

3 * The New Sexual Culture of American Television in the 1970s

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Histories of the sexual revolution in America often address the ways that the changes in sexual mores, practices, and beliefs peaking in the 1960s and 1970s helped to shape, and were in turn shaped by, media and popular culture. Typically, such accounts are concerned with the appearance of radical or bold displays of sexuality, as in the nudity on stage in productions of *Hair* or *Oh! Calcutta!*, or the hardcore depictions of oral sex in *Deep Throat* (1972). It is not only the explicitness of such instances that makes them notable, but also their mainstream popularity. The fact that graphic advice books such as *The Joy of Sex* (1972) could be “tossed into the grocery shopping bag with the asparagus,”¹ or that porn films could play in first-run and art house theaters, has made such phenomena all the more significant to the historical record. Apart from brief mentions of a risqué talk-show guest or a suggestive commercial, however, the most popular, most mainstream medium of this era has received little to no attention as either a symptom or an instigator of the sexual revolution.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, television was a central force in the mediation of the sexual revolution. From the sexual innuendo of *Laugh-In*’s one-liners to the double entendres of *Three’s Company*’s roommates, from the exposés of teenage prostitution in made-for-TV movies to the examinations of rape in daytime soap operas, sex suffused American television. In fact, I argue that television, as embodied primarily in the era’s three national broadcast networks, did more than any other popular cultural form to translate the sexual revolution to mainstream America. Why, then, has it received so little attention in histories of the period, including in the rest of this book?

Television’s engagement with the sexual revolution was qualitatively different from that of most other media. As an advertiser-supported, government-regulated site with a reputation for being family friendly, television of the late 1960s and 1970s would never reach the radical boldness of such cultural forms as live stage performance, sound recording, or feature film. The constraints keeping such content from reaching the

airwaves were too deeply rooted in the very structure of the system. Thus it is difficult to see television's treatment of the sexual revolution as anywhere near as revolutionary as the presence of explicit sexual content elsewhere in the culture. But perhaps counting only those cultural products that seem "revolutionary" misses a key part of the sexual revolution's permeation of American culture during this period. The sexual content that came to television in the late 1960s and 1970s marked a significant shift in that medium's handling of sex. The new sexual culture of television of the 1970s not only changed television; it changed the way in which American society would represent the results of the sexual revolution up to the present day.

This chapter offers an overview of television's translation of the sexual revolution for the American mainstream, with a more specific analysis of the work of one television producer and executive, Douglas S. Cramer, as a case study of how television constructed its vision of a world altered by sexual revolution. Elsewhere, I have examined this process in great detail,² and it would of course be impossible for me to do justice in one chapter to the ways in which a medium with an output as vast as that of American television grappled with sexual change. I intend for the broad strokes with which I paint television's role in the first part of this chapter to achieve more detailed definition in the case study of the later part.

Before I proceed with my overview, I'd like to offer some general parameters for thinking about television's place in the new sexual culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Television's embrace of changes in sexual mores, practices, or beliefs came a bit later than did the appearance of such changes in other media and cultural sites. Despite some experimentation with sexually bolder content in the late 1960s, it would take until the middle and late 1970s for those experiments to become an established part of the images and stories television presented. In this way, it is possible to conceive of television's participation in the mediation of the sexual revolution as part of a broader commercialization of sexual change that various writers have lamented as signaling the end of the revolution's radical potential.³

Whether commercialization itself is detrimental is a subject for another discussion, but in the case of television embracing some of the primary changes brought about by the sexual revolution—the questioning of monogamy, the recognition of gay and lesbian sexualities, the awareness of women's sexual autonomy—commercialization via television most surely helped lead to a deradicalization. Changes such as these did find a place on American broadcast network television during this period, so television's address of the sexual revolution was not

simply a matter of repression. Instead, in its treatment of such subjects, television programming found ways to make them safer, less disruptive, and less of a challenge to the dominant social institutions of patriarchy, heterosexuality, and monogamy. That said, it is also important to recognize that the coming of these markers of sexual change to TV did indicate that change of some kind would be permanent, or at least that dominant understandings of sex and gender would be altered. The incremental shifts in sensibility, awareness, and acceptance visible in television programming would help to assure a new status for such shifts that would alter American culture for years to come.

Sexual Content across the Television Schedule

Television's turn to more overt discussion and representation of sex in the late 1960s and the 1970s took place across the television schedule, at all times of day and night, and in all kinds of genres. My focus is primarily on entertainment programming, as this is the programming that commanded the largest mainstream audience and that featured much of the medium's sexual content. Such programming was the product of numerous influences. These contextual factors not only shaped that which appeared on television; they also shaped viewers' experiences of what they watched.

Like most instances of television programming, the turn to sex in the later 1960s and the 1970s was primarily motivated by the broadcast networks' drive for profits. This period marks an especially competitive moment between the "Big Three"—ABC, NBC, and CBS—in which their traditional standings were upset. During this period, ABC, the perennially third-place network, would rise to number one in the Nielsen ratings, in large part because of the network's embrace of sexually suggestive humor and other elements of television's new sexual culture. Competitive pressure led to certain innovations, as in CBS's early attempts in the 1970s to address some of the social issues of the day—the sexual revolution included—in new sitcoms such as *All in the Family*. The same could be said of ABC's efforts to counterprogram CBS with sillier, more seemingly escapist fare that referenced changing ideas about sex as, for example, in the use of nostalgia for the 1950s in *Happy Days* as a family-friendly veneer encasing double entendres and sexually suggestive humor. As is typical of American broadcast television, competitive pressure encouraged at least as much imitation as it did innovation; consequently the success of *Charlie's Angels* on ABC led that network, and the other two, to try out a number of mostly unsuccessful pilots for series that

copied *Angels'* action heroine/sex symbol formula.⁴ As these examples illustrate, network competition is one important context for explaining how and why the broadcast networks embraced sexual content in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

