THE CHANGING FEMALE

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[Assignment: Write a comparative analysis on two subjects of your choice aiming toward enhancing your reader's understanding of the subjects by allowing him or her to view the subjects in relation to one another without judging their relative merits.]

(1) Since the invention of television almost forty years ago, our country's lifestyles, morals, and views have changed dramatically. We are more extravagant in the way we choose to live our lives, looser in our morals, and more open-minded in our views. But more importantly, as the years have progressed, so have women's rights to be treated as an equal sex. Our television sets reflect these changes. Today, television portrays the female as more than just a frivolous, air-headed creature. TV programs present single-parent families headed by women and not just traditional male-dominated families. Women come to our screens as doctors, lawyers, and detectives, not just as secretaries, waitresses, and librarians. Furthermore, most TV moms hold full-time jobs as well as run households, as compared with the mothers of the past who were just housewives. Undoubtedly, the gains women have achieved in being considered an equal sex are reflected on our nation's most important mass media, because as times have changed, so has the role of the female on TV.

(2) In the past, television shows such as Leave It to Beaver and The Brady Bunch focused on the lives of the traditional, male-dominated, two-parent family. Mr. Cleaver and Mr. Brady were the breadwinners, the authorities, the kings. Their word was law. The wives in both of these programs were content in cleaning their houses and listening to their husbands. It may be hard to believe, but the family life portrayed in these shows was the family life portrayed in the majority of the programs aired less than twenty years ago! Of course, there were exceptions in programs such as The Andy Griffith Show, where the mother died and an elderly female relative replaced her. Nevertheless, the male still dominated.

(3) Since then, shows such as Kate and Allie and Harper Valley PTA have reached our airways. In Kate and Allie, women divorcees decide to live and raise their families together. Their lives are not disordered because male guidance is lacking. In fact, they are happy and fulfilled with their careers and children. Another show, Harper Valley PTA, focuses on the lives of a widow, played by Barbara Eden, and her teenaged daughter. Like the characters in Kate and Allie, Eden plays a female who is able to survive in a man's world, and do it quite successfully. As we can see, television is acknowledging the female-headed family, and not ignoring it, as was done in the past when we only saw the
traditional, male-dominated family.

(4) Not only are women being recognized as heads of households on television, they are also being presented as doctors, lawyers, and detectives. In the past, both men and women felt that the only jobs proper for women were those of secretary, waitress, or librarian. The top-rated program on television is The Cosby Show. Claire Huxtable, the wife and mother, is a lawyer. In the number one afternoon soap opera, General Hospital, the chief of police is Anna DeVane, and in another non-traditional role, Monica Quartermaine wins our respect as a heart surgeon. Such career roles for women were totally absent from TV less than twenty years ago. In fact, even in the 70's, popular programs presented women in conventional and stereotypical roles. Thus, in The Brady Bunch, Alice was the family maid, and in The Beverly Hillbillies, Miss Hathaway was a secretary. Today, however, women have made inroads into very different careers and television reflects these changes by portraying women in careers which were traditionally male-dominated.

(5) The most significant change in television's image of women is that now they are seen as capable of both holding a full-time job and running a household. In contrast, TV programs of the past portrayed women only as housewives. In The Dick Van Dyke Show and I Love Lucy, Laura Petrie and Lucy Ricardo were simply wives devoted exclusively to home and family. They cleaned the house, did the laundry, ironed clothes, prepared dinner, and waited for their husbands to come home from their jobs. To them, thought of a career would have seemed insane. How could they possibly do both? Today's woman can, and television shows us that. Claire Huxtable, of The Cosby Show, is a successful lawyer and mother. She is able to satisfy herself with a demanding career, as well as devote time and energy to her husband and five children. Elise Keaton, of Family Ties, is an architect and mother of four. When she is not designing buildings, she is giving love and understanding to her husband and family. The lives of these two women, despite the predictable exaggeration on TV, are no fantasy because, today, many women combine full family life with demanding careers.

(6) Undoubtedly, women have come a long way. They no longer live in the shadows of their men. They pursue exciting careers and pursue them as competently as men. And miraculously, they manage their families even as they manage their jobs. As women have emerged in the forefront of our world, so have they on television. Actresses of today play very different roles from those of the past.