

Women of Stargate: The representation of women in media

There has been better representation of women in Tv and movies over the last few years but that wasn't always the case. '*Stargate*'¹ was a movie that was released in 1994, it didn't have a lot of female representation. The movie had two female characters and both were no great representation but one of them was a slight move in the right direction. There was a lot of negative images of women in the eighties and the nineties, '*Stargate*' is one of the few that didn't have as many as the other shows that were coming out at the same time. Women wanted to see their counterparts working and not just as being in the home. Ads for TV shows and movies also use women in a certain way, they would only show the women that were conventionally attractive and wear certain clothes that lean towards the male demographic because studios thought that men would only watch it if the women were attractive. Genres also went through changes and mutations. Women in certain genres would only be young and attractive and were overly sexualised. With the studios intervention the first episode of '*Stargate SG-1*'², they had sexual violence, but the creators didn't want to ad it.

Representation is a big part of television studies and audiences also play a big part in this. The more of a certain audience you have for a television show, the more representation you will need in the show. 'Research on the television audience has historically been dominated, particularly in the USA, by large-scale quantitative surveys often designed using a model of the "effects" of the media, not which television is not necessarily a differentiated element'³. Television stations will try and get as big of an audience as they can so they have to have representation for everyone if

¹ [Stargate \(1994\) - IMDb](#), Accessed 05/04/2025

² [Stargate SG-1 \(TV Series 1997–2007\) - IMDb](#), Accessed 05/04/2025

³ Christine Geraghty, David Lusted, The Television studies book, Pg.107

they can fit it. This only started happening in the late eighties and early nineties, In the eighty's woman were still mostly shown as mothers or taking care of a household. They were not being properly represented until stations started seeing a rise in woman wanting a strong independent woman in a main role. Women also wanted to see what they actually experience in their lives and no see a gap between what they see on television and what happens in real life.

There was a lot of negative images of woman back in the eighties but there was a search for encouraging interpretations of women's experiences. 'Many critics expressed straightforward enthusiasm for TV roles in which women characters were presented as strong, independent, smart, economically powerful, or socially involved, rather than identified primarily in terms of their relationships to men'⁴. Women wanted to see their work outside the home, which was first shown properly by '*The Mary Tyler Moore show*'⁵ and '*Cagney and Lacey*'⁶, these shows also had an emphasis on the bonds between the women characters. The traditional crime dramas had little consideration for domestic life 'but the success of series such as '*Cagney and Lacey*' brought conventionally feminine interests such as romance and family into the police station'⁷. This made analysts to recognise that to a degree that masculine police dramas had always dealt with even indiscreetly questions to gender and what was happening to women.

From the eighties up until today we are in the Third wave of the women's movement, the second wave was just before the eighties between the sixties and seventies. The third wave started to work a lot better on how women saw themselves and how they saw themselves in media with both positive and negative images, this was not good as it would give women conflicting messages about themselves. 'Nancy Signorielli's (1997) quantitative content analysis across six

⁴ Christine Geraghty, David Lusted, Pg.121

⁵ [The Mary Tyler Moore Show \(TV Series 1970–1977\) - IMDb](#)

⁶ [Cagney & Lacey \(TV Series 1981–1988\) - IMDb](#)

⁷ Christine Geraghty, David Lusted, Pg.121

media used heavily by teenage girls showed that the media play a dual role by presenting both positive and negative images of women, thus providing adolescent girls with conflicting messages about their own potential'⁸. Even with this women's jobs were still shown as less important than a man's job, this was not a good message for women to have on television and needed to be represented more with how they actually live. 'The overall message may be that women can be strong, smart, independent as long as they remain within the confines of their homes and relationships'⁹. That was what was shown in the eighties and nineties, when there was a strong woman, she was either at home or in a relationship with a man that was much stronger, that they are of the beauty standards of the time and conventionally attractive.