There were multiple forces guiding the kind of programming the networks offered, some of which ran counter to the networks' profit motives. Government pressure to limit representations of violence increased in the late 1960s, particularly in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, as well as the confrontation between protestors and police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, more disturbing news from the war in Vietnam, and escalating race-based conflagrations in America's inner cities. Forty-nine members of the House of Representatives introduced resolutions calling for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to study the effects of TV violence on the public,⁵ and Senator John Pastore convened his Communications Subcommittee in March 1969 to ask the surgeon general to take on the matter.⁶ Through such initial calls for study and the subsequent hearings in which their results were presented, government regulators questioned not only the effects of TV violence, but the moral propriety of television content more generally, a turn that often included concerns about sex. Indeed, during the 1969 hearings, Pastore remarked of the broadcast networks, "I don't think there is so much competition on the showing of violence as there is on the showing of sex," a concern he threaded throughout his subcommittee's pursuit of the violence question.⁷

This sort of regulatory attention, which filtered down through Congress to the FCC; the TV industry's self-regulating organization, the National Association of Broadcasters; and the networks' own standards and practices departments, helped shape television content in particular ways. For example, some have argued that the pressure to tone down violent content led to an increase in sexual fare.⁸ Elsewhere, I have argued that the suggestive, rather than explicit, treatment of sex in so much television of the 1970s is at least in part due to efforts by producers and networks to gingerly sidestep these sorts of regulatory concerns.⁹ Whatever their specific impact, the regulatory debates about television content during this period had a part in shaping television's representation of the sexual revolution.

Within the broader rubrics of economic and regulatory forces were such specific pressures as those imposed by advertisers nervous about public reaction or, alternately, eager to draw attention with risqué fare. Also pertinent in this period were the pressures asserted by a number

of different advocacy groups made up of citizens placing demands on broadcasters for different kinds of representations. These groups came from multiple political persuasions, with interests such as the National Gay Task Force or the National Organization for Women applying pressure from the liberal side, and organizations such as the National Federation for Decency and the Coalition for Better Television pursuing a religiously motivated conservative agenda.¹⁰ In all of these cases, U.S. citizens and institutions sought to use television's new sexual culture as a means to an end. The changes brought by the sexual revolution and increasingly addressed on TV were controversial matters, revealing a number of different entities' investments in questions of sexual beliefs and practices.

What, then, were some of the ways in which entertainment programming addressed the sexual revolution from the late 1960s through the 1970s, in this climate of pressure and debate about television's role? Here, I will briefly outline four different strands of the networks' sex-themed content, beginning with the newest television format of the period, the made-for-TV movie. Although NBC had been airing movies made exclusively for television since 1964, telefilms became a significant part of the prime time schedule only once ABC debuted its *Movie of the Week* in 1969.¹¹ The ABC network sought to differentiate the movies it offered from those on NBC, which tended toward action-adventure and suspense genres.¹² Despite that some of ABC's films fell into those genres as well, the network also licensed comedies and social issue dramas. Films in each of the latter categories often dealt with subjects such as women's liberation, sexual promiscuity, and divorce. Comedies included *Playmates* (October 3, 1972), in which two divorced men secretly date each other's ex-wives; social issue dramas included films such as *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* (November 16, 1971), which dealt with teen pregnancy.¹³ Although most of ABC's sex-themed social issue films were seen as exploitative, some achieved acclaim for their thoughtful consideration of contemporary life. Perhaps the best example of this is *That Certain Summer* (November 1, 1972), in which a gay, divorced father comes out to his fourteen-year-old son, a film widely praised for its sensitive treatment of gay male experience.

As the other two networks began to schedule made-for-TV movies to compete with ABC's successful series, high-profile, critically awarded material continued to air. But those movies and miniseries served as a respectable cover of sorts for the more exploitative fare all three networks broadcast throughout the 1970s. These films tended to follow the mode of the classical exploitation cinema of the early twentieth century in that

they were largely driven by a moral panic around young people's (especially young women's) sexual endangerment.¹⁴ In numerous telefilms featuring teenage runaways-turned-prostitutes, hitchhikers, victims of stalking and rape, and centerfold models, all three networks combined the titillating and the cautionary to address the perceived dangers of the sexual revolution. As producer Douglas S. Cramer was involved in the creation of some of these very films (e.g., *Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway*, *Nightmare in Badham County*), I will analyze a more specific example of these tendencies in the later part of this chapter.

Alongside the made-for-TV movies taking on the social issues of the sexual revolution in a range of ways was another new development of this period: the centering of women characters as protagonists in action-oriented series. There had been only the occasional instance of a woman in such a role before the 1970s, but during this period such characters became essential to the new sexual culture television offered. This is because these characters were not simply action heroines. Instead, they were extremely popular sex symbols, achieving their fame not only through their TV series but also through revealing pin-up posters and other star publicity. The most successful of these characters were the leads for ABC's *Charlie's Angels* (1976–1981); many attempts to clone their winning formula appeared throughout the second part of the 1970s. This trend was important to television's new sexual culture for the ways that it negotiated the women's liberation movement and debates both within the movement and between the movement and its detractors about the question of sexual difference. In asserting these women characters' status as symbols of heterosexual male fantasy, such programming made the representation of liberated women taking on conventionally masculine roles (detectives, superheroes, and the like) less threatening, even appealing, to a mass audience potentially uncomfortable with the ways the women's movement was shaking up traditional sex and gender roles. By making purportedly liberated women symbols of the new sexual openness and freedom, both women's liberation and sexual revolution could fit into patriarchal and heteronormative perspectives.

