as opposed to social services or public policy solutions.[46] Many of these moms had husbands who were able to work from home, or they hired male nannies or housekeepers who became "part of the family," making it possible for mothers to succeed in their careers while knowing that their family was being cared for by a trustworthy man. Crucially, because these male helpers were "like family," it reinforced the idea that moms with careers can find childcare solutions within the home and without the aid of childcare programs.

THE 1990S AND 2000S

Through the 1990s and 2000s, the depiction of TV moms shifted back to reinforcing traditional values and largely disparaging single moms. With some exceptions, there were two primary types of moms shown on TV in this era: 1) those in traditional marriages who were largely defined by their domestic roles but who were shown engaging with the realities of parenthood; and 2) single mothers who were shown dealing with major obstacles and vices, such as addiction, teen pregnancies, and financial problems, among others. The moms in traditional family roles were often depicted as more competent and attractive than their bumbling husbands, reinforcing an unrealistic standard for mothers in reality, even as their fictionalized counterparts held power (e.g., Jill Taylor in *Home Improvement,* Debra Barone in *Everybody Loves Raymond,* and Harriette Winslow in *Family Matters*). They were able to lament the difficulties of their role in their home, but the problems were never meant to be solved in the storyline, and the imbalance in domestic work and competency remained central to the narrative of the shows throughout their runs, but resolutions were not the goal.[47]

As different types of television channels (e.g., cable) entered the market during this era, the types of shows that focused on families expanded as well, adding more nuance to motherhood portrayals. Family-centric hour-long dramedies grew in popularity during this era, and many of these shows focused on non-nuclear family units, such as blended families, those with queer family members, single

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

parents, and found families. But teen dramas, a popular genre at the time, often showed troubled teenaged characters with indifferent or absent mothers, which reinforced social criticisms of single motherhood.[48]

THE 2010S AND BEYOND

Cable television, premium channel programming, and streaming services have flooded the market in the past two decades, leading to a fracturing of TV narratives and thus a fracturing of the dominant ideas about topics or characters, like moms and motherhood. Furthermore, as audiences have become more accustomed to serialized television, and broadcast networks relied more heavily on reality programming, the family sitcom has all but disappeared from airwaves. Therefore, there is not a "typical" TV mom that defines the current era.

These new types of programming have allowed for more variety in on-screen moms. As we outline below, TV moms are no longer quite the monolith they once were. We have seen more moms of color on screen in the past decade — especially more who are API, Latinx, and Native. Further, while there are very few overall, the presence of any LGBTQIA+ moms on TV is a sign of progress.

Despite dynamics changing over the decades, ushering in more diverse depictions of motherhood, the cultural power of TV moms of the past remains embedded in modern-day stories and our collective ideas about what it means to be a good mother.

To disrupt these norms, we must understand what we see on TV, and figure out new directions. Our study examines what the modern TV mom looks like and explores whether moms on TV today are similar to their antecedents — who were often used to reinforce the cultural idea that childcare and motherhood should be a private rather than a public or political concern — or if today's TV moms reflect the diverse experiences and backgrounds in the broader United States. We then use our findings to develop recommendations to bring a new generation of motherhood to the screen.

Methodology

For data collection, we employ content analysis, a research method where researchers operationalize complex concepts into quantifiable markers and systematically identify every occurance of those markers in media. This process is carried out by a team of human expert coders, who have all met training standards to ensure consistent and reliable data collection.

The dataset for this report consists of scripted TV shows with moms in the title cast — that is, those wherein at least one series regular was a mom. To create this dataset, we began with a list of all shows released in the U.S. in 2022 on broadcast, cable, and streaming,[49] according to Luminate, an industry database by *Variety*. A team of trained experts researched each show, using any available information including fan wikis, reviews, or episodes of the show itself, to determine whether any series regular characters were moms of any kind (including those with adult or deceased children). From the original

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

list of 483 shows, just over half (261 shows, or 54.0%) had a mom in the title cast. We then conducted a random sample of 134 series, and selected two random episodes from the 2022 season of each show for a total of 268 episodes.

All characters in the episodes were coded for demographic information, including gender, race, LGBTQIA+ identity, disability, body size, and age. Characters determined to be parents (even if they were not revealed to be so in the episode) were coded for additional information, including their jobs and success at work, partnerships and partner dynamics, children's ages and behaviors, experiences with shame, and types of storylines.

Unless otherwise stated, the data about moms and other parents is limited to parents of children ages 18 and under. In discussions of childcare, this is limited to parents with children ages 10 and under.

For the sake of comparison, we contrast moms with parents of other genders in some of the results. For simplicity, we use the term "dads." However, there was one nonbinary parent in the dataset who was grouped in with the parents of other genders, which we've characterized as "dads." (The sole nonbinary parent in our dataset is Shar from the show *Queer as Folk*. They gave birth to their children and use the parental address of "zaddy." Given that they do not identify as a mom, though, we did not categorize them as one.)

Findings

This report's findings explore the realities and expectations of motherhood. The following topics are examined:

- Do the demographics of today's moms on TV resemble those of today's moms in the United States?
- Do TV families' homes and moms' physical appearances set unrealistic expectations for families and moms in real life?
- Where are the kids on TV, and who is watching after them?
- What are the experiences of working parents on screen, and do working moms and dads get the same treatment?
- Do narratives depict parents making sacrifices, and do these storylines perpetuate inequality in the home?

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Modern Family: What kinds of moms are we seeing on TV?

The depiction of the "typical" TV mom has evolved over the decades alongside the technology and versatility of television options. Given the current oversaturation of TV options, we find that TV moms have also become slightly more diverse — though there is still work to be done since Latinx, LGBTQIA+, disabled, fat, and older moms are all likely underrepresented.

Most TV moms with kids ages 18 and under were mostly white (57.4%), followed by Black (23.8%), Latinx (9.2%), and API (7.0%). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, birthing people in 2022 were 50.5% white, 14.0% Black, 6.3% API, 25.5% Latinx, and 0.7% Native.[50,51] While this is not a direct comparison to the demographic breakdowns of U.S. mothers writ large, it does suggest that TV moms are relatively racially and ethnically diverse. However, Latinx moms are underrepresented.

> "TV moms have become slightly more diverse — though there is still work to be done since Latinx, LGBTQIA+, disabled, fat, and older moms are all likely underrepresented.

TV moms were overwhelmingly slender (79.2%), and only 1.8% were fat.[52] While there is no existing data about the body types of moms overall, the Institute's analysis of CDC data indicates that over 58% of women are fat, suggesting that fat moms are very underrepresented on screen.

There were no disabled moms in the dataset, yet 6.2% of American parents had a disability as of 2012.[53] While there is limited data about the number of LGBTQIA+ parents in the U.S., a 2022 report from the AAMC[54] Center for Health Justice found that 13% of people who had given birth in the past five years were LGBTQIA+, compared with just 6.2% of TV moms. Within the entire dataset, there were only nine partnered queer couples raising kids. (Bob and Linda Belcher of *Bob's Burgers* may be considered a tenth queer couple because Bob is canonically bisexual. However, as the couple is straight-passing and Bob's queerness is rarely explicit, we omit them here.) About 1 in 10 TV moms were 50 or older (9.9%), and while we do not know how many older moms of minors exist in the U.S., the fertility rates of women ages 35–39 increased 67% between 1990 and 2019 — thus, older moms are increasingly more common.[55] Moms were not significantly different from dads in any of these categories.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

