



authoritatively, "I count!" Of Prairie Dawn, he inquires, "And how do you spend your day?" Sure, it would be silly to ask a schoolgirl what she does for a living. But none of the female Muppets on *Sesame Street* are even old enough to earn a living.

Further, almost all the baby puppet characters on *Sesame Street* are girls. For example, Snuffle's sibling is Baby Alice; in books, Grover's baby cousin is a girl, and when Henry Monster's mother brings home the new baby—"It's a girl." Since babies are totally dependent and fairly passive, the older (male) relatives take care of them and provide leadership.

Also, the female Muppets almost never interact with each other. In sharp contrast, consequential and caring friendships have been fully developed between male Muppets: Ernie and Bert; Big Bird and Snuffle; even Oscar the Grouch and his (male) worm, Squirmy.

Any parent of toddlers or preschoolers can testify that the "girls" on *Sesame Street* are not very popular. Children ask their parents for Bert and Ernie dolls, not Baby Alice. Is this just because the girls are not marketed via books, tapes, placements and toy dolls the same way the boys are? Or is it that the *Sesame Street* writers simply have not developed the girls into the same types of lovable, adorable personalities that belong to the main characters?

Interestingly and peculiarly, the minor "girls" look more human than most of the well-loved animal roles. They are not physically cuddly, colorful or bizarre, as are the more important male characters. Prairie Dawn has ordinary blonde hair and brown eyes—nothing even remotely similar to Big Bird's soft yellow feathers or Cookie Monster's wild, bright blue, mane.

Yes, we believe that *Sesame Street* is one of the best shows on television for small children. Our children—boys and girls—are regular viewers. In addition to its educational value, lack of violence and emphasis on cooperation, the adult characters on the show are admirably balanced in terms of avoiding sexual stereotypes.

But even the best of the bunch has room for improvement. Just as elementary through professional school educators must learn to be more sensitive to subtle and unintentional gender bias, so too should the folks at Children's Television Network. We can stop sexism from seeping into our children's first "formal" educational experience. The message was brought to you by the letter F: fairness for females.

### Thinking Critically About *Sesame Street*

1. This essay spends no time on the criteria part of the argument ("Sexism is bad") and all its time on the match argument ("*Sesame Street* exhibits sexism"). Why do the authors feel no need to defend the criterion?
2. Do the authors convince you that *Sesame Street* is sexist?
3. If you agree with the argument that *Sesame Street* is sexist, should that criterion be sufficient for undermining the popular assessment of *Sesame Street* as a model educational program for children?

Our next reading is by cultural critic Elayne Rapping. It first appeared in *Progressive magazine* a leftist publication that strongly supports labor and workers' rights.

ELAYNE RAI

### IN PRAISE OF R

The other night, while flipping among the I stopped—as I often do—to check out the *Rose*, ing that time slot in New York. And, as often he longer than I intended, watching the *Conners* w had hit their Kmart window fan that day.

On the three more respectable networks, I Congress and the courts hand down weighty weapons of state are deployed, around the glo democracy and the American way. But in the Co either in disrepair or not yet paid for, it is poss newscasts themselves—how the fallout from suc who are relatively low in the pecking order.

On CBS, NBC, ABC, and CNN, the problem are not likely to sound familiar to most of us. Zo vant issue. Hillary may have misplaced her cap land may be embroiled in royal-family dystunc shabby Conner household, will be coping with les foreclosure, job stress, marital power struggles, I dignified but more realistic style.

I am a big fan of Roseanne—Barr, Arnold, C working-class students, who invariably claim he dear life as they climb the ladder of class and p which their parents have so hopefully invested e cultried to me that I have never—in the many ye mented on American popular culture—written a many, outside the trashy tabloids, where her per ularly recorded and described.

In the last year, I've read dozens of academi books, about *The Cosby Show*. Archie Bunker praised, and analyzed endlessly. Even *Murphy Br ate*, taken seriously in ever-broadening académic lion the well-structured, post-structural Madonna, academics.

What is it about these other media icons (l spectacular" subjects of intellectual analysis, more is it about Roseanne that makes her so easy to ig obvious talent, originality, political *chutzpah*, and surely part of it; but I suspect that class—position tor: Bill Cosby's Cliff Huxtable, Mary Tyler Moor Murphy Brown are all well-turned-out, well-edu girting, working-class Archie Bunker, far from s beaten down by the liberal, professional mentality