The sex symbol heroines of action-adventure shows were accompanied by a host of female sex symbol characters in more comedic contexts, as well. Here, the intimations of liberation that attended characters such as the Angels or Wonder Woman could be ignored, as the characters' status as sex objects became their primary narrative function. In series such as *Three's Company*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and *Too Close for Comfort*, the female sex symbol lived on in a more comedic vein.¹⁵ The comedic turn in the representation of sexy young women by the late 1970s was in

keeping with a trend in television's sexual content since the late 1960s — a trend of employing sexually suggestive humor to reference the sexual revolution and the changes it had brought without violating any of the medium's family-friendly parameters. As I will discuss in more detail below, sexual humor was one of the earliest and most frequent ways in which television addressed the sexual revolution. This sort of comedy appeared in sitcoms, of course, but it was also rampant in other genres, especially variety and game shows. *Match Game*, airing both on CBS daytime and in syndication, was one such show. Here, two contestants competed to match the answers offered by six celebrity panelists to a question featuring a suggestive "blank," for example, "A giant turtle tried to 'blank' a Volkswagen," or "The magician brought his 'blank' to bed with him." Although the panelists would offer a number of risqué answers, they were typically in the form of suggestive allusion or double entendre. Thus, the raciest elements of the show required the viewer's complicity; his or her understanding of the new sexual culture would make the references sexually meaningful and thereby comedic. *Match Game* was premised on this brand of humor, but much of the sexual humor across television programs and genres relied upon a similar formula.

I do not mean to suggest that television only represented the sexual revolution in exploitative, sexist, or juvenile ways. In each of the kinds of programming I have mentioned thus far, there were instances of thoughtful reflection and commentary on the changed and changing times, as well as endorsements of some of the more open sexual attitudes and practices that marked the sexual revolution. Perhaps the best example of this sort of reflection on social change appeared in daytime programming, a less culturally prominent sphere in which many of the changes of the new sexual culture could be more carefully considered. This could be the case in daytime talk shows, such as *Donahue*, in which the avowedly feminist male host addressed issues and concerns affecting women in particular, including divorce and female sexual satisfaction. Television also offered a forum for the consideration of sexual change in its daytime soap operas, in which (i.e., hetero) sexual relationships received extensive attention. In my work on this subject, I have explored in particular the ways in which the daytime soaps of the 1970s grappled with the meaning of rape and sexual violence at a time in which sexual promiscuity and antirape activism competed for public acceptance.¹⁶ In these and other instances across the television schedule, the sexual revolution was debated and discussed, helping to make television a key site for the widespread dissemination of ideas about sexual change.

Negotiating Sexual Change: The Work of Douglas S. Cramer

To establish a more specific picture of the ways that broadcast network television of the late 1960s and the 1970s grappled with the sexual revolution, in the rest of this chapter I focus on a number of programs that spoke to such matters as premarital sex, divorce, promiscuity, rape, prostitution, and homosexuality. My focus is specific to the career of Douglas S. Cramer, who worked for Paramount as a production executive in the late 1960s, and went on to form his own production company as well as work for Aaron Spelling Productions in the 1970s.¹⁷ As a production executive or an executive producer, Cramer had a hand in many different instances of television programming that spoke to and about sexual change, though little in his public or archived statements suggests any particular commitment to such issues. Instead, Cramer's career is marked by a savvy business sense, his ability to discover, embrace, and carry out that which can attain mass popularity. As he has claimed of the popular success of one of his series, "When *Love Boat* set sail everyone was terrified to do three stories in an hour; it would be more than an audience could accept. Nobody has ever given the audience much credit in TV, but we did and it worked."¹⁸ The fact that so many of the shows he produced dealt with sexual themes is thus perhaps most attributable to his (and Spelling's) ability to generate and sustain program formulas that had mass appeal. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, mass appeal was often connected to the changing sexual culture; thus, many of Cramer's successes also evidence that culture. Cramer's work and influence were felt across a number of television genres, but in what follows I examine two key examples, the first being his work on comedic anthology series and the second being his work on made-for-TV movies. In both cases, Cramer's productions directly addressed the new sexual culture and in so doing helped to construct what the television version of that culture would be.

As a production executive at Paramount, Cramer supervised the creation of one of American television's first attempts at sexually suggestive humor, *Love, American Style* (1969–1974, ABC). He would borrow a similar formula for *The Love Boat* (1977–1986, ABC) later in the 1970s. Both series followed a comedic anthology story structure; they also shared a tone and a stance on sexual openness. Both series successfully walked the line between acknowledging sexual change and staying safely within television's boundaries of acceptability. Using humor and comedic situations to defuse the potential radicalness of their sexual representations, these series sought to make "love" and "sex" synonymous terms, capi-

talizing upon the wholesomeness of the former while trafficking in the edginess of the latter. Although they had much in common, each was a product of its specific historical moment: *Love, American Style* of the television industry's initial forays into sexual themes, and *The Love Boat* of the institutionalization of such themes, and their transformation into the naturalized, hegemonic logic of television's new sexual culture.

