

PRESS & TELEVISION

journalists and businessmen objectively summarized news stories. But when they were asked to concoct stories based solely on pictures, their latent political and social views surfaced. Even though two-thirds of the journalists felt that newsmen can (and should) be impartial, it is difficult, the authors argue, to guard against subjective judgments when making basic editorial decisions—which stories are important, what “angle” they should be given.

Their divergent views make journalists and businessmen natural antagonists, the authors suggest. But because journalists “help depict reality for the rest of society,” their biases take on special significance.

A Prime-Time TV Census

“The World According to Television” by George Gerbner and Nancy Signorielli, in *American Demographics* (Oct. 1982) P.O. Box 68, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850.

Americans watch an average of over four hours of television daily, one-third of it during prime time. They see a world of adventure, melodrama, and fantasy. Gerbner and Signorielli, of the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Communications, add that even the population of these shows is a poor reflection of reality.

In an analysis of some 14,000 characters appearing in 878 prime-time entertainment shows from 1969 to 1981, they found that men, who make up 49 percent of the U.S. population, were 73 percent of the prime-time population. Nearly half the white men were between 35 and 50 years old—the “age of authority” on TV, the authors say—while nonwhite men tended to be younger. Blacks were underrepresented by 27 percent compared to the real world, Hispanics by 63 percent.



The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, which aired from 1952 to 1966, idealized family life. Today's shows depart from reality in other ways: Single white women appear more than twice as often as in real life.

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Only 27 percent of the prime-time population was female. On children's programs, women were outnumbered four to one by men. Television women tended to be disproportionately young—one-third were in their twenties—and their marital status was left unclear in only 12 percent of the cases. Women also tended to age faster on television. More than 90 percent of the women over age 65 were portrayed as "elderly," the authors say, compared to 77 percent of over-65 males. While a majority of the real world's working women are married, on television they were not, and they were employed in traditional female jobs—nurses, secretaries, teachers.

Indeed, the overall occupational make-up of the television world was skewed. Two-thirds of the U.S. labor force is in blue-collar or service work, but professional, celebrity, and police characters dominated the prime-time airwaves. The heavy police population should come as no surprise: "Prime-time crime is at least ten times as rampant as in the real world," the authors report.

Television not only exaggerates real-world dangers, they say, but heightens feelings of "mistrust, vulnerability, and insecurity." White, middle-aged men have even more power on TV than they do in the real world, undermining female and black viewers' sense of opportunity.

Why worry? Gerbner and Signorielli believe that today, television programs, not parents, tell children how the world works.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Ethics of Snitching

"Undercover: The Hidden Costs of Infiltration" by Sanford Levinson, in *The Hastings Center Report* (Aug. 1982), 360 Broadway, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y. 10706.

When Judas revealed Jesus' identity to the Romans, his conduct deserved only mild censure. But when he concealed at the Last Supper what he had done, he crossed far over into the realm of the unethical.

So says Levinson, a University of Texas law professor. He argues that there are not only two but three different kinds of informers, each posing different ethical dilemmas and legal questions. One type, the "snitch," betrays a friend without deceiving him. "It is unrealistic to expect that one's friends will never change their minds about a relationship," Levinson observes. The Supreme Court recognized this position in *Trammel v. United States* (1980) when it overturned the courtroom practice of allowing one spouse to prevent the other from testifying against him.

Levinson finds the other two kinds of informers—the friend who turns informer while feigning continued loyalty, and the spy who be-