

# Charlotte York, Trad Wives, and Female Showrunners in Television

By: Lorna Loch<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction:

How we portray women on television matters. TV plays a vital role in shaping cultural narratives and has crafted the cultural narrative surrounding women's role in society for decades.<sup>2</sup> Social media has further complicated this dynamic. Short-form media platforms – mainly, TikTok and Instagram – provide an additional mode through which people filter what they see on TV. People engage in in-depth online discourse about TV shows, their characters, and themes. The accessibility of such discourse and interactions on social media further embeds these shows in peoples' everyday lives.<sup>3</sup> Now, not only are TV shows weekly episodic forms of entertainment, but they're viral trends, memes, and video essays, bringing the characters that much closer to reality.<sup>4</sup>

However, just as media shapes culture, culture shapes media. In recent years, the U.S. has seen a rise in conservative values and policies.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* restricted women's right to access reproductive healthcare for their bodies, and the Heritage Foundation, a prominent conservative think tank, has produced numerous reports on family planning and what constitutes the nuclear family.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, the media has reflected this ideological trend, whether on social media or on television.

In this paper, I explore the connection between the recent "trad wife" trend on social media, the rise in prominence of the Sex and the City character Charlotte York, who embodies a romanticized, traditionally feminine and normatively conservative vision of gender roles, motherhood, and family, and American conservatism. I contend that the rising popularity of conservative-leaning female archetypes on television and social media, as exemplified by Charlotte York and the

---

<sup>1</sup> JD 2026, Georgetown University Law Center. I would like to thank Professor Jeff Schneider for his assistance in the development of this Note.

<sup>2</sup> Burcu Başaran, *Women on screen: How TV shows redefine modern femininity*, DAILY SABAH (Mar. 24, 2023), <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/women-on-screen-how-tv-shows-redefine-modern-femininity>.

<sup>3</sup> Juliet Stott, *Six ways social media is changing the nature of TV forever*, E-CONSULTANCY (Oct. 13, 2014), <https://econsultancy.com/six-ways-social-media-is-changing-the-nature-of-tv-forever/>; *From Binge-Watching to TikTok Scrolling: How Social Media Changed the Way We Watch TV*, STN DIGITAL, (Sep. 12, 2024), <https://www.stndigital.com/blog/tv-and-social-media/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Jill Filipovic, *Data says Americans are becoming more conservative. What's going on?*, THE GUARDIAN (Aug. 9, 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/09/americans-conservative-obama-trump-joe-biden>.

<sup>6</sup> See generally *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022); *Eliminate the Title X Family Planning Program*, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION, <https://www.heritage.org/budget/pages/recommendations/1.550.48.html> (last visited Dec. 21, 2025).

trad wife trend, indicates a larger cultural shift toward traditional gender roles. Though the portrayal of women with traditional values is not inherently problematic, it creates the risk of perpetuating harmful stereotypes about the role of women in society.<sup>7</sup> To counteract this, I argue that the TV industry must continue to embrace complex female narratives, in part by addressing the continued decline of female showrunners<sup>8</sup>. As a legal solution to this possible consequence, I propose a California state government funded scholarship program to encourage women to enter the television business.

## I. WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

TV series still occupy a prominent role in shaping society, but the advent of short-form social media content provides an additional lens through which to understand current culture. Social media trends enable us to understand how social narratives are filtered through the mainstream. This paper examines how social media, by filtering certain narratives, perpetuates gender roles and how that dynamic relates to television series.

### A. *Trad Wives, Secret Lives, and Mormon Wives.*

2020 marked the emergence of new media trends centered around traditional, conservative values. At the forefront of this phenomenon lies the divisive “trad wife” trend. The term trad wife refers to a movement of women who favor a “traditional wife” role.<sup>9</sup> These women—often social media influencers—gained popularity by posting content romanticizing homemaking and traditional gender roles.<sup>10</sup> Their content ranges from cooking videos to child raising to creating a homestead to pushing anti-birth control sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Each of their posts present a visual package of peace and certainty, reflecting and perpetuating a new form of modern femininity that conforms to these ideals.<sup>12</sup>