Love, American Style was part of ABC's attempts late in the 1960s to make itself a viable competitor in the TV industry's three-network system, an effort that led the network frequently to draw upon sexually suggestive humor as a means of distinguishing itself from its competitors. The network's first attempt at sexual humor was *Turn-On*, a variety series canceled after its February 1969 debut and widely agreed to be a colossal failure. The program was ABC's effort to clone NBC's topical, comedic hit *Laugh-In* (the producers of which also created *Turn-On*), but *Turn-On* was to even further emphasize sexual humor. This strategy of ABC's backfired when many saw the broadcast as taking that sexual humor too far. As the general manager of a Cleveland station claimed, "It may be all right to be racy, but this was plain dirty. This was a hate show. Its spirit was dirty."¹⁹

Failing to extend *Laugh-In*'s formula in an even more sexually explicit direction, ABC changed tactics for the season of 1969–1970, continuing to pursue sexual material as a way to reach young viewers but placing that material in other formats and taking a somewhat different tack in those formats' handling of sex. *Love, American Style* was part of this attempt, but it was paired with another, rather different ABC effort to use sex as an attention-getter. This series, *The Survivors*, was created by novelist Harold Robbins and was touted as one of his typically sexy works of fiction, but this time made for television as a serialized narrative. *The Survivors* was heralded as innovative because of its format, but also for its degree of sexual openness, particularly for television. Robbins described the series as "a story of today's morals," insisting that "if people go to bed together, they'll go to bed together on the show. We are not bowing down to TV in any way."²⁰ The overt sexiness promised by *The Survivors* was too risky a tactic for ABC to rely solely upon it, and so the network paired *The Survivors* with *Love, American Style* on its Monday night schedule. When *The Survivors* suffered multiple production problems and received poor ratings, ABC cancelled it midseason, suggesting that Robbins's strategy of ignoring television's typical conservatism was a misstep. *Love, American Style* was part of the same sex-centered strategy, but its approach to sexual openness proved the longest-lasting of these early attempts at sexual themes. Indeed, the *Love, American Style* formula would presage the explosion of sex-themed programming

a bit later in the 1970s, particularly the comedic sort, and particularly that scheduled by ABC.

Love, American Style was not a new effort just because it dealt with sex; it was also seen as innovative because it was an anthology series, with each week's hour-long episode typically made up of two to three longer sketches with brief blackout gags interspersed throughout. Perhaps because of this unusual format, or because of ABC's investment in differentiating the series from *The Survivors* and *Turn-On*, its predebut promotion was the source of some conflict. *Love*'s producers initially planned to include a recurring motif in each story as a means of tying the show's disparate elements together. This motif was to be a bed that would be visible at some point in each sketch, even if in the background or through a window. However, when an ABC press release about the new show highlighted the fact that the program would have just "one continuing character—a large brass bed,"²¹ speculation began that that bed "would hardly ever be empty, particularly in the concluding minutes of each yarn," leading to "a new low in video morality."²² Because the controversy over *Turn-On* was so recently past, and because Robbins was so publicly touting his new show's sexual openness, ABC surely hoped that *Love* would draw some less sensational attention. Given that concerns about television's sexual and violent content were also rampant during this period (Senator Pastore referenced *Turn-On* specifically in the 1969 hearings),²³ it is no wonder that *Love*'s producers quickly sought to spin the impression of their series as morally suspect in a different direction. Thus producer Bill D'Angelo proclaimed, "People got the idea that the darned bed was the symbol of our show, ergo sex was the symbol of the show"; "the bed became something we never set out to make it. Our stories, honestly, aren't that kind of thing at all, but stories which we hope people will enjoy and laugh at."²⁴ Executive producer Arnold Margolin tried to make light of the controversy, claiming "Some people think we're doing 'The Erotic Life of the American Housewife.'" In contrast, he insisted, "This is a comedy show. We try to do stories which have relevance to today."²⁵ The producers thus sought to emphasize the comedic content of their series, asserting that comedy would be their means of achieving timeliness, even on sexual matters, and that they would thereby avoid the sexual explicitness that "the bed" had come to symbolize.

Very early in *Love, American Style*'s public life, then—even before its broadcast debut—the network and the show's producers found themselves struggling with a way to balance the program's more salacious, and thereby more attention-grabbing, potential with reassurances that the

program would not go too far in its “relevant” storytelling, that it would offer a TV-friendly (and thus family-friendly) version of the sexual revolution that would not upset the advertisers, politicians, or home viewers who were uncomfortable with the recent, profound changes in sexual mores. The series ultimately managed to avert its potential public relations crisis; the bed ceased to be mentioned in network press releases, and its planned use as a motif was dropped. But *Love, American Style* also managed to balance the seemingly incompatible identities that had led to the conflicted meanings of the bed in the first place. In so doing, it set a precedent for the comedic treatment of sex across television of the 1970s.

The series made clear that its handling of sex marked it as a new kind of TV, all the while reinforcing conventional sexual morality. This is especially evident in a second-season sketch called “Love and the Only Child,” which starred sitcom stars of the 1950s (and real-life married couple) Ozzie and Harriett Nelson as middle-aged parents preparing to divorce now that their only child is grown and married. Just as they are readying their move out of their house, however, their daughter Ellen comes home, announcing that she has left her husband. When her husband, played by *Leave It to Beaver*’s big brother, Tony Dow, arrives, hoping to save their marriage, the parents reveal their secret. The two had married originally because the woman was pregnant, and they stayed together for their daughter’s sake. When Ellen reveals to her husband that *she* is now pregnant, not only does the younger couple reconcile but so too do Ellen’s parents, more than happy to stay married for the sake of their imminent grandchild. Placing these icons of suburban domesticity and marital monogamy from the 1950s in such a sketch alone serves as commentary on the changing times (figure 3.1). The suggestion that the Ozzie and Harriett of yesteryear had premarital sex gently mocks the conservatism of the 1950s; including a *Leave It to Beaver* cast member even further marks its difference from the earlier era. When Dow’s character remarks, “Gee, I didn’t think that happened back in those days,” in response to his in-laws’ revelation, it is as if Wally Cleaver’s naiveté has been transplanted into the middle of the sexual revolution, a world apart from where the character, and television itself, began. As such, the sketch manages to mark itself as contemporary, relevant, and even a bit daring, speaking so openly about pregnancy, divorce, and, most shockingly, premarital sex. Yet the story manages to contain these disruptions at the same time. After all, both couples are clearly happier with the idea of staying married than they are with the possibility of divorce, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy remains a somewhat shameful secret. As Ellen’s