FIGURE 1

Racial diversity on TV among moms with kids under 18

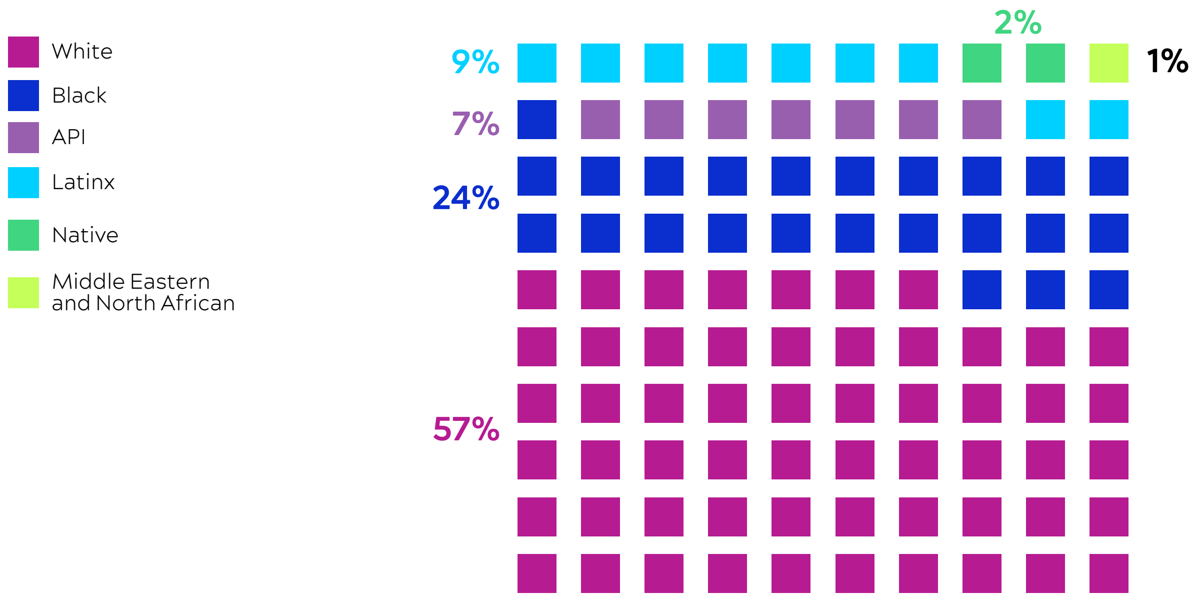


Figure notes: Figure displays the percentage of moms of each race.

FIGURE 2

TV motherhood at the intersection of queerness, disability, mental health, age, and body size

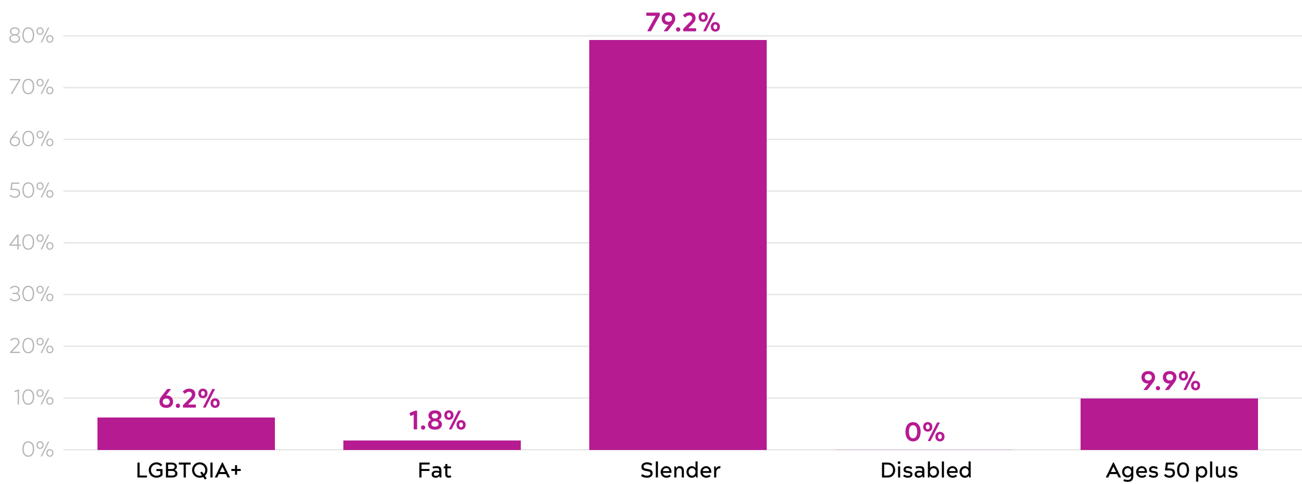


Figure notes: The percentage represents the percent of moms of minors with each identity.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

While these findings suggest some racial diversity and LGBTQIA+ representation among moms on TV, nearly half (46.9%) of moms with kids 18 and under were straight, white, and slender, suggesting that while we are seeing some improvements in the diversity of TV moms, one type of on-screen mom dominates.

About one-third of moms were single, which we defined as not having a live-in partner (33.9%). Compared with partnered TV moms, single moms on TV were more likely to be Black (33.3% of single moms, compared with 18.9% of partnered moms), which is consistent with the population, where 30.0% of single moms are Black, compared with 12.0% of cohabitating moms and 7.0% of married moms.[56] The majority of partnered TV moms were white (62.2%), which was also consistent with the population (58.0% cohabiting, 61.0% married). Latinx TV moms, both single and partnered, were underrepresented when compared with the population (single TV moms were 8.6% Latinx, compared with 24.0% of U.S. moms; partnered TV moms were 9.4% Latinx, compared with 23.0% of cohabitating and 21.0% of married moms). Single API moms were overrepresented on TV (5.4% of single moms on TV were API, compared with 3.0% of the population) but partnered API moms were likely underrepresented (7.8% of partnered TV moms were API, compared with 3.0% of cohabitating and 10.0% of married moms).

FIGURE 3

Single moms on TV are more racially diverse than partnered TV moms

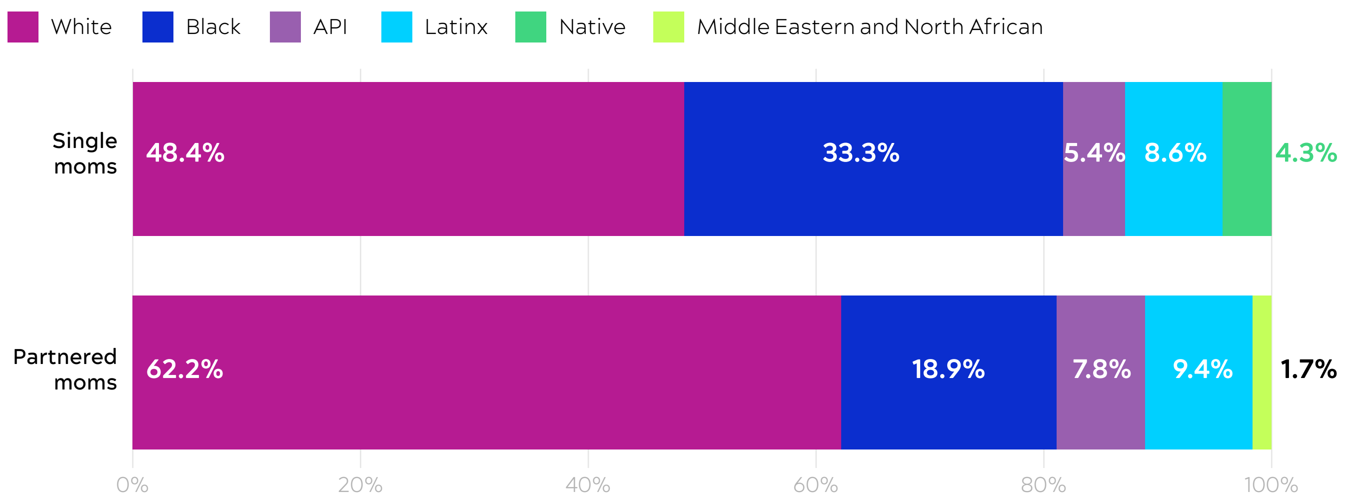


Figure notes: The differences between single and partnered moms were statistically significant for white, Black, and Native moms, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference in their share of "single moms" and "partnered moms." Substantively this means that white moms are more likely to be portrayed as partnered than single, while Black and Native moms are more likely to be portrayed as single than partnered.
N = 272, 93 single moms and 179 partnered moms.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

While the racial representations of single moms on TV are relatively consistent with their share of the U.S. population, it is important to consider the nature of how these moms are portrayed. Compared with partnered moms, single moms were also dealing with mental illness or addiction at higher rates (11.8% of single moms, compared with 3.9% of partnered moms). This may suggest that the trend of stigmatizing single motherhood that emerged in the 1990s lingers today.

Finally, a higher percentage of single moms than partnered moms were slender (88.2% compared with 74.6%), suggesting that single moms may be held to higher beauty standards than their partnered counterparts. This may be an indication that single moms are given more opportunities to be viewed as attractive because they could be looking for a partner.