Ads for TV shows with a female leads in the ad or poster had to look attractive, so they could make men want to watch it and women would like it because there was a female lead. The main poster of '*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'¹⁰ was Buffy in a short black dress holding a wooden stake. Whereas the same year a few months after Buffy launched, in '*Stargate SG-1*' Sam Carter is in full military gear and is only seen from the shoulders up. This was strange for the time as women were always shown in a physically attractive way in ads or posters of shows like Buffy was. 'Although others (Soley and Reid 1988) find evidence of a decline in stereotyping after 1964, women still were likely to be shown in physically alluring roles'¹¹. All the female leads in buffy are in a relationship or are looking to get into a relationship thought-out the whole series, Buffy starts dating Angel straight away and is always grouped together with him in the first couple of seasons. In '*Stargate SG-1*' the women that work with the stargate generally stay single and are only focused on their job and have no time for relationships. This show was the start of the genre

⁸ Marian Myers, Mediated Women, Pg. 5

⁹ Marian Meyers, Pg. 6

¹⁰ [Buffy the Vampire Slayer \(TV Series 1997–2003\) - IMDb](#)

¹¹ Marian Meyers, Pg. 255

of Sci-Fi having independent woman that aren't in a relationship. Genre has had a few changes to do with women's representation in Television, it took some genres longer than others to change to make better female characters.

TV has a long history of using different genres and woman being the side role or not able to take care of themselves and have to be helped by a man. In the sci-fi genre this happens a lot more than in the other genres but is still prevalent in most other genres. 'A quite tightly generic perspective has often been adopted in studies, often in a way which proceeds in ignorance of other kinds of television'¹². There is also a lot of genre hybridity and mutation that happens in television, it does not work for television shows to stick to one genre. They need to use multiple genres to keep the show entertaining and innovative. 'Television genres and programming formats are notoriously hybridised and becoming more so'¹³. It is much better to have multiple genres when you are making a television show so the characters can grow and learn as the series progresses. Series and serials have been combined in a lot of shows, series used to be self-contained episodes with autonomous plotlines, whereas serials were continuing storylines with characters learning from episode to episode. 'Today, there are elements of the serial in many of what the industry would regard as series: US sitcoms such as *'Friends'*, hospital dramas such as *'ER'* and cop shows such as *'NYPD Blue'*.'¹⁴ Most shows don't fall into one or the other, they are combined in most series unless it is a comedy series, but even then, they have call backs to other episodes which still combines series and serials. Sci-Fi also combined these, but they are mostly on the serial side.

¹² John Corner, *Critical ideas in Television studies*, Pg. 126

¹³ Glen Creeber, *The Television Genre Book*, Pg.9

¹⁴ Glen Creeber, *The Television Genre Book*, Pg.9

In the genre of sci-fi women were and still are overly sexualised, in the original 'Stargate' movie there is not a lot of sexualization as other movies that came out around the same time. Not a lot of female characters in the early 1990's were strong and never needed help. In the original movie, the only female leads were an old woman and a young woman that couldn't do anything she wanted. The young woman called Sha'uri was the daughter of the village chief and was given to one of the main character Daniel Jackson as a gift. The main characters didn't know this was going to happen but the villagers who spoke a different language did and were joking about it. You could tell this from their body language after they spoke, after the chief said something to Daniel and started pushing him towards where she was. Humour was used here to make the sexualisation less noticeable. 'The use of humour to reinforce prejudice, the use of strongly nationalist aesthetics (including music and dance) to promote xenophobia, the use of various types of sexual objectification, and the depiction of violence (including sexual violence)'¹⁵

Sexual violence is seen in the first episode of SG-1, where the same character is captured and has her clothes ripped off her, so her body can be shown to an alien. This made it seem like the studio didn't care what people would think watching this, openly showing this violence. 'Both sexual objectification for pleasure and the depiction of violence raise questions about the relationship between the realm of fantasy and the realm of real values and attitudes'¹⁶ This went against what the writers and producers wanted, but the studio executives wanted it in it. This is the only sexual violence shown in the whole series. 'Jonathan Glassner seemed pleased to hear that the nudity had been removed from the pilot, too, telling Gateworld in a 2009 interview that he was against it from the outset. "We were kind of unhappy with it having nudity in it," he said,

¹⁵ John Corner, Pg. 103

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"But the studio thought that it would help the ratings on Showtime." ¹⁷ Showtime was known for only showing adult content at the time SG-1 was made, so the studio pushed for there to be more adult content when the producers wanted the show to be more family friendly. This was a leave from the movie as the movie only had two female main characters and one was an old woman named Catherine.