Fig. 3.1 The sexual revolution affects icons of television in the 1950s and marital stability Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, who play a divorcing couple dealing with the marital troubles of their adult daughter (Heather North) in *Love, American Style*'s "Love and the Only Child" (1971).

mother tells her before revealing her story, "You're a married woman now and you know everything, so I might as well tell you." Despite her own experience with premarital sex, pregnancy, and (initially) unwanted marriage, the Harriett Nelson character—and the sketch as a whole—hold up marriage not only as the romantic ideal, but also as the gateway to adulthood and the sexual knowledge that comes with it. *Love, American Style* regularly made suggestive nods at sexual change, but just as regularly managed to hold that change in check, indicating that this so-called revolution was not so revolutionary, after all.

Cramer would repeat this formula to even greater success when he produced *The Love Boat* for Aaron Spelling Productions later in the 1970s. This series compromised a bit on the anthology format from the first *Love* series; the titular cruise ship's crew as the continuing characters anchored the three anthology-style stories per episode. Much like the first *Love* series, *The Love Boat* typically relied upon the humor of sexual suggestion to make its nods to the new sexual culture while remaining safely ensconced within traditional moral codes validating heterosexual monogamy and the institution of marriage. By the late 1970s, this for-

mula had become key to ABC's ratings success, as the network by then had risen to first place. This success, however, did not mean that the formula was an effortless mix. In fact, the efforts Cramer and his fellow producers expended in maintaining the balance between family friendliness and sexual suggestion point out how challenging it was to sustain such a combination and yet also how naturalized that very blend had become. By the time of *The Love Boat's* reign in the late 1970s, family-friendly sexual suggestiveness had become the most widely adopted and accepted version of the new sexual culture on television.

One of the key dictums of executive producer Aaron Spelling was that the most effective comedic treatment depended upon the avoidance of "too much blatant sex." Spelling insisted that humor came from *holding off* on sex, and he thus ordered that the sex in his productions be more suggestive than overt.²⁶ Douglas Cramer executed Spelling's vision on *The Love Boat* in a range of ways, some of which encouraged the inclusion of sexual material and some of which qualified the kind of sexual content that would work for the series' light tone. For example, he asked of the program's hands-on producers, "Do we have enough titillating, purely sexual stories?"²⁷ He regularly considered each episode's three plots in relation to one another, making sure that youth and sex were prominently featured in at least one. For instance, he asked of upcoming episodes, "Do *any* of the first six hours have a *love* story for Julie [the ship's young, pretty cruise director]? *Let* the poor girl get laid—please!!"²⁸ Yet Cramer and his staff were also well aware that "purely sexual stories" were problematic for a series, a network, and an industry that prided themselves on offering family-friendly fare. Thus, the sexual titillation that was so central to *The Love Boat's* appeal was necessarily couched in light-hearted humor. Indeed, humor and sex were understood to be two sides of the same coin, the former softening the potential shock of the latter. As Cramer commented on an upcoming episode, "What this beautifully emotional script needs most is FUN-HUMOR-LAUGHS-SEX!"²⁹ Included in the balancing of humor and sex was an old-fashioned morality in which sex, though fun, was never frivolous. Instead, it was always connected to heartfelt emotion, to the "love" of the program's title, much as was the case in *Love, American Style*. Thus, Cramer qualified his call for "purely sexual stories" as "naturally" including "heart and depth."³⁰

Cramer so fully believed that *The Love Boat's* combination of sexual openness and old-fashioned values was a "natural" fit and not an inherent contradiction that he was thrown by a letter he received from a man who identified himself as both an attorney and a father of five daughters. This viewer wrote to complain that he was "continually embarrassed"

by the sexual content when he watched a recent *Love Boat* episode with his daughters and that he would keep them from watching future episodes as a result. Although Cramer at first considered ignoring the letter, he found himself bothered by this man's claims, in particular because Cramer believed that this viewer must have turned the TV off before the end of the episode, thereby missing the "*decent* resolution of the stories"—the teenagers considering sex realizing they were too young and the adults in the other two stories ending up in monogamous, loving relationships.³¹ Cramer decided to send the man a letter, along with a script of the episode in question. In this correspondence, he did not deny the program's sexual content, but he did insist that "we always point out that sex carries with it a responsibility, and that sex is not love."³² The fact that Cramer took this viewer's criticisms seriously enough to respond and that he defended the series by insisting that its version of the new sexual culture actually adhered to traditional values illustrates the precarious balance between suggestiveness and wholesomeness that had become so central to this version of TV sex, even if viewers did not always accept that balance as satisfactory.

Cramer's efforts to sustain this balance were somewhat short lived, as ABC asked *The Love Boat*'s producers for more and more sexual content as the series entered its third season, perhaps hoping to revitalize the network's ratings position once CBS began to reclaim some of its former success.³³ The ABC network was no doubt motivated in making such demands by the growing amount of sexual content across prime time, as well as the casual openness about sex permeating American culture more generally as of the late 1970s.³⁴ Cramer's notes on a fall 1979 script draft are telling of the pressures ABC was putting on the show's producers, as well as of the increasingly narrow ways in which sex was being represented and defined. Cramer began by commenting on a script: "Six months ago, this would have seemed an A+ show—now, I ask (as ABC will) does it have enough *hot* sizzle? Can we tune up the sexuality of the stories? . . . I've made some leering suggestions . . . and bear in mind the request for the Jacuzzi in every show!" His "leering suggestions" included eliminating the T-shirts that the characters Ben and Sally were wearing as they sat up in bed together and having the two kiss and slide down onto the bed at the end of a scene. In a later scene, he suggested that Ben and Sally be wearing bathing suits on deck "or in *hot tub*—best of all!!" He noted places where many of the characters might be dressed in swimsuits, or where couples might kiss.³⁵ His comments included no mention of the "heart and depth" he had sought in the past.