FIGURE 4

Single and partnered TV moms at the intersection of queerness, disability, mental health, age, and body size

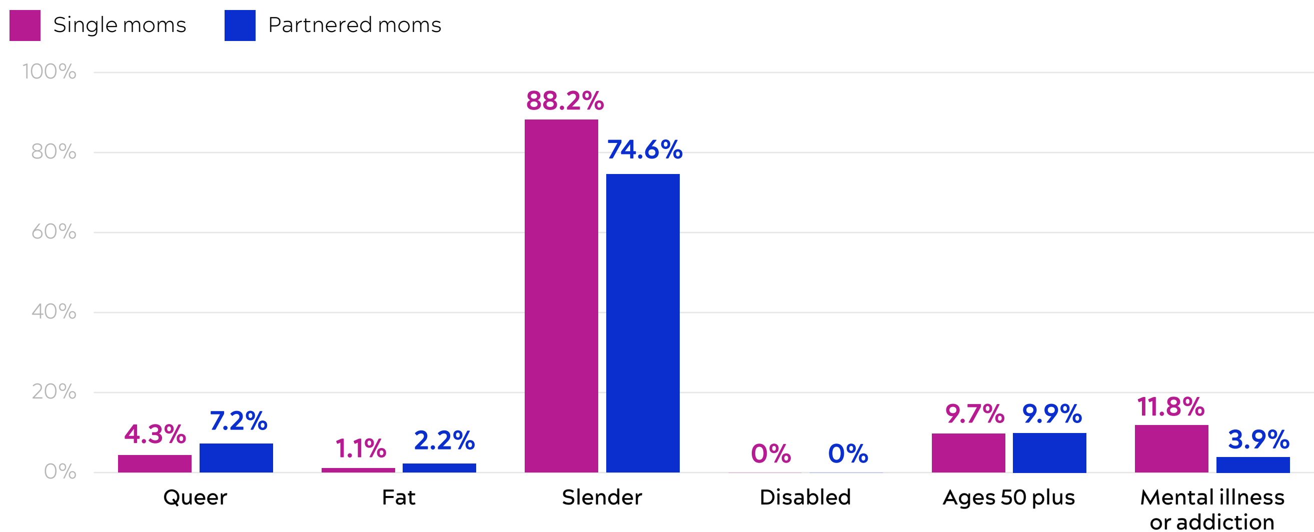


Figure notes: The differences between single and partnered moms were statistically significant for moms who were slender and who were struggling with mental health or addiction.

MoMo Productions/DigitalVision via Getty Images

Bewitched: How do these women look so put together?

In today's society, it's common for moms to lament the fact that they do not have the time or resources to prioritize their physical appearance day to day. Current beauty standards — especially as they appear on social media and TV — present unrealistic expectations for women to have styled and treated hair, clear skin, flawless makeup, stylish and flattering clothes, and fit bodies. The investments of time and money required to reach these standards are unattainable for anyone, but they are especially difficult for moms who must care for their families in addition to themselves. The data here shows that TV moms do not seem to have these same concerns, and that the work required to reach these standards is being erased.

> "TV moms do not seem to have the same concerns about modern beauty standards as their real-life counterparts, and the work required to reach these standards is being erased.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

The vast majority of moms are slender (79.2%), and almost none of them are fat (1.8%). These trends continue even when looking only at moms with children ages 12 months and younger (61.1% slender, 2.8% fat). Further, very few (3.3%) were styled to be unattractive. When compared with dads, moms of minors were desirable — that is, they are written or filmed in a way that clearly conveys to the audience that they should be seen as sexually appealing to other characters or to the viewers themselves — more than twice as often (11.3% compared with 5.5%), and their appearance was commented on about five times as often (6.9% compared with 1.3%).

TABLE 1

Physical appearances of TV parents of minors

	Parents of minors	
	Moms	Dads
Fat	1.8%	3.4%
Slender	79.2%	-%
Desirable	11.3%*	5.5%*
Unattractive	3.3%	3.8%
Appearance comments	6.9%*	1.3%*
Objectified	3.3%	2.1%
Revealing clothing	7.3%*	2.9%*

Table notes: The “slender” variable was only applied to moms. We did not assess dads’ body types for this project. Cell indicates the percentage of moms who possess the trait or experience the variable on screen, compared with the percentage of dads. Starred cells indicate statistically significant differences between moms and dads, for each trait or experience.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Overall, the necessary steps to achieve such levels of physical beauty do not appear on screen. TV moms rarely explain how they can afford beauty products, flattering clothes, and a gym membership, or how they find the time to apply a full face of makeup, style their hair, iron their clothes, and exercise regularly. These standards broadcast a message that attractiveness is effortless and affordable, and thus should be attainable for real-world moms.

Many of these discrepancies between TV life and reality can be explained through the processes of creating scripted TV shows. Production norms standardize high levels of physical attractiveness. Exceedingly high levels of physical beauty have been nearly a requirement to be featured on any show for the past three decades. However, these unrealistic ideals are reinforced not just through the attractiveness of the actor but also through how they are styled and presented for the camera.

In nearly all cases, an actor on television is wearing clothes that have been perfectly tailored to fit their frame. While some costume designers deliberately style characters in affordable clothing, many do not. Indeed, there are websites devoted to allowing audiences to find the outfits they see on TV characters, revealing the frequency at which characters are wearing clothes that they would realistically never be able to afford. Similarly, actors of all genders are always wearing makeup — not just so that they seem attractive but also because TV sets have lights that would make their skin reflect in the camera lens. Their hair is also carefully styled so that it will look consistent between different shots. Because of all this, actors always look put together — they rarely wear clothes that are unflattering, even when they're dressing down.

For real-world moms, such attention to one's physical appearance is especially unrealistic. Actors have hours to get their hair and makeup done by professionals — a reality nearly no mom experiences in her normal day-to-day life. Further, the amount of time and money it would take to stay physically fit and get all of their clothes tailored simply does not exist for most moms without significant financial resources and childcare assistance.

kohei_hara/E+ via Getty Images

Home Improvement: How do they keep those houses so clean?

In addition to struggling with unrealistic beauty standards, modern moms also feel the pressure to have a clean, organized, and stylish home — an expectation that generally falls more on their shoulders than their partners', even when both are employed. On top of the practical efforts and monetary cost to keep a home functional and clean, the emotional load of this responsibility is taxing as well. While this stress is commonly shared by moms, the work involved is largely erased on TV.

> “
> The work involved in keeping a clean, organized, and stylish home is largely erased on TV.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Among the families shown on television, those in upper classes are overrepresented (32.5% of TV parents of minors, compared with 21.0% of all U.S. adults) and those in lower classes are underrepresented (12.8% of TV parents of minors, compared with 29.0% of all U.S. adults). The percentage of TV parents in the middle class are represented accurately (54.7%, compared with 50.0% of all U.S. adults). This may contribute to skewing the perspectives of what is considered a "typical" American family home.

FIGURE 5

The representation of TV family social class

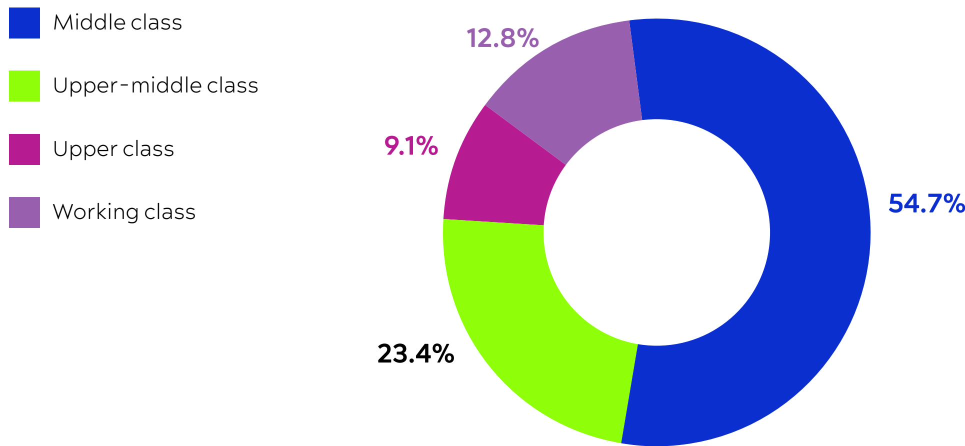


Figure notes: Figure represents the percentage of parents from each social class.

In addition to the representation of social class, TV families also live in spaces that are unrealistically maintained, which hides the time and resources necessary to manage a home. Of all TV parents of minors, only 9.7% had a messy house, and yet only 15.0% were shown performing any domestic tasks at all. Even when the parents' storylines were *about parenting* — that is, when parenthood is salient to the character — only 11.0% had a messy house and only 22.5% were shown doing domestic tasks.

