

Skewed gender representation in television

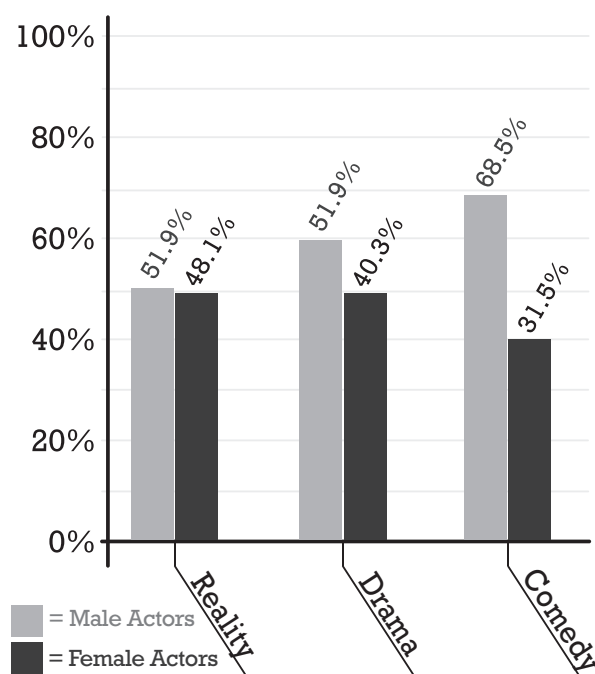
Data represents one week of spring 2012 prime-time cable and broadcast television.

Total number of speaking characters:
5,520

Ratio of male to female characters:
1.57 to 1

Percentage of shows with female narrator:
44.2%

Percentage of shows with gender-balanced casts:
22%



Source: <https://seejane.org/research>

Students should remain idealistic



Laknath Gunathilake

A few days ago, I came across Steve Jobs' commencement address at Stanford University. It's a fascinating speech by a college dropout who became one of the most successful entrepreneurs of our generation. After providing anecdotes about love, life and his struggles with pancreatic cancer, Jobs left the Stanford graduating class with the farewell, "Stay hungry, stay foolish."

His message to remain hungry and foolish must be taken beyond its literal meaning, and I consider his parting comments as an invitation to foster idealism. College perhaps is the best place to meet young idealists who want to make a difference and change the world. I've been lucky enough to have met many students at Truman State who want to do great things and make a positive impact on society. Whether it's about social justice, equality or self-expression, a liberal arts education can be used in a truly liberating way for self-actualization.

After all, we are part of the millennial generation, and according to David Burnstein, the author of "Fast Future," our generation's approach to social change is based on pragmatic idealism. Burnstein notes the millennial generation has a deep desire to make the world a better place, understanding doing so requires building new institutions while working inside and outside existing ones.

Sadly, however, our idealism tends to wane with age. While trying to strike a balance between what we really love to do and our desire to remain practical, we satiate our appetite and consider ourselves wise. After college, some individuals abandon their idealism for a life of comfort and safety. They often trade their early idealism for a comfortable job and a safe income for the future.

While one certainly should be concerned about financial security and familial obligations, remaining faithful to one's idealism sometimes requires great sacrifice. History is full of individuals who abandoned their careers to pursue something greater than themselves.

In the eyes of an ordinary individual, such action might seem ridiculous and unwarranted. After all, we are rationally calculating, self-interested beings motivated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. When I think of the counterfactual for the rationally calculating individual, I think of the tank man in Tiananmen Square. During June 1989 an anonymous man stood in front of an approaching column of tanks in the midst of the military suppression carried out by the Chinese military in Tiananmen Square. Although there is little known about the identity or the fate of the individual, it is thought he was a 19-year-old student who was charged with political hooliganism and executed a few days after.

Now, being an idealist certainly doesn't call for risking one's life or engaging in death-defying acts of heroism. But it certainly requires stretching one's boundaries and moving away from one's comfort zone. It's important to remember sticking to our idealism often calls for great sacrifices to be made. Whether those sacrifices take the form of time, money or taking a path less-traveled, they certainly would be worth it.

Laknath Gunathilake is a senior political science major from Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Feminism has a place in TV



Mackenzie McDermott

Being the best representation of feminism on television is every girl's dream, but it's Amy Poehler's destiny. There is something about a ditzy, blonde, unlucky-in-love damsel in distress that makes most television writers go crazy. Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, creators of the hilarious and absurd television show Parks and Recreation, and its main character Leslie Knope, are not among them. Instead, they envisioned a passionate, determined and whip-smart blonde who always stands up for what she believes in — and what she believes in is feminism, love and waffles.

Strong female characters have been on television for a while now — specifically since Joss Whedon created his 90s superhero Buffy the Vampire Slayer — but feminists are more difficult to come by in mainstream TV. Feminism is a tainted label with a stigma of angry, man-hating women and, generally speaking, writers aren't even willing to breach the subject. Schur and Daniels haven't just breached it — they've blown it wide open. Leslie Knope isn't just a driven, put-together woman — she's a driven, put-together woman with a framed picture of Hillary Clinton on her desk.

It's important for audiences to be exposed to strong female characters who don't exist in a bubble where no one questions why they're strong. Deciding to show a woman who is good at what she does and refuses to be

stopped by a society that constantly tells her she shouldn't be capable is a noble and risky move that ultimately has paid off. Parks and Recreation has garnered a cult following and critical acclaim since its second season, with Amy Poehler receiving high praise for her honest and endearing performance as loyal public servant Leslie Knope.

Most people probably would point to "30 Rock's" Liz Lemon when thinking of modern television feminists, but she often falls prey to misogynistic stereotypes. Her demeanor as a socially awkward, perpetually and unhappily single career woman whose feminism often is the butt of a joke sometimes comes off as anything but feminist. Leslie Knope, however, champions women's rights and is a strong community leader with a group of close friends and a loving and supportive spouse. Throughout the show's six-year run, she has run for public office, fought employment discrimination, personally overseen a project to clean a local pond and explained if she had to choose a stripper name, it would be Equality.

Even with all this said, Leslie Knope isn't the only feminist on the show — she's just the loudest. Virtually every main character has feminist ideals — with gruff boss Ron Swanson's penchant for strong women and intern April's refusal even to pretend to care about pleasing people.

At the end, the most impressive aspect of the show is it's not afraid of the word "feminism" and refuses to trivialize or demonize it. Never at the wrong end of a joke, Leslie Knope's sunny and optimistic brand of feminism simply is a part of her personality — and it's never the part that makes you laugh. The writers of "Parks and Recreation" have created a female character with depth and nuances. Because this fact is unusual is the reason Leslie Knope — and the rest of the world — needs feminism.

Mackenzie McDermott is a sophomore English major from Springfield, Ill.

What's your favorite thing to do for fun around Kirksville?

"I mostly hang out with my sorority."

Mellisa Wurtz
freshman



"I go to the hookah bar on acoustic nights and hang out outside with my friends when it's warm."

Alicia Priyatmo
junior



"I like to go to Thousand Hills."

Andrew Paulman
senior



"I like to walk around The Square, go out to eat, go bowling at Leisure World sometimes, and go to Thousand Hills."

Jessica Gennuso
senior



AROUND THE QUAD

Truman students take improvising to a new level



Conor Gearin

The phrase "making it up as they go along" usually does not have a positive ring to it. Yet I think much can be learned from the times we have to figure things out on the fly — like jazz musicians discovering a song as they play it.

I think at Truman State, a rarely acknowledged skill we share is making it up as we go, reinventing ourselves all the time. Forced to deal with uncertainty in essays, research projects and performances, students become increasingly better able to turn uncertainty into a chance for creation.

One of my favorite acts at Truman is Tag Improv. Witty, surreal and unpredictable, these students have spent perhaps more time than any of us practicing the art of "making it up as they go along." My favorite performance was last fall in front of Magruder Hall. Their long-form sketch somehow brought together zombies, a corn maze, the clock tower and corn nuts in a reasonably coherent and humorous story. Seemingly random elements of our shared culture appear in their sketches and are connected in bizarre and artful ways.

However, as Truman students, we all are at least a little experienced in the art of improvisation. When Jeffrey McClurken, University of Mary Washington history professor and speaker for the plenary address of the Student Research Conference, met a group of Truman students for lunch, he asked what we did for fun here. One of us responded with something I have heard a number of times — "We make our own fun here."

This comment could be interpreted two ways, one perhaps more meaningful than the other. The first would be there is not much to do around town. Well, so what? There are many

American liberal arts schools in rural locations without malls, nightclubs or professional sports. The second interpretation gets at what makes Truman special — we are expert improvisers in many aspects of our life — from finding new things to do with friends to discovering a new question to ask about our fields of study.

Even the Student Research Conference, despite its academic atmosphere and precisely-calculated schedule, showed signs of anarchic Truman improvisation. The sheer variety of student projects — from creating interactive sculptures that respond to light, sound and pressure, to describing a new species of African fern, to analyzing the politically scientific implications of the Internet phenomenon "Twitch Plays Pokemon," a forum-controlled game of Pokemon — impressed me with a sense of how passionate and zany students here can be.

After the team of students who created the sound-making sculptures finished their presentation describing how they programmed and designed each object, their audience was fairly unanimous in wanting to hear a performance. Reluctant at first, the students protested they had never tried playing them together.

But after more encouragement, the team eventually turned to their creations and sang into, swung, pressed on and waved flashlights at their creations. Senior team member Steven Goldberg declared over the resulting mass of chaotic sound that their performance was a critique of consumerist society.

The question is whether all of our efforts and energy, spiraling out in different directions, add up to anything meaningful. Perhaps the best way to find answers to this question is to ask graduating seniors about their post-graduation plans. After cultivating their interests and their abilities to invent and reinvent themselves, our graduates are moving on to countless new pursuits, taking on greater challenges and larger leadership roles.

While it might not seem like a coherent effort, with seniors going all across the world to follow their passions, at the end they are playing the same tune all Truman students have learned here, just with the new riffs they have made up along the way.

Conor Gearin is a senior biology and English major from St. Louis, Mo.