Concurrent with Cramer's input, *The Love Boat*'s production staff



Fig. 3.2 Sexual suggestion often led characters to the Jacuzzi or the pool on *The Love Boat*. Here guest stars Heather Thomas and Tony Danza show some skin in the “Japan Cruise” episode from show’s seventh season. (Digital frame enlargement.)

met in October 1979 to devise additional changes “designed to make the show ‘sexier.’” Producer Gordon Farr reiterated Cramer’s note about the obligatory Jacuzzi scene in every episode, and the producers planned to include more young women in revealing attire as extras. Even the Pirate Lady statue in the Pirate’s Cove lounge was scheduled for a makeover! The line producers were instructed to make sure that scenes on the Lido Deck (by the pool) and in the ship’s spa emphasized the “attractive young people” (figure 3.2).³⁶ By the 1979–1980 season, the formula initiated by *Love, American Style* ten years earlier had seemingly outlived its usefulness. Now that sexual situations and themes, often suggested but rarely fully realized, had become standard fare across genres, networks, and time of day, *The Love Boat* had to go further than before, to embrace more of the “blatant sex” that Spelling had earlier warned against, in order to stand out. The mix of the wholesome and the risqué that had defined the decade’s most successful takes on sex had become the new standard.

Cramer’s contribution to television’s new sexual culture was not confined to the sexual humor offered in comedic anthology series. He was also a prolific producer of made-for-TV movies, which frequently served as pilots for potential new series in the 1970s. Many of Cramer’s telefilms grappled with the sexual revolution; these productions examined the darker side of sexual freedom, often by telling stories of young people endangered by their access to the new sexual culture. As I discussed above, this theme was common across many made-for-TV movies of the period, thus I am not blaming or crediting Cramer for its presence. However, the centrality of his work to the perpetuation of this theme further illustrates his role as a representative creator of the new sexual culture of television of the 1970s.

In Cramer’s TV movies about sexually endangered youth, as in many

such films airing in this period, both the films themselves and the promotion for them wavered between the titillating and the cautionary. Promotions for made-for-TV movies were notoriously sensational in the 1970s, in part because such programming had no chance to build an audience over time but instead needed to generate as much interest as possible for the broadcast premiere. Industry wisdom argued that sexual suggestion was key to drawing such interest. As one CBS executive explained, "You want to hint at sex but not make it too explicit"; "if you combine it with violence, you're golden."³⁷ This combination was certainly employed in the promotion of Cramer's *Nightmare in Badham County* (November 5, 1976, ABC). The *TV Guide* ad for this film, a story of two college-aged women who find themselves imprisoned at a southern sexual slavery operation when they have car trouble on a cross-country trip, screamed, "SLAVERY IS NOT A THING OF THE PAST!" followed by slightly smaller text that read, "The sadistic sheriff knows it. The psychotic warden knows it. But two girls, alone in a women's prison learn it the hard way."³⁸ The dual threats of sex and violence are used here both to draw audiences in and to offer a cautionary warning about the dangers of a postsexual revolution society, much as did the promotions for theatrical sexploitation films of the period, albeit in tamer terms.

As much as the networks willingly employed these exploitation tactics to draw audiences, they constantly struggled to justify the movies' scandalous subject matter and to protect themselves against the criticism so rampant in this period of intense regulatory scrutiny on the part of the government, advertisers, and the public. Thus, the film's producers walked a careful line between promising the networks attention-grabbing content and reassuring jittery executives of their films' appropriateness for the "family" medium, a line the networks themselves precariously straddled. In the case of *Nightmare*, ABC executive Brandon Stoddard found its "white slavery aspect" one of its most compelling features.³⁹ However, when another ABC executive saw rough, more sexually explicit footage meant for the version of *Nightmare* to be distributed overseas, Cramer scrambled to reassure him that the material would never be submitted for U.S. broadcast, describing it as "shoddy," "really vulgar," "tacky and tawdry," and "in no way [representing] something [he] would care to have anyone consider something [he] either approved or condoned."⁴⁰

To meet the networks' dueling desires, producers such as Cramer tended to root their movies in real-world social problems and manipulate their stories in such a way as to fit their more licentious elements under a banner of social responsibility. These efforts are especially clear

in Cramer's work on *Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway* (September 27, 1976, NBC) and its sequel, *Alexander: The Other Side of Dawn* (May 16, 1977, NBC). Cramer pitched *Dawn* to NBC as "an honest, authentic, tasteful, and yet deeply moving picture" on the "serious current problem of teen-age runaways," documenting his seriousness of purpose with newspaper clippings and reports of the scriptwriter's extensive research.⁴¹ His juxtaposition of "honest, authentic, tasteful" with "deeply moving" suggests the contrast between attention to a serious social issue and the entertainment factor meant to appeal to audiences. Yet calling the material "deeply moving" rather than "exciting" or even "gripping" worked to legitimate even the entertainment value of the story as socially responsible art rather than a blatantly commercial exercise, differentiating the TV movie from theatrical sexploitation fare. Cramer also exhibited this effort at accountability in his work on *Alexander*, one of the few such films to deal with a male adolescent under sexual threat. Here, Cramer consulted with Newton Deiter of the Gay Media Task Force and struggled with how to communicate Alex's experiences without too explicitly representing or referencing gay male sexual activity, a turn that would have pushed the network's desire to confront the sexual revolution further than it was willing to go.⁴²