TABLE 2

The representation of TV family social class

	All parents of minors	Storyline about parenting
Shown doing domestic tasks	15.0%	22.5%
Had a messy house	9.7%	11.0%

Table notes: Cell indicates the percentage of parents who are shown performing a domestic task or have a messy home, first among all parents of minors, then among those parents of minors who have a storyline about parenting.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Moms were shown performing domestic tasks more than twice as often as dads (20.1% compared with 9.2%; a gap of 10.9 percentage points), and this gap widened when the character's storyline was about parenting (28.2% compared with 14.5%; a gap of 13.7 points). This depiction reinforces the idea that moms are primarily responsible for housework. However, this gap was narrowest among working parents (18.1% of moms compared with 9.8% of dads; a gap of 8.3 points). While television is sometimes meant to show an ideal, and some parents may prefer to escape into a reality where homes are large and miraculously spotless, more balance is needed to avoid sending the message that the work that goes into maintaining a home is easy or unimportant.

FIGURE 6

TV moms are shown doing more domestic work than TV dads

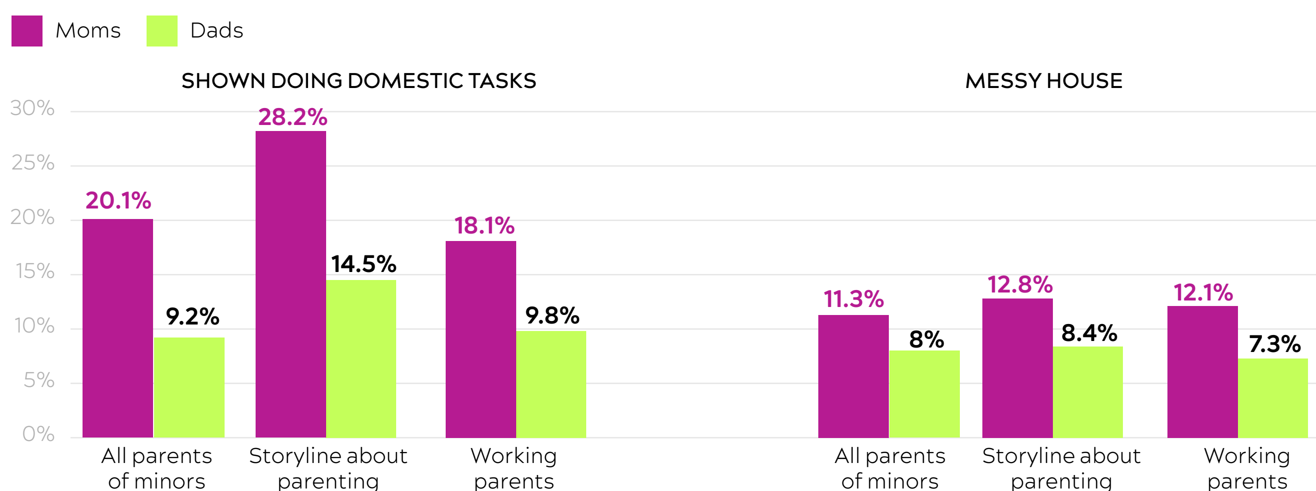


Figure notes: Figure represents the percentage of moms who are shown performing a domestic task or have a messy home, compared with dads — first among all parents of minors, then among those parents of minors who have a storyline about parenting, then among working parents of minors. These differences are statistically significant between moms and dads for those shown doing domestic tasks.

These unattainable levels of wealth and cleanliness can also be partially explained by the norms of the industry. The logistics around shooting for television favors certain home styles. Sets for shows are often large to accommodate the crews and equipment necessary for shooting. Multi-camera sitcom sets are even larger so that all of the actors are visible to the audience. This reinforces an expectation of financial comfort that would be necessary for a character to have such a large home. Additionally, because production designers want to avoid distracting from the important action in the story, sets are often minimalist, which is a design style typically associated with wealth. Set decorators will avoid adding clutter or mess that will complicate things like continuity or composition unless the script requires them. Further, set decoration has trended more minimalist over the past two decades, especially in broadcast television. As a result, the typical home for any television character is likely larger and tidier than the average person can live up to. This is especially unrealistic for the homes of small children. Again, this broadcasts a particular message: The "typical" family home is large and consistently clean, even if there is no evidence that a character has the financial means to afford a home of that size or the time to maintain it.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

The Nanny: Who is watching the kids?

One of the biggest issues facing parents is childcare. It is not only incredibly expensive, but also it requires coordination of schedules, transportation, and health and safety needs. Parents also need to navigate complications when their children are sick or their standard childcare is unavailable. When these complex problems are minimized or hidden, we send the message that they are not important or difficult, and do not warrant any major social changes to alleviate them. Unfortunately, these realities of childcare are largely invisible on TV.

In the shows analyzed, childcare for kids under the age of 10 was not portrayed often, despite the reality that children under 10 need near-constant supervision. Only about one-fifth of TV parents of children 10 and under had any known childcare at all in their storylines (20.5%). A small percentage of parents (11.2%) had live-in family members who could reasonably provide childcare, even if it was not shown. Even fewer had a nanny (7.7%), and only 3.1% sent their children to daycare (or summer camp).

> “The realities of childcare, like scheduling, transportation, and health and safety needs, are largely invisible on TV.

TABLE 3

Childcare depictions for TV parents of children 10 and under

	Parents of kids 0-10 who…
Had any childcare	20.5%
Had family assistance	11.2%
Had a nanny	7.7%
Sent kids to daycare/summer camp	3.1%

Table notes: “Any childcare” refers to the presence of at least one of the variables listed (family assistance, nanny, daycare). Cell indicates the percentage of parents with kids under the age of 11 who are shown to use each form of childcare. Subcategories of childcare do not add up to 20.5% because some parents had more than one.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

About one-fifth of TV parents with kids 10 and under (21.2%) were portrayed in an episode where at least one of their minor children was not seen or discussed at all — it was as if that child did not exist. It would take a high degree of privilege to disengage from the realities of parenthood to this extent, which is unattainable for most parents in the U.S.

Nearly two-fifths (39.4%) of parents with young children were shown going out in some capacity outside of their everyday routine, such as on a date. Of those parents, only 37.3% had some form of childcare shown or explained in the episode. For the other 62.7%, the safety and care of their children was to be assumed by the audience (Figure 7). This glosses over the difficulties of securing, coordinating, and affording childcare. The erasure of the realities of childcare is a misrepresentation of the experience of parenthood. In the real world, 85% of primary caregivers reported that their focus at work and commitment to work are negatively affected due to challenges with childcare.[57]

FIGURE 7

Who is taking care of the children 10 and under?

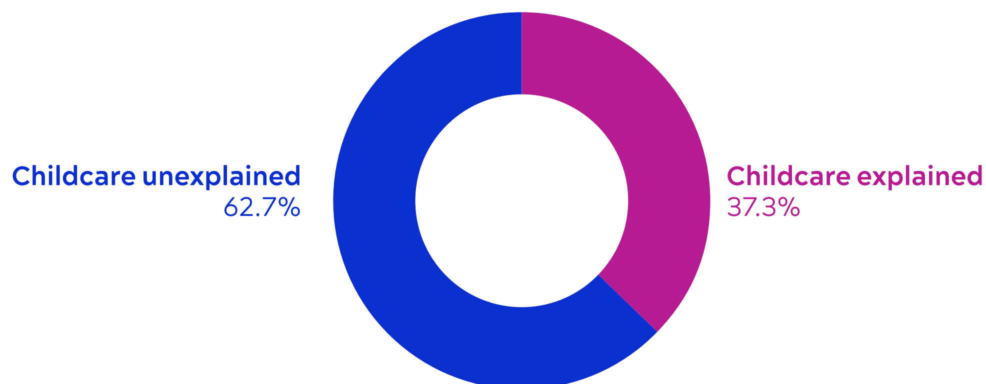


Figure notes: The figure displays if childcare is shown for the share of parents on outings without their kids under 11.

Despite these flaws, there are exceptions. For example, in the show *Fleishman Is in Trouble,* the main character struggles to find care for his young kids, which impacts his capacities at work. He is able to manage the situation only by sending them to summer camp. The show acknowledges the character's privilege, as he recognizes (and laments) that he is able to do so only because he is wealthy.

