

Sitcom Representations of Woman Eating: Abstract

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Eating disorders are very prevalent women's health issues today. Additionally, societal expectations dictate that women should eat less than men. One way that we can begin to tear down this patriarchal ideal of female eating habits is by portraying positive messages about women eating in media. It has been found that the media we consume has a powerful influence over our thoughts and feelings. When trying to understand the pathologies of eating disorders and body image, it is important to consider what media we are consuming and if this media is perpetrating any of the thought processes that are predictors of ED severity. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare how many times male and female characters were shown eating in popular sitcoms and to discuss what implications these results may have on women's health and eating habits.

To gauge how often men and women were shown eating in popular sitcoms, three shows ranked on the IMDb website as "The Best Sitcoms of All Time" were chosen to analyze. The three shows watched were *New Girl*, *Friends*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Five episodes of each show were watched and analyzed, paying specific detail to when characters were eating. The two values of interest were times characters of each gender were shown eating, and the amount of male and female main characters per episode. To be counted as eating, the character had to put the food in their mouth. Characters were categorized as "main characters" if they spoke and significantly furthered the plot of the episode.

The results of this study showed that in two out of the three shows watched, male characters were shown eating more often than female characters in the first five episodes of three popular sitcoms. Based on these findings, a larger scale study should be performed to see if this pattern of men eating more than women in television is common throughout a variety of television shows in a larger number of episodes. Additionally, eating can still be perceived as a gendered action through media that is less acceptable in women than men.