Catherine is only in the first quarter of the movie; she is there to introduce the stargate. You first see her as a child at the dig site where the stargate is discovered as it is her father that found it. She is then shown as an old woman meeting Daniel Jackson to get his help with translating the stargate. You then learn that the military has the stargate and she is only a part of the research team and not allowed near the actual gate. Only the military is, and they are all men, the only women in the whole base are on the research team and has little to no position of power in the base. Catherine who owns the gate doesn't have a say in what happens with the gate and can only make suggestions to the military men in charge. She gets told off by one of the military men Jack O'Neill when she wants to explore what's on the other side of the gate, but he thinks it is too dangerous and that she is too emotionally involved with the stargate. This is a problem with a lot of movies and TV shows in the Sci-Fi genre, the men think that the women are too emotional and can't separate their emotions from thinking logically. Even though she was put down for being too emotionally attached, she was still a woman in somewhat power, and she was on the older side, as only young attractive women were generally used in Sci-Fi in the seventies and eighties. This image of women in tight and revealing clothes was changed in the late seventies. 'The Screen Actors' Guild leapt into the fray in 1978, when its president, Kathleen Nolan,

¹⁷ Joe Roberts, [Showtime Pushed For Nudity In Stargate SG-1, But One Star Fought Back](#), Accessed 28/03/2025

referred to the “disgusting and degrading image of American women.”¹⁸ This quote got the backing of a lot of organisations who were normally not on the same page and all talked to the networks, conservative organizations, feminist groups, advertisers, critics, scientists, television producers and even the actresses themselves lamented the representations, and begged the networks to tone them down¹⁹. This is what would have helped the character of Catherine to be an older character instead of a young woman, if it wasn't changed the studio most likely would have tried to push for the character to be younger. Science fiction had only had women that look a certain way in Science Fiction. 'There are hardly any women', by which Russ means that the female characters in science fiction merely conform to social and cultural stereotypes of what women should look like²⁰.

Representation wasn't great for women before the nineties, but it started to become better in the late seventies. Studios wanted the biggest audience they can get so they started to add more women in bigger roles as women wanted to see a better representation of themselves on the big and small screens. The negative of images of women was very common in the eights and by the nineties it was getting better but still didn't get a lot better until the late nineties. There was a lot of bad ways women were shown in different genres on TV, especially Sci-Fi, but 'Stargate SG-1' was one of the shows that started to change that, with one of its main characters Sam Carter not being in any revealing clothing and only in military clothes, to show that she was more than just a woman. Humour was used to cover this sexualisation in the '*Stargate*' movie, which happens a lot in the Sci-Fi genre. The show moved away from this as they had very little sexualisation of women in it, the first episode was the exception and this was because of the studios interference

¹⁸ Céline Morin, Regan Kramer, *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, No. 48, Gendering the (post-)Ottoman world (2018), Pg.262

¹⁹ Céline Morin, Regan Kramer, Pg. 262

²⁰ RITCH CALVIN, FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION AND FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY, Pg. 15, Accessed 20/03/2025

and the creators didn't want it at all, they wrote great female characters and pushed back against it so much that the studio made them, but they won in the end that the scene was cut from any release after the 2000s, when the show moved to a different studio. The only strong female character, that had a little power in the movie was put down on her ideas and plans by the military man that was in charge because he thought she was too emotional. Women have not had great representation from the start of TV and Movies until the eighties and Stargate was one of the few that started to have better characters and the show that came after was one of the first that had very strong female characters.

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