The discourse surrounding this already controversial trend gained traction from a 2023 article written about prominent trad wife, Hannah Neleman, known for posting her content under the name Ballerina Farms.<sup>13</sup> Neleman amassed over twenty million followers between TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube by posting about her life on a Utah farm with her eight children and husband.<sup>14</sup> Neleman sacrificed her

---

<sup>7</sup> Historically, television has played a large role in how viewers understand the evolving role of women in society. *Television's Impact On American Society And Culture*, ENCYCLOPEDIA.COM, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/televisions-impact-american-society-and-culture>, (last visited: Dec. 21, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> A “showrunner” is defined as “a person who oversees the writing and production of each episode of a television series and has ultimate managerial and creative control over the series.” *Showrunner*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY (last updated Nov. 30, 2025), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/showrunner>.

<sup>9</sup> Maddie Garfinkle, *What Is a Tradwife? All About the Controversial Lifestyle — And Why It's Having a Viral Moment*, People (Jul. 29, 2024), <https://people.com/what-is-a-tradwife-8684651>.

<sup>10</sup> Megan Agnew, *Meet the queen of the ‘trad wives’ (and her eight children)*, THE TIMES (Jul. 20, 2024), <https://www.thetimes.com/magazines/the-sunday-times-magazine/article/meet-the-queen-of-the-trad-wives-and-her-eight-children-plfr50cgk>.

<sup>11</sup> Sophie Elmhirst, *The Rise and Fall of the Trad Wife*, THE NEW YORKER (Mar. 29, 2024), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-trad-wife>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Agnew, *supra* note 9

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

budding career as a professional ballerina to create a homestead.<sup>15</sup> On social media, she shows herself cooking recipes from scratch, tending to the farm, and discusses her experience giving birth to all eight of her children without medication (save for one).<sup>16</sup> The article, originally published in *The Times*, resulted in an outcry, with some suggesting that the trad wife model empowers women to reclaim more traditional roles and choose their own paths, while others claim that it is a blow to feminism.<sup>17</sup>

In the aftermath of the article, Neeleman and other self-proclaimed trad wives continue to produce content, engage in the discussion, and carve out a space on the internet for women who identify with those values. A 2025 study from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, which analyzed TikToks under the hashtags “#tradwife and #tradelife”, found that “[women identifying as being part of the tradwife community] argued that being a tradwife offers more freedom and fulfillment than corporate life.”<sup>18</sup> Yet they also have faced great criticism over their lifestyle choices. Even critics acknowledge that one appeal of the trad wife movement may be its sense of control, certainty, and promise of peace away from the otherwise “hustle culture” of modern society.<sup>19</sup> Yet they also contend that this trend creates danger of perpetuating archaic stereotypes about women needing to be controlled and protected.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of one's opinion on the trad wife trend, it illustrates how prominent discourse about gender roles continues to be in the media. Furthermore, it sheds light on the prevalence of conservative values on social media, because, whether to hate on it or to find safe harbor in it, 300 million viewers are engaging with trad wife content across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.<sup>21</sup>

A similar social media surrounding Mormon mothers trend gained such substantial traction that it resulted in a hit reality TV series. The “MomTok” trend refers to a group of Mormon female influencers—most of them wives and mothers—who all post content on TikTok.<sup>22</sup> While their political and social views aren't always explicitly stated, their videos reflect the realities of being young Mormon women balancing motherhood, marriage, and, in many cases, serving as the primary earners in their families; in doing so, their content implicitly reinforces particular values around domesticity that may reflect broader conservative ideals. MomTok creators sparked such interest among TikTok viewers that Hulu adapted the trend into a hit series, *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, where themes of the Mormon religion, traditional gender roles, and new conservative values are explored in greater depth.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives* explores these themes on a deeper level than the trad wife trend elicited, as the show works to remove the romanticism portrayed in short-form TikToks. Consequently, *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives* and MomTok creators not only highlight the

---

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Agnew, *supra* note 9

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca L. Stotzer and Ashley Nelson, *The (Anti)Feminism of Tradwives*, 27 TERRORISM & POLITICAL VIOLENCE 1 (2025).

<sup>19</sup> Agnew, *supra* note 9

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Sophie Gilbert, *MomTok Is the Apotheosis of 21st-Century Womanhood*, THE ATLANTIC (Oct. 27, 2024), <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2024/10/momtok-secret-lives-of-mormon-wives-review-feminism-beauty-domesticity/680410/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

prevalence of conservative values and gender roles on social media, but also illustrate the increasingly direct connection between online trends and traditional television. In the scope of this paper, that connection is important to note because it enforces the inverse relationship between narratives on television and discourse online.