One of the most complicated elements of portraying parenthood on television is the reality of working with child actors. There are strict labor laws protecting kids' time on a TV production. As such, productions include children in scenes only where they are essential, and thus television does not portray childhood realistically: They do not speak unless spoken to, they do not make messes unless it's necessary for the plot, they are often unseen and can conveniently be explained away with a quick line about a nap upstairs or dinner at a friend's house. Or their absence may not be explained at all. Therefore, the realities of the responsibilities of raising a child are erased from TV family life.

Ariel Skelley/DigitalVision via Getty Images

Workin' Moms: How realistic is working motherhood on TV?

As discussed earlier, the prevalence of the family sitcom has declined over time. This has been met with a rise in workplace programming. Thus, many of the working moms of television are rarely, if ever, shown in their home or with their families, and the details of their parenting lives are rarely acknowledged in their workplace. Working moms are often portrayed with a dichotomy: women in workplace shows who happen to be moms, and moms in family shows who are sometimes shown at work. When these two worlds are shown independently with little overlap, the realities of the difficulties of work–life balance are erased. Furthermore, when moms' jobs are undervalued or misrepresented on TV, it can contribute to the assumption that women's earnings are not as important to the financial well-being of their families.

> Working moms are often portrayed with a dichotomy: women in workplace shows who happen to be moms, and moms in family shows who are sometimes shown at work.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Overall, moms of minors were less likely than dads of minors to have a job (72.6% compared with 86.1%), and only 30.7% of moms of minors and 41.6% of dads of minors were shown working.

In 2022, in the United States, the husband was the primary or sole breadwinner in 55% of opposite-gender marriages, the couple had roughly equal incomes in another 29%, and the wife was the sole or primary breadwinner in the remaining 16%. However, as the number of children in the family increases, so does the likelihood that the husband is the primary earner (ranging from 54.0% of marriages with one child to 69.0% of marriages with four or more children).[58] Even when moms are not primary earners, they make significant financial contributions to the home. In 2018, among families with children ages 6–17 in the U.S., 44.4% of mothers earned at least half of the family income, with another 24.8% earning at least a quarter of the family income.[59]

For TV families, when the narrative implied the breadwinner in a couple with kids under 18, it was the father 86.5% of the time, and it was the mother just 13.5% of the time. Thus, dads are significantly overrepresented and moms underrepresented as primary earners in TV homes. Only 10 moms of minors could be identified as primary breadwinners. Of those, most were women who out-earned their partners. There was only one stay-at-home dad (Jason from *Trying*) and another dad who switched to part-time hours to accommodate his partner's work schedule (Quinten from *Lopez vs. Lopez*).[60] There was also one lesbian couple, Evelyn and Diana from *Resident Evil,* which had an explicit primary breadwinner. In sum, television shows are still reinforcing the notion that mothers are less likely than fathers to work and to be breadwinners, perpetuating a norm that diminishes mothers' contributions to the household income.

Television shows are still reinforcing the notion that mothers are less likely than fathers to work and to be breadwinners.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

FIGURE 8

Depictions of working TV parents of minors

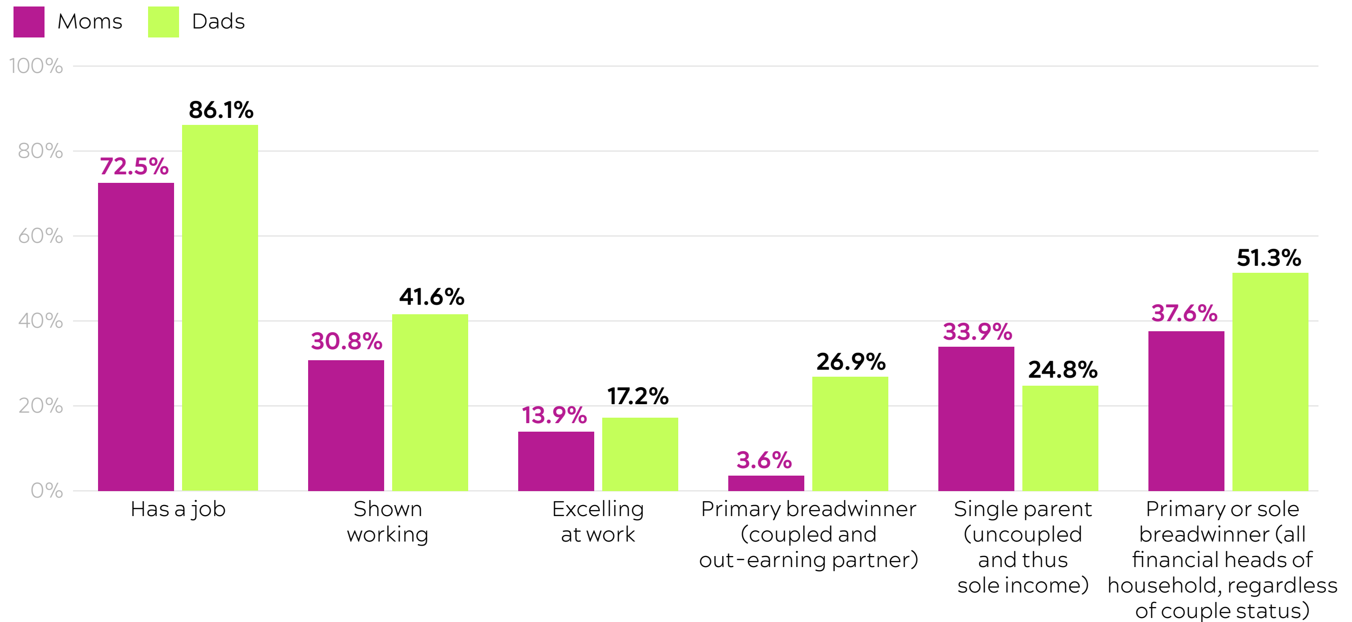


Figure notes: The percentage of moms who are shown with each depiction of work, compared with the percentage of dads. The differences between moms and dads are statistically significant for: has a job, shown working, primary breadwinner, single parent, and primary or sole breadwinner.

Among TV families with children under 18, there are no statistically significant differences between moms and dads regarding whether they have a storyline about work, or if they are shown excelling at work (Figure 8). While the differences are not statistically significant due to low occurrences, TV moms of minors were shown missing work for their families more often than dads (3.0% compared with 1.0%), whereas dads were shown missing family opportunities for work more often than moms (6.8% compared with 4.0%). Storylines like this reinforce the beliefs that men's work is more important than their family life, and that women's work can be sacrificed for their more vital role as mothers.

TABLE 4

TV storylines about parental sacrifice and work–life balance

	Working parents of minors	
	Moms	Dads
Has a storyline about work	30.2%	37.1%
Missed work for family	3.0%	1.0%
Missed family for work	4.0%	6.8%
Excels at work	19.1%	20.0%

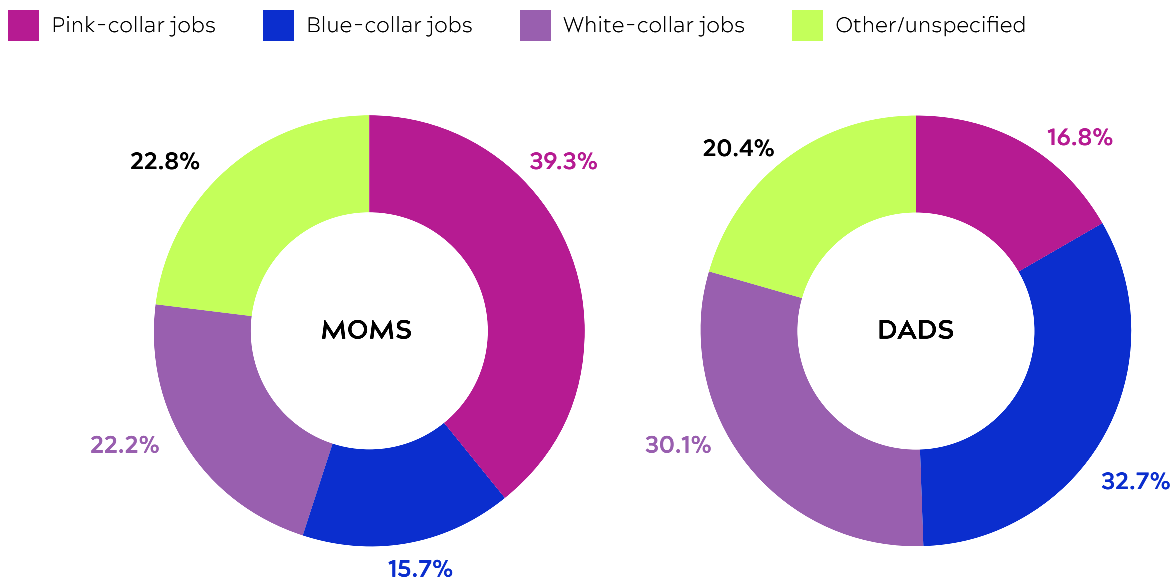
Table notes: Cell indicates the percentage of moms who are shown with each storyline type, compared with the percentage of dads. Differences were not statistically significant.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