In such films, the new sexual culture was primarily represented as menacing, a real danger to young people, especially to innocent young girls such as Dawn. For example, when Dawn first arrives in Los Angeles, having run away from her drunken mother and hard home life, she walks down Hollywood Boulevard. The audience is invited to share her shock at the moral decay the sexual revolution has wrought. As Dawn first leaves the bus station, a man in a suit brushes past her and she is noticeably disturbed. Next, Dawn crosses the street; a man on a motorcycle gestures for her to get on, and she hurries past him. Walking along, Dawn sees a man covered in tattoos, a midget, and an effeminate hippie-type coming out of the International Love Boutique; her eyes widen in surprise. From Dawn's point of view, we see words such as "Massage," "Nudity," "Girls," and "Pussycat" on storefront signs. In the distance, a movie marquee advertises *Deep Throat* and *The Devil in Miss Jones*. At the corner of Hollywood and Vine, a bald, middle-aged white man pulls up in a convertible and asks, "Want a ride?" Moments later, several black men talk to Dawn, trying to block her way. She then passes two young girls, one of whom is visibly pregnant. The sequence ends with Dawn crouched in an alley after being mugged. The message is unavoidable: Dawn has entered a dangerous, licentious world where men seek to exploit her sexually; her fate is to wind up pregnant, destitute, and alone.



Fig. 3.3 Teen runaway turned prostitute Dawn (Eve Plumb) confronts the dark side of the sexual revolution in *Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway* (1976). (Courtesy Douglas Cramer Collection, Box 22, Press Kit Folder, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.)

Dawn does indeed struggle in her new life. Once she is drawn into the world of prostitution by her pimp, Swan, she repeatedly suffers the abuses of her johns and of Swan himself. Her appearance changes from one of fresh innocence to one of hardened resignation. Her tight clothing, garish makeup, and unkempt hair signify her sexual corruption (figure 3.3). Throughout the film, the only source of hope is Dawn's sweet relationship with Alex. The two kids, both victims of the sexually loose

streets, fall in love, their relationship carefully differentiated from their sexual interactions with clients. The loving, monogamous, heterosexual relationship between these two characters not only resolves the narratives of both of Cramer's teenage runaway films (*Alexander* ends with the two leaving Los Angeles together, planning to marry and start a new life), but it also heralds the triumph of more conventional sexual ideologies over those of the new sexual culture. In this way, Cramer's TV movies, as well as the others in the subgenre of sexually endangered youth, may have offered an even more conservative take on sexual change than did the sexually suggestive humor of series such as *Love*, *American Style* and *The Love Boat*.

Television and a Sexual Revolution?

The gradual emergence of sexual themes and references across American broadcast network television from the late 1960s through the 1970s makes television as significant a medium as any other in the cultural saturation of the sexual revolution. Because television's take on the sexual revolution was necessarily constrained by the many forces that make the medium commercially viable, its perspective on sexual change may seem less "revolutionary" than those offered in other media and cultural sites. In certain respects this is true, as television would not offer the explicitness in words or images that other media would until cable in general, and premium cable in particular, took off in the 1980s. Yet the new sexual culture of television of the 1970s played a crucial role in the dissemination of the ideas and practices of the sexual revolution across American society.

I have indicated some of the key ways in which television represented sex in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Because this content was present across the television schedule and throughout a number of genres, it is not possible to offer here a full picture of television and sex in that time. Yet it is possible to illustrate how valuable television was when it came to matters of sexual change. Most of television's discourses of sex tended to deemphasize the radical potential of the sexual revolution, finding ways to make promiscuity, gay and lesbian lifestyles, women's sexual agency, youth sexuality, and nonnormative practices more generally seem like only slight adjustments to the way sex had always been practiced and understood. But this small, partial acknowledgement of change only appeared by virtue of a constant negotiation between televisual discourses denouncing the evils of sexual looseness (as in the stories of sexually endangered youth in made-for-TV movies) and those excitedly contem-

plating the potential of sexual freedom (as in *Love, American Style*'s playful mocking of TV morality of the 1950s). In the new sexual culture of television of the late 1960s and 1970s, we can see the ways in which the sexual revolution moved from being an emergent culture beginning to disrupt the status quo, to one that becomes incorporated into that very status quo, losing much of its revolutionary potential in the process but nonetheless bringing small increments of change to our ways of thinking, feeling, and seeing sex.

Notes

1. Bob Greene, "Beyond the Sexual Revolution," *Newsweek*, September 29, 1975, 13.
2. Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
3. David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000); Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America, the Americanization of the Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).
4. Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 69–73.
5. "Congressmen Seek Probe of TV Violence," *Television Digest*, July 8, 1968, 5.
6. U.S. Senate, Committee on Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications, *Federal Communications Commission Policy Matters and Television Programming*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Washington, DC, 1969.
7. U.S. Senate, *Federal Communications Commission Policy Matters and Television Programming*, 374.
8. Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 72; Geoffrey Cowan, *See No Evil: The Backstage Battle over Sex and Violence on Television* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).
9. Elana Levine, "Sex as a Weapon: Programming Sexuality in the 1970s," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes, 234–236 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 98–99.
10. Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time. Advocacy Groups and the Struggle over Entertainment Television* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
11. Gary Edgerton, "High Concept, Small Screen," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (fall 1991): 114–127.
12. Judith Crist, "Tailored for Television," *TV Guide*, August 30, 1969, 8–9.
13. I have not been able to view these films. Plot descriptions come from Alvin H. Marrill, *Movies Made for Television: The Telefeature and the Mini-Series, 1964–1979* (Westport, CT: Arlington House, 1980).
14. On classical exploitation cinema see Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

15. Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 162–168.
16. Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 208–251.
17. Cramer's television experience has spanned the advertising, network, and TV production worlds. He began his career in the late 1950s, working at New York ad agency Ogilvy and Mather, where he supervised the broadcast component of several prominent accounts. He also worked for Procter & Gamble, supervising production of some of the company's daytime soap operas. In 1962, he became director of program planning at ABC. However, in the mid-1960s, Cramer left the network business to work in television production, first for 20th Century Fox and then for Paramount. He formed the Douglas S. Cramer Company in 1971, then joined Aaron Spelling Productions in 1976. In this phase of his career, Cramer would produce not only the series and telefilms discussed in this chapter, but also such hit programs as *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981–1989) and its spin-offs, as well as producing nearly all of the miniseries based on Danielle Steele's novels. Despite Cramer's long career shepherding some of the most populist, low-prestige programming in American television, he has long held a significant place in the contemporary art world as a leading collector and patron. Carter B. Horsley, "Contemporary Art from the Douglas S. Cramer Collection," *City Review*, November 14, 2001, accessed March 15, 2008, www.thecityreview.com; Andy Meisler, "A 'Soap' Mogul with an Eye for the '90s," *New York Times*, August 29, 1993, H29.
18. John Stanley, "Producer Douglas S. Cramer: The Man Behind the Big Prime-Time Shows," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 1, 1985, 62, accessed March 25, 2008, ProQuest, www.proquest.com/en-US/.
19. "ABC's *Turn-On* Makes like a Spec, and Web had 'Third Season' Vacancy," *Variety*, February 12, 1969, 43.
20. "Rescuing the Survivors," *Time*, August 1, 1969, accessed November 5, 2007, www.time.com.
21. George Eres, "New ABC Series Loaded with Love," *Press-Telegram*, Long Beach, CA, August 1, 1969, C9.
22. Clay Gowran, "ABC Series Gets a Racy Reputation," *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 1969, 31.
23. U.S. Senate, *Federal Communications Commission Policy Matters and Television Programming*, 405–406.
24. Gowran, "ABC Series Gets a Racy Reputation," 31.
25. Jerry Buck, "Margolin and Parker Head Production of New Series," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, August 1, 1969, accessed November 1, 2007, Newspaperarchive.com.
26. Spelling made these comments regarding a TV movie his company was developing titled *Love on Fire Island*. Reported in a memorandum from Bob Stevens to Aaron Spelling, Douglas Cramer, Duke Vincent, Cindy Dunne, Norm Henry, and John Whelpley, September 26, 1977, box 1, file folders, ASP Development, Douglas S. Cramer Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (hereafter, Cramer Collection, AHC).

27. Memorandum from Douglas Cramer to Gordon and Lynne Farr, June 22, 1977, box 35, *Love Boat*, Farr, Gordon and Lynne, Douglas S. Cramer Collection, AHC.
28. Handwritten comments from Cramer on memorandum from Lynne Farr to Lance Taylor, ABC, January 16, 1978, box 35, *Love Boat*, Farr, Gordon and Lynne, Cramer Collection, AHC.
29. Douglas Cramer notes on script K-54, April 10, 1979, box 36, *Love Boat*, script, K-54, Cramer Collection, AHC.
30. Memorandum from Douglas Cramer to Gordon and Lynne Farr, June 22, 1977.
31. Correspondence from Dennis P. Blackhurst to *The Love Boat*, December 4, 1979, and Marginalia by Douglas Cramer on same, box 35, *Love Boat*, Farr, Gordon and Lynne, Cramer Collection, AHC.
32. Correspondence from Douglas S. Cramer to Dennis P. Blackhurst, January 2, 1980, box 35, *Love Boat*, Farr, Gordon and Lynne, Cramer Collection, AHC.
33. The ABC network's first-place lead was beginning to erode, albeit slowly, at this point, which might have led to the network's demands for more sex on screen. Memorandum from Gordon Farr to Aaron Spelling and Douglas S. Cramer, October 15, 1979, box 35, *Love Boat*, Farr, Gordon and Lynne, Cramer Collection, AHC.
34. For more on the mainstream commercialization of sex in the late 1970s, see Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*.
35. Douglas Cramer notes in script K-64, October 10, 1979, box 36, *Love Boat* Script K-64, Cramer Collection, AHC.
36. Memorandum from Gordon Farr to Aaron Spelling and Douglas S. Cramer, October 15, 1979.
37. Ben Stein, "Love, Rape, Highway, Diary: Have We Sold You, Dear Viewer?" *TV Guide*, July 25, 1981, 35.
38. Display ad, *TV Guide*, October 30, 1976, A106.
39. Paraphrased in Douglas Cramer to Jo Heims, April 23, 1976, box 46, Heims, Jo, Cramer Collection, AHC.
40. Douglas Cramer to Mark Cohen, September 24, 1976, box 46, ABC correspondence, Cramer Collection, AHC.
41. Douglas Cramer to Stanley Robertson, May 5, 1975, box 21, Teenage Runaway-NBC, Cramer Collection, AHC.
42. "From Newton Deiter," box 4, Newton E. Deiter, PhD, and handwritten notes, box 9, script writer, "Alexander," Cramer Collection, AHC. For detailed analysis of the negotiations over Alex's sexuality see, Levine, "Sex as a Weapon."