So, what is the purpose of exploring the rise in conservative trends on the internet? At the very least, it suggests that media, whether social media or traditional TV, continues to hold the power to cut and trim society's views on social issues. It also illustrates the complexity surrounding discourse around gender roles, showing the continued need for complex female narratives on TV. If we do not encourage complex female narratives on TV, these shows will possess great narrative and identity building power, but promote only one dimensional views that could perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

#### B. *Charlotte York: A Case Study.*

While trad wife influencers and MomTok creators depict new forms of traditional femininity, this cultural shift is also evident in how audiences engage with older television characters. One such example is the renewed fascination with Charlotte York from *Sex and the City*, whose conservative sensibilities are being reinterpreted by a younger audience on social media.

This renewed interest, sparked by younger audiences viewing the HBO series on streaming services<sup>24</sup>, underscores the enduring narrative and identity-building power of television. Series characters offer viewers accessible archetypes through which to understand evolving social norms.<sup>25</sup> In the case of *Sex and the City*, the long-standing question—“Which one are you?”—illustrates how audiences continue to use fictional women as mirrors for their own identities and values. In particular, these fictional women portrayed complex narratives surrounding femininity: portraying duality and sexual liberation in a glamorous, yet nuanced, manner. Miranda, the corporate attorney, grapples with unexpected motherhood later in the show as Samantha, an icon of sexual freedom, struggles with acknowledging her own romantic insecurities while balancing the struggles of nearing middle age. Carrie, the showrunner, becomes a leading voice in the New York media landscape while running around town in her signature Manolo Blahniks, forgoing traditional pursuits of motherhood and marriage to pursue a fabulous life of her own out of her studio apartment.

But out of these four characters, one character has gained more traction among this younger generation than the others – Charlotte York. Charlotte York’s character is more conservative-leaning than the others. She dresses in tailored tennis whites, focuses her dating efforts on finding a husband and building a family, and is less willing to share her sexual exploits compared to the other three protagonists. While Charlotte in many ways is far from conservative, she represents the most conservative ideals of the four. In fact, Charlotte’s critics have even deemed her the “foil” to Samantha Jones, who is notorious for her sexually free, liberal outlook on life and feminism.<sup>26</sup> TikTok

---

<sup>24</sup> *Sex and the City*’s continuation series, *And Just Like That*, may also have renewed interest in the show, but this paper does not discuss content from it.

<sup>25</sup> Başaran, *supra* note 2.

<sup>26</sup> Nell Beram, *The Triumphant Rise of ... Charlotte?*, THE CUT (Jan. 26, 2022), <https://www.thecut.com/2022/01/charlotte-york-and-just-like-that.html>.

after TikTok of young women praise Charlotte for her style, sophistication, and confident valuation of herself.<sup>27</sup> While the rise in online engagement with Charlotte's character may only be a coincidence or a surface level observation (meaning, these young women really *are* only concerned with the way Charlotte presents rather than the conservative values that may lurk beneath the surface), it raises an interesting correlation given the rise in more conservative values in recent years.<sup>28</sup>

One possible explanation for Charlotte's rise in popularity is her character arc in the reboot series, *And Just Like That*. Many critics consider Charlotte to be the *Sex and the City* character with not only the most character growth, but also the most liberal bent.<sup>29</sup> In the reboot series, she even parents a nonbinary child and a teenager exploring her own sexual freedom.<sup>30</sup> Charlotte's character arc further enforces how her more traditional portrayal, even in the beginning of the series, was much more complex, and multidimensional than it may have initially appeared.

Regardless, Charlotte, though not a trad wife, has a similar appeal to Hannah Neeleman and the trad wives. Both icons embody a version of femininity that is grounded in domesticity and traditional family roles (see: Charlotte quitting her job when she got married<sup>31</sup>). These portrayals also represent *choosing* that path for themselves, requiring audiences to reconcile with the tension between traditional gender roles and feminist agency. Charlotte, even in the original series, also shows extreme exercises of feminism in her self-worth, and how she advocates for her value (see: "I'm worth a million" in her prenup negotiations<sup>32</sup>). And she, like the other characters in *Sex and the City*, engages in sexually free experiences, even if at the center of her actions is her quest for a husband.