When looking at types of jobs characters hold, we find that a higher percentage of moms than dad worked in pink-collar jobs, such as care work, education, and service jobs that focus on feminized tasks like waiting tables and cleaning (39.3% of moms compared with 16.8% of dads). More dads, however, worked in blue-collar jobs, such as public service positions like police officers, firefighters, military positions, farming, and hands-on service jobs like auto repair, factory work, and fishing (32.7% compared with 15.7%). Here, we see a clear indication that moms are in feminized and traditionally lower-earning positions than dads, who are in more masculinized and often higher-earning jobs. In reality, 2021 U.S. census data indicates that women make up 52.0% of legal occupations, 53.4% of business and financial operations and 63.7% of education, community service, arts, and media occupations. Although many jobs in the U.S. are still gendered — for example, men still make up the vast majority of people working in STEM and management professions — women are increasingly represented in traditionally male roles yet take home only 81.5% of men's earnings.[61]

FIGURE 9

Occupational differences for TV moms and dads of minors



© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

TABLE 5

Occupational differences for TV moms and dads of minors

	Parents of minors	
	Moms	**Dads**
Pink-collar jobs	**39.3%***	**16.8%***
Administration	3.0%	0.5%
Art	1.5%	1.0%
Care work	4.0%	1.0%
Education	6.6%	5.1%
Media	4.0%	3.6%
Performing arts	4.5%*	0.0%*
Pink-collar service jobs	9.6%*	3.6%*
Pink-collar small business owner	6.1%	2.0%
Blue-collar jobs	**15.7%***	**32.7%***
Farming/land ownership	1.0%	2.6%
Military	5.1%	10.2%
Public service	5.6%	9.7%
Blue-collar service jobs	4.0%	7.1%
Blue-collar small business owner	0.0%*	3.1%*
White-collar jobs	**22.2%**	**30.1%**
Business	7.6%	6.6%
Government	3.5%	5.6%
Law	2.0%	5.6%
Medicine	7.1%	8.2%
STEM	2.0%	4.1%
Other/unspecified	**22.8%**	**20.4%**

Table notes: Percentages shown represent the share of moms and dads in each occupational category when their job is known. Of all working parents, 19.0% of moms and 14.1% of dads were assumed to be employed without a specified job. Cell indicates the percentage of moms in each job category, compared with the percentage of dads. Starred cells indicate statistically significant differences between moms and dads, within each job category.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

More real-world mothers than fathers express that they feel judged for how they parent by the people and/or groups they interact with online, their friends, and other parents in their community, highlighting differences in perceived expectations and additional social pressure that mothers feel.[62] However, very few characters in scripted TV shows express these feelings or experience these judgments. Further, we find no statistically significant differences between moms and dads regarding the portrayal of feeling shame or experiencing judgment related to their parenting.

TABLE 6

Depictions of judgment and shame for TV moms and dads of minors

	Moms	Dads
Complimented by others	6.2%	5.9%
Judged by others	12.6%	14.6%
Feels shame for not living up to parenting expectations	10.6%	8.4%
Experiences parenting shame because of work	1.5%	1.3%

Table notes: Cell indicates the percentage of moms who are shown with each depiction of judgment or shame, compared with the percentage of dads. Differences were not statistically significant.

Looking closer at the rare instances when a TV parent experiences guilt or shame, we find they often appear in atypical situations. Parents expressed shame when their child went missing, when they endangered their child because they had chosen a life of crime, or when they dealt with a difficult situation like abuse. TV parents rarely expressed the insecurities and frustrations that real parents can't escape. There were only seven total instances of a parent feeling shame about parenting because of their work — four were moms, three were dads — and only half of the instances were explicit reflections on the struggle to balance work and family. In this sense, modern programming isn't reinforcing a gender imbalance, but it may not be accurately reflecting the struggle that many parents face, either.

Tara Moore/Stone via Getty Images

Growing Pains: How difficult is TV motherhood?

Sacrifice is intrinsic to parenthood. Raising children requires putting their needs before one's own, and those sacrifices range from major physical changes, such as pregnancy, to small everyday choices, like making meals that appeal to kids or staying up late to help them with a project. All parents do these things for their children, yet many of these responsibilities fall to moms. These everyday details are an important part of motherhood but are often missing on TV.

> "The everyday sacrifices moms make for their kids are an important part of motherhood but are often missing on TV.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Overall, TV moms of minors were shown more often than dads to make sacrifices for their families (40 times for moms, 23 for dads). However, many of these sacrifices were not the everyday concessions that real moms make to keep their families' lives running smoothly. Instead, they were often big life-or-death choices told as part of dramatic stories, such as risking their lives or turning to criminal activities for their children's safety (55.0% of moms' sacrifices and 65.2% of dads' sacrifices were more dramatic than day-to-day sacrifices). Less than half (45.0%) of the sacrifices that moms were shown making were the more common, everyday behaviors that real moms actually encounter, such as staying up with a newborn, feeding a hungry neighborhood child when also struggling with money, and making financial and career decisions that benefit their family more than themselves. Only a handful of dads were shown making more common (i.e., less life-or-death) types of sacrifices.

Writing a TV script requires being economical with dialogue so that screen time is not wasted on things inessential to the story. Thus, a writer would not likely spend time on the small details of motherhood unless they had reason to believe it is a core element to a character's development. Further, many dramas focus on big life-or-death moments because they bring more drama to the story. However, there can be value in recognizing the realities of everyday sacrifices, especially if they are used to complement (or, in some cases, contrast) the high-drama moments.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

Conclusion

Our analysis of scripted television programs from 2022 that feature mothers in the title cast finds authentic portrayals of motherhood intermingle with portrayals that reproduce unrealistic expectations for moms, likely contributing to the guilt and shame they experience, while setting fathers up for failure too. For example, our analysis of who played TV moms finds racial diversity, but 2 out of 3 partnered moms were white, while Black moms were much more likely to be single. At other intersections, diversity was even less visible: Moms were largely slender, and no mom in the dataset had a discernible disability. Moms were also more likely than dads to be in revealing clothing, and their appearance was commented on five times more often. But moms were no more likely than dads to be objectified, and moms weren't more likely than dads to be disheveled or unattractive. Although we want to see more moms who don't look perfect, we celebrate that the unkempt mom was no more common than the unkempt dad.

One of the most important findings that this analysis uncovered was portrayals that paint a picture of working moms that undervalues women's contributions to the economy and to their families' financial well-being. For example, nearly 9 out of 10 family breadwinners were dads, and dads were more likely to be shown working, while moms were more likely to be shown carrying out domestic chores. When moms were shown working, they were most commonly shown in pink-collar professions (e.g., care work or education), while dads were more often shown in blue- and white-collar professions.

Finally, the most pressing problems that real-world moms face, such as finding consistent and affordable childcare, were all but missing from the TV landscape. Instead, TV moms were portrayed as effortlessly attractive and unbothered by the daily stressors of motherhood, able to live in clean houses without having to clean, or shown as under siege by drama and calamity, both of which are not relatable to most moms.

While television is an important source of escapism, especially for moms in a post-COVID-19 era, these unrealistic representations of parenthood contribute to gender socialization and communicate inauthentic norms and expectations surrounding parenting, work, and home life. We encourage the entertainment industry to more fully develop the characterization of motherhood, and offer the following recommendations when developing motherhood narratives.

StockPlanets/E+ via Getty Images

Recommendations

Given these findings, we present the following recommendations to TV executives, producers, and writers, as well as to all of the moms who aren't seeing themselves on-screen. Moms First (experts on the support moms need to thrive) and the Geena Davis Institute (experts on the entertainment industry) are eager to support entertainment industry leaders in their efforts to more accurately portray motherhood on television.

TELEVISION EXECUTIVES AND PRODUCERS

- **Provide flexible work options for writers.** Those most qualified to write realistic stories about motherhood are moms themselves. However, given the precarity of jobs in TV writing,[63] it is not easy for writers who are also moms to navigate the industry. Flexible and hybrid work schedules will provide moms with more opportunities to succeed as writers.

- **Invest in childcare and gender-neutral paid family leave for employees.** Without affordable childcare, moms cannot work. Supporting parents with expanded childcare benefits and with gender-neutral paid family leave can help attract, retain, and advance women in the workforce. Moms First is available to provide guidance and recommendations to employers when designing their childcare and paid leave policies.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

- **Cast mom characters with more diverse backgrounds and appearances.** The white, straight, thin TV mom has never been a reflection of reality. However, even as we see more diversity on TV, nearly half of mom characters still fit this description. Challenge this by showing moms of color, queer moms, fat moms, disabled moms, and moms who do not look perfectly styled at all times. Organizations like t he Geena Davis Institute can help assess your progress with this goal.

TELEVISION WRITERS

- **Integrate the problems facing moms today into storylines.** The structural and cultural problems that moms are facing need attention in order for policy- and decision-makers to take them seriously. Show parents grappling with things like the current childcare crisis and the need for paid leave.

- **Represent the inescapable realities of motherhood**. We recognize that every line of dialogue in a television show must serve a purpose, and that writers may not prioritize explaining things like childcare if a scene does not explicitly call for it. However, for real-world moms of young kids, their responsibilities and concerns for their children are an integral part of their lives, which should be present when writing mom characters, even when their role as a mother may not be central to the plot of the show.

- **View moms through an intersectional lens.** Our findings suggest that TV moms lack diversity at the intersection of disability, sexual orientation, and body size. Write and cast more moms of all races and ethnicities who have disabilities, are queer, and have a range of body sizes.

- **Expand your perspectives of motherhood.** As we have shown, the TV mom has evolved over time and has never truly reflected reality. Therefore, the specific details that can best represent motherhood could be better understood by looking not at other TV characters for inspiration, but at real-world moms. Follow moms on social media, read books written by moms, support organizations like Moms First that advocate for moms, and talk to real moms who can tell you what they would like to see on TV.

MOMS OUTSIDE OF THE INDUSTRY

- **Reflect.** Moms often find themselves feeling inadequate for not living up to unrealistic standards. Reflect on how you may have internalized the expectations set by TV and larger social structures.

- **Change the narrative.** Share your own experiences of motherhood with friends, loved ones, fellow parents, your social media networks, and policymakers.

Here are some things we want to see more of on TV.

What do you want to see?

Stories from writers who are moms themselves. Those most qualified to write realistic stories about motherhood are moms themselves.

Moms who ask for help. Sacrifice is intrinsic to parenthood but shouldn't always fall to moms on TV. Show moms asking for help as a model for change.

Moms who repeat outfits. Real-world moms repeat outfits.

Homes with childproofing. If shows feature young children, show home details that reflect this, like childproofing.

Moms in school. Many parents decide to return to school after having kids.

Disabled moms of color. There were no disabled moms in the TV episodes sampled for this report. When casting disabled moms, ensure racial diversity, too.

Dads as equal partners. Surveys show today's dads want to be more involved.

Moms with their roots showing. Current beauty standards present unrealistic expectations for women to have styled and treated hair, clear skin, and flawless makeup.

Moms who struggle (or struggled) with infertility. About 1 in 10 women have difficulty getting or staying pregnant.

Messy moms, dads, and homes. Less than 1 in 10 TV parents had a messy house, and yet only 15.0% were shown doing domestic tasks like cleaning. Show us more clutter.

Babysitters. Our report found only 1 in 5 TV parents with kids under the age of 11 mentioned any form of childcare.

Fat moms. Our report found nearly 8 out of 10 moms on TV were slender.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

ENDNOTES

1. Gromada, A., & Richardson D. (2021). *Where do rich countries stand on childcare?* UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/where-do-rich-countries-stand-on-childcare.pdf
2. Robles, C. (2023, August 17). Why child-care prices are rising at nearly twice the overall inflation rate. *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/economy/child-care-prices-are-rising-at-nearly-twice-the-overall-inflation-rate-2c279c61
3. National Partnership for Women and Families. (2023). *Fathers need paid family and medical leave.* https://nationalpartnership.org/report/fathers-need-paid-leave/
4. Brenan, M. (2020, Jan 29). Women still handle main household tasks in U.S. *Gallup.* https://news.gallup.com/poll/283979/women-handle-main-household-tasks.aspx
5. Glynn, S.J. (2018). An unequal division of labor: How equitable workplace policies would benefit working mothers. *The Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/unequal-division-labor/
6. Barroso, A. & Horowitz, J.M. (2021, March 17). The pandemic has highlighted many challenges for mothers, but they aren't necessarily new. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/17/the-pandemic-has-highlighted-many-challenges-for-mothers-but-they-arent-necessarily-new/
7. This study reported that working moms averaged about 1.5 fewer hours at work than working dads.
8. We use the term "opposite-gender marriages" to refer to marriages between a man and a woman, regardless of sex assigned at birth. While imperfect, this phrasing does not equate sex and gender, and we prefer it over terms like "heterosexual marriage" or "straight marriage," which carry the implication that a partnership between a man and a woman cannot also be queer.
9. Bauer, Lauren, Sara Estep, Winnie Yee. (2021, July 22). "Time Waits for No Mom in 2020." *The Hamilton Project.* https://www.hamiltonproject.org/publication/paper/time-waited-for-no-mom-in-2020/
10. Carranza, C. (2023, April 13). Even when women make more than their husbands, they are doing more child care and housework. *The 19th.* https://19thnews.org/2023/04/even-when-women-make-more-than-their-husbands-they-are-doing-more-child-care-and-housework/
11. Fry, R., Aragão, C., Hurst, K. & Parker, K. (2023, April 13). In a growing share of U.S. marriages, husbands and wives earn about the same. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/04/13/in-a-growing-share-of-u-s-marriages-husbands-and-wives-earn-about-the-same/.
12. Glynn, S.J. (2021, March 29). Breadwinning mothers are critical to families' economic security. *The Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/
13. Glynn, S.J. (2021, March 29). Breadwinning mothers are critical to families' economic security. The Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/
14. KPMG. (2022). *The diversity journey.* https://www.kpmg.us/about/kpmg-dei-progress-survey.html
15. Shannon-Karasik, C. (2018, August 8). Working mothers are the backbone of the U.S. economy. *Dame Magazine.* https://www.damemagazine.com/2018/08/08/working-mothers-are-the-backbone-of-the-u-s-economy/
16. *Equal Rights Advocates.* (2023, August 14). Moms' equal pay day 2023: Moms deserve more (literally and figuratively). https://www.equalrights.org/viewpoints/moms-equal-pay-day-2023-moms-deserve-more-literally-and-figuratively/
17. *AAUW.* "The motherhood penalty." https://www.aauw.org/issues/equity/motherhood/
18. Carranza, C. (2023, April 27). The 'open secret' in most workplaces: Discrimination against moms is still rampant. *The 19th.* https://19thnews.org/2023/04/workplace-discrimination-mothers-open-secret/
19. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). *National compensation survey: Employee benefits in the United States.* https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/september-2022-landing-page-employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2022.htm
20. Workman, S. (2020, August 4). The true cost of high-quality child care across the United States. *Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/costly-unavailable-america-lacks-sufficient-child-care-supply-infants-toddlers/
21. Schochet, L. (2019, March 28). The child care crisis is keeping women out of the workforce. *Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-crisis-keeping-women-workforce/

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

22. Hurst, K., Braga, D., Greenwood, S., Baronavski, C., & Keegan, M. (2023, January 24). How today's parents say their approach to parenting does – or doesn't – match their own upbringing. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/01/24/how-todays-parents-say-their-approach-to-parenting-does-or-doesnt-match-their-own-upbringing/
23. Motherly's 2021 state of motherhood survey results. (2021, May 4). *Motherly.* https://www.mother.ly/news/2021-state-of-motherhood-survey/
24. Frye, J. (2019, August 22). Racism and sexism combine to shortchange Black working women. *Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/racism-sexism-combine-shortchange-working-black-women/
25. Roux, M. (2021, August 3). 5 facts about Black women in the labor force. *U.S. Department of Labor Blog.* https://blog.dol.gov/2021/08/03/5-facts-about-black-women-in-the-labor-force
26. Goodwin, J. M., Williams C., and Dow W.H. (2021). Racial/*Ethnic Inequalities in Paid Parental Leave Access.* Health Equity 5(1): 738-759.
27. CDC. (2023). *Working together to reduce black maternal mortality.* https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html
28. Carranza, C. (2023, April 27). The 'open secret' in most workplaces: Discrimination against moms is still rampant. *The 19th.* https://19thnews.org/2023/04/workplace-discrimination-mothers-open-secret/
29. U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.) *Frequently asked questions – pumping breast milk at work.* https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/nursing-mothers/faq
30. Cohen, R. (2015, November 18). Who took care of Rosie the Riveter's kids? *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/11/daycare-world-war-rosie-riveter/415650/
31. Shannon-Karasik, C. (2018, August 8). Working mothers are the backbone of the U.S. economy. *Dame Magazine.* https://www.damemagazine.com/2018/08/08/working-mothers-are-the-backbone-of-the-u-s-economy/
32. Coontz, S. (2016). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap.* Hachette UK.
33. Frye, J. (2019, August 22). Racism and sexism combine to shortchange Black working women. *Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/racism-sexism-combine-shortchange-working-black-women/
34. Stoltzfus, E. (2000). *Child care: The federal role during World War II.* Congressional Research Service, the Library of Congress.
35. Mathews, G. (1987). *"Just a housewife": The rise and fall of domesticity in America.* Oxford University Press.
36. Federal Communications Commission. (2021). *The Public and Broadcasting.*
37. Kompare, D. (2006). *Rerun nation: How repeats invented American television. Routledge.*
38. Kompare, D. (2006). *Rerun nation: How repeats invented American television. Routledge.*
39. Coontz, S. (2016). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap.* Hachette UK.
40. Spigel, L. (1992). *Make room for TV: Television and the family ideal in postwar America*. University of Chicago Press.
41. Spigel, L. (2001). *Welcome to the dreamhouse: Popular media and postwar suburbs.* Duke University Press.
42. Livingston, G. (2013, July 2). The rise of single fathers. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/07/02/the-rise-of-single-fathers/
43. Dow, B. J. (1996). *Prime-time feminism: Television, media culture, and the women's movement since 1970.* University of Pennsylvania Press.
44. Leppert, A. (2017). Solving the day-care crisis, one episode at a time: family sitcoms and privatized child care in the 1980s. *Cinema Journal,* 56(2), 67-90.
45. Leppert, A. (2017). Solving the day-care crisis, one episode at a time: family sitcoms and privatized child care in the 1980s. *Cinema Journal*, 56(2), 67-90.
46. Leppert, A. (2019). TV family values: gender, domestic labor, and 1980s sitcoms. Rutgers University Press.
47. Feasey, Rebecca. (2013). From soap opera to reality programming: examining motherhood, motherwork and the maternal role on popular television. *Imaginations,* 4(2), 25-46.
48. Feasey, Rebecca. (2013). From soap opera to reality programming: examining motherhood, motherwork and the maternal role on popular television. *Imaginations,* 4(2), 25-46.
49. Streaming content includes the following platforms: Amazon Prime, AMC+, Apple TV+, BET+, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, Netflix, Paramount+, and Peacock.
50 The CDC does not provide information on Middle Eastern and North African birth rates.

© 2024 Geena Davis Institute. If they can see it, they can be it.™ · All rights reserved.

51. Hamilton, B.E., Martin, J.A., & Osterman, M.J.K. (2023). *Vital statistics surveillance report.* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr028.pdf

52. We prefer to use the term "fat" as a value-neutral descriptor that is not rooted in medical terminology (such as "obese" or "overweight"), nor is it suggestive of being outside of some sort of "norm" or "average" (such as "plus size" or "bigger"). Fatness is determined relative to waist-size data from the CDC, and is equated to characters who would wear XXL clothing or larger.

53. *National Council on Disability.* (2012). Rocking the cradle: ensuring the rights of parents with disabilities and their children. https://www.ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD_Parenting_508_0.pdf

54. Association of American Medical Colleges

55. Morse, A. (2022, April 6). Stable fertility rates 1990-2019 mask distinct variations by age. *United States Census Bureau.* https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/04/fertility-rates-declined-for-younger-women-increased-for-older-women.html

56. Livingston, G. (2018, April 25). The changing profile of unmarried parents. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/04/25/the-changing-profile-of-unmarried-parents/.

57. Bishop, S. (2023). *$122 billion: The growing, annual cost of the infant-toddler child care crisis.* Ready Nation: Council for a Strong America. https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2038-122-billion-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis

58. Fry, R., Aragão, C., Hurst, K., & Parker, K. (2023, April 13). In a growing share of U.S. marriages, husbands and wives earn about the same. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/04/13/in-a-growing-share-of-u-s-marriages-husbands-and-wives-earn-about-the-same/

59. Glynn, S.J. (2021, March 29). Breadwinning mothers are critical to families' economic security. *The Center for American Progress.* https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/.

60. Quinten appears in the dataset twice.

61. United States Census Bureau (2021). *Full-time, year-round workers & median earnings by sex and occupation.* https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/industry-occupation/median-earnings.html.

62. Motherly. (2021). *Motherly's 2021 state of motherhood survey results*. https://www.mother.ly/news/2021-state-of-motherhood-survey/

63. Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity. (2022). *Behind the scenes: The state of inclusion and equity in TV writing.*

About the Geena Davis Institute

Since 2004, the Geena Davis Institute has worked to mitigate unconscious bias while creating equality, fostering inclusion and reducing negative stereotyping in entertainment and media. As a global research-based organization, the Institute provides research, direct guidance, and thought leadership aimed at increasing representation of marginalized groups within six identities: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body type. Because of its unique history and position, the Institute can help achieve true on-screen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at geenadavisinstitute.org.

About Moms First

Moms First is a national, nonprofit organization transforming our workplaces, communities, and culture to enable moms in America to thrive. Our grassroots movement of more than 1 million moms and supporters is dedicated to advancing women's economic freedom, uplifting the vital work of moms in our society, and building the power to win the public- and private-sector investments moms need and deserve, including childcare, paid leave, and equal pay.

About the Authors

Dr. Meredith Conroy (she/her) is the vice president of research and insights at the Geena Davis Institute. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from University of California, Santa Barbara. Meredith has led studies that look at the representation of gender, race/ethnicity, queer identity, age, disability, and body type in film, TV, and advertising. Meredith's research interests include how gender is communicated in news coverage and how this impacts American politics, as well as representation more broadly.

Aly Ferguson (she/her) is the director of communications at Moms First. Aly is an external communications strategist who specializes in working with national nonprofits, in the government, and on political campaigns to advance social impact. She holds a B.A. in communication from University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication.

Dr. Michele Meyer (she/her) is the senior director of research and methodologies at the Geena Davis Institute. She is a mixed-methods social scientist who specializes in the representation of marginalized groups in new, social, and entertainment media. She holds a Ph.D. in media and communication from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an M.A. in media studies from Syracuse University, and a B.A. in culture and communication from Ithaca College. She also runs Anxiety Productions, a small art and sticker company.

Summer van Houten (she/her) is a researcher at the Geena Davis Institute. Summer received her M.A. in gender, society, and representation from University College London, where she studied the politics of feminist dystopias within the United States. She holds a B.A. in psychology and feminist studies from University of California, Santa Barbara.

Suggested Citation: Meyer, M., Conroy, M., van Houten, S., & Ferguson, A. (2024). Rewriting Motherhood: How TV Represents Moms and What We Want To See Next. The Geena Davis Institute.

Thank you!

The authors would like to thank Sofie Christensen, Cameron Espinoza, Dr. Gina Gayle, Melanie Lorísdóttir, Marisa Rodriguez, Dr. Alexis Romero-Walker, Lena Schofield, Dr. Larissa Terán, and Dr. Sarah Trinh for contributing to the data collection, and Romeo Pérez for data management and data collection. We would also like to thank Caitlin Durante for their insights on screenwriting. We would like to thank Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex, and The Archewell Foundation for supporting the development of this report and helping to promote its findings. We could not do this work without you. We are grateful to the team at Moms First for their expertise and would like to thank Charlotte Stone for her communications expertise and shepherding of this report. Lastly, the historical background on television and motherhood in this report builds upon the work of the authors and scholars Lynn Spigel, Alice Leppert, Stephanie Coontz, Rebecca Feasey, and Derek Kompare.