Charlotte doesn't just occupy one facet of womanhood. Therefore, even if younger audiences are mainly fascinated with her for her classically, feminine, traditional appeal, they are forced to interact with her dimensions as well, especially given her character arc in the reboot. This ensures that the narrative and identity building effects of Charlotte require audiences to reconcile and come to terms with how complex femininity truly is. In many ways, that complexity that audiences are forced to reckon with is akin to the depth inherent in the MomTok discourse. Both MomTok as a concept and Charlotte as an icon illustrate how the relationship between gender, power, and modern society complicates traditional values, such as marriage.

Taken together, the trad wife influencers, MomTok content creators, and Charlotte York's resurgence form a cultural throughline. Unlike the feminist archetypes of the early 2000s who centered their identities on sexual liberation and professional ambition, these new and reinterpreted figures reflect a subtle pivot toward conservative values. Yet the part that makes them so influential against the current

<sup>27</sup> EJ Dickson, "How Did Charlotte Become the Breakout Star of 'And Just Like That...?'", ROLLINGSTONE (Jul. 20, 2023), <https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-features/and-just-like-that-season-2-charlotte-york-kristin-davis-breakout-character-1234788862/>.

<sup>28</sup> Note: even if it is the aesthetic appeal of Charlotte that draws young audiences to her, this in itself suggests a tie to the visual package of modern femininity portrayed in the trad wife trend.

<sup>29</sup> Beram, *supra* note 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Time and Punishment* (Season 4, Episode 7 of *Sex and the City*) (HBO television broadcast June 20, 1999) (depicting Charlotte York quitting her job after getting married).

<sup>32</sup> *All or Nothing* (Season 5, Episode 10 of *Sex and the City*) (HBO television broadcast June 19, 2003) (depicting Charlotte York negotiating a prenuptial agreement).

social backdrop is how dynamic and multifaceted they are. Depending on how you look at each of these figures, the pendulum of public opinion can swing from perceiving them as oppressed to empowered. They force audiences to question what it means for a woman to choose—whether she's choosing to work outside of the home or to abandon her career in favor of the home—and what it means for her to have power in her femininity—whether conforming to traditional gender roles gives her more or less power. Perhaps the most important takeaway from the rise in popularity of more traditionally oriented women is the need to promote more complex female narratives in media, ones that compel audiences to critically engage with and interrogate each portrayal. If we do that, then we mitigate the potential risk of a cultural backslide towards stereotyping women into purely traditional roles.

## II. WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

Against the cultural push towards more conservative values, exploring complex female narratives on TV is more important than ever. However, the decline of female showrunners in the TV industry may prevent this.

### A. *The Decline of Female Showrunners and Business Implications.*

To ensure diverse narratives are shown on screen it is imperative to hire diverse voices to craft those narratives. Thus, having female showrunners working in TV is imperative to add to the depth, complexity, and range of TV storytelling. Unfortunately, studies show that over the past few years there has been a decline in women in behind the scenes roles and TV creator roles.<sup>33</sup> In particular, “the percentage of creators on broadcast network programs declined by 6 percentage points from 29% in 2021-22 to 23% in 2022-23” and “the percentage of creators on streaming programs declined 1 percentage point from 30% in 2021-22 to 29% in 2022-23.”<sup>34</sup> Overall, “in 2022-23, 95% of broadcast and streaming programs had no women directors of photography, 83% had no women had no women directors, 74% had no women editors, 73% had no women creators, and 70% had no women writers.”<sup>35</sup>

The decline, as exemplified by the statistics above, and under-employment of women in creative roles on television is particularly problematic because “programs with at least 1 woman creator employed substantially higher percentages of women in other key behind-the-scenes roles than programs with exclusively male creators.”<sup>36</sup> This perpetuates the cycle of underrepresented women in the TV industry. Furthermore, “per the study, on shows with at least one female creator, women made up half of the protagonists, compared to only 26 percent on programming from male creators”.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the more female creators, the more women on screen. This lack

---

<sup>33</sup> Martha M. Lauzen, *Boxed In: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes on Broadcast and Streaming Television in 2022-23* (2023), <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2022-23-Boxed-In-Report.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> Lacey Rose, *New Study Says Women Working as TV Creators and in Major Onscreen Roles Has Fallen (Again)*, HOLLYWOOD REPORTER (Aug. 22, 2024), <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/new-study-says-female-tv-creators-and-women-in-major-roles-has-fallen-1235981249/>.

of diversity limits the types of stories being told and has the potential to perpetuate harmful stereotypes about women.<sup>38</sup>

From a business perspective, the decline of women working in television is especially problematic. In 2021-22, viewers across various race, ethnicity, gender, and age categories, on streaming and broadcast, watched a majority of the top ten shows with diverse casts.<sup>39</sup> At least half of the top ten shows had “gender-balanced or majority women-casts”.<sup>40</sup> The same sentiment translated to diverse writers: audiences favor shows created by diverse writers.<sup>41</sup> In essence, “stories written from diverse perspectives result in more plausible characters, make for more interesting television, and boost a show’s overall appeal.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the ratings on these shows are higher, making more money for the networks.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, complex narrative television presents business opportunities for networks. Studies show that complex narrative television may inspire engagement with different audiences.<sup>44</sup> Unlike the original business model of television, which focused on appealing to a mass audience, the shifting broadcast framework of the 1990s meant that audiences became more fragmented, and niche channels had more appeal.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it makes sense for networks and streamers to garner engagement of niche audiences. These series not only generate buzz, but also attract audiences that may not otherwise have watched TV.<sup>46</sup> Complex narrative TV also presents opportunities for channels to rebrand around a specific identity or theme, leading to further marketing opportunities.<sup>47</sup> A key way to tap into these business opportunities is to hire female showrunners that can create these diverse narratives on television.

The rise of social media has further amplified the power of niche entertainment. For instance, *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, though not created by a woman showrunner, emerged from a niche social media subculture, but ended up amassing 769 million viewers in its first week on streaming.<sup>48</sup> The show’s exploration of complex themes surrounding religion and culture illustrates the mass appeal of underrepresented narratives on television.

---

<sup>38</sup> Margie Warrell, *Leveling The Field For Women In Film And Television: A User's Guide*, FORBES (Oct. 25, 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/margiewarrell/2023/10/25/nine-ways-women-can-level-the-field-in-film-and-television/>.

<sup>39</sup> Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, *TV Viewers Favor Shows with Diverse Casts and Authentic Storylines*, FORBES (Nov. 9, 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/drarnellhuntaanddranachristinaramon/2023/11/09/tv-viewers-favor-shows-with-diverse-casts-and-authentic-storylines/>.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> Jason Mittell, *Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television*, THE VELVET LIGHT TRAP, NO. 58 (2006), <https://justtv.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/mittell-narrative-complexity.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> Katie Campione, ‘*The Secret Lives Of Mormon Wives*’ Moves Up Nielsen Charts As Buzz Grows; ‘Kaos’ Viewership Declines 52% Week-Over-Week, DEADLINE (Oct. 10, 2024), <https://deadline.com/2024/10/the-secret-lives-of-mormon-wives-nielsen-ratings-kaos-viewership-declines-1236112869/>.

A counterargument could be that *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives* demonstrates that women creators are not the only ones capable of crafting complex narratives about women, because of male directors or producers. However, the women starring in this series continue to drive the storylines. Even if male creators are capable of nuanced storytelling, offering women a seat at the table broadens the range of perspectives. It is imperative to allow more diverse voices in the creative room in order to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes and single dimensional storytelling about women.

B. *State Solution: California State Scholarship Program for Women in TV.*

I propose that one state-level solution to the decline in female showrunners in television is a California state-funded, higher education scholarship program. This program would encourage young women in higher education to pursue degrees in TV screenwriting, producing, or directing. This program would be state-funded by California. As the epicenter of the film and television industry, California is uniquely positioned to support such an initiative, and in the current political climate, a state-based program is more likely to secure sustained backing than a federal one.

There are three possible ways in which the scholarship could be funded. The first is to fund the scholarship through funds allocated to higher education by the California Constitution and California legislature. The Cal Grants offer one current model for state-funded scholarships. For example, Cal Grant C offers up to \$2,462 for tuition and fees and \$547 for supplies for students pursuing an occupational or technical training program at any private for-profit or private nonprofit school that qualifies for Cal Grant.<sup>49</sup> The funding for this grant comes from the California Student Aid Commission, which gets its funding from the state.<sup>50</sup> Cal Grant C indicates that the California state government already provides funding for a scholarship program for a specific occupation. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to appropriate funds for an additional grant for the entertainment industry.

Opponents of the scholarship may argue that California universities either lack constitutional authority or have misused public funds in funding the program. The California Constitution grants the University of California (“UC”) large discretion over how to govern and organize the university, such as setting student fees, approving admissions criteria, and creating academic programs.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the California legislature maintains control over the UC through appropriations.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, the California State University (“CSU”) system’s powers are conferred by the California legislature through the Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960.<sup>53</sup> Meaning, the legislature has greater discretion over the CSU’s operations than the UC’s, but CSU still maintains broad authority over everyday operations.<sup>54</sup> Part of the budget allocated through these

---

<sup>49</sup> *Cal Grant C Award*, CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID COMMISSION, <https://www.csac.ca.gov/post/cal-grant-c-award>.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *What Role Does the State Play in Public Higher Education?*, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST’S OFFICE (Dec., 2009), <https://www.lao.ca.gov/sections/education/Ed-basics/What-Role-CA-Play-Public-HE-1209.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

funds is to the student aid commission, which provides student grants.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, California public schools likely have the constitutional basis to fund the scholarship.

Opponents may argue that the scholarship is a misuse of public funds. California Penal Code Section 424 governs the misuse of public funds for an unrelated public benefit or for personal use.<sup>56</sup> Two recent cases involved a UC Chancellor utilizing a personal trainer and not paying the school back<sup>57</sup>, and five government officials burying hazardous waste in the desert.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, cases about misusing public funds generally involve individual public officials with authority over funds.<sup>59</sup> However, if the money is allocated to the university by the legislature for purposes of student aid or academic programs, then the university has great discretion over how to use those funds. Thus, it likely would not be a misuse of public funds if those funds are used for one of those valid purposes. Overall, one way to fund the scholarship is through state funds appropriated to the universities to create grants and design academic programs.

A second way in which the scholarship could be funded is through entertainment tax credits. In 2024, California Governor Gavin Newsom proposed a \$750 million expansion of the film & TV tax credit program.<sup>60</sup> The purpose of this program is to incentivize filming and production to stay in California.<sup>61</sup> As it currently stands, the tax credit program offers a tax credit to eligible TV and film productions in California. For every tax credit dollar approved, the program “generated at least \$24.40 in output, \$16.14 in GDP, \$8.60 in wages, and \$1.07 in initial state and local tax revenue from production in the state.”<sup>62</sup> In total, the current tax credit program has produced “over \$26 billion in economic activity and supported more than 197,000 cast and crew jobs across the state.”<sup>63</sup> In the past, California updated the program to include workforce diversity provisions and additional funding for the Career Pathways Training Program.<sup>64</sup> The success of this program in generating revenue for the state and incentivizing productions to stay in California has been astronomical<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>55</sup> *The 2024-25 California Spending Plan Higher Education*, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE (Sep. 11, 2024), <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4926>.

<sup>56</sup> CA Penal Code § 424.

<sup>57</sup> Audrey McNamara, *Investigation revealing Chancellor Dirks' \$4,990 misuse of public funds cost university \$57,671*, THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN (May 20, 2017), [https://www.dailycal.org/archives/investigation-revealing-chancellor-dirks-4-990-misuse-of-public-funds-cost-university-57-671/article\\_bce19594-57cc-59c8-977d-9115f5930bad.html](https://www.dailycal.org/archives/investigation-revealing-chancellor-dirks-4-990-misuse-of-public-funds-cost-university-57-671/article_bce19594-57cc-59c8-977d-9115f5930bad.html); *Misappropriation of Public Funds - California Penal Code Section 424*, EISNER GORIN LLP, <https://www.egattorneys.com/white-collar-crimes/misappropriation-public-funds-penal-code-424> (last visited: Dec. 21, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> *Misappropriation of Public Funds - California Penal Code Section 424*, EISNER GORIN LLP, <https://www.egattorneys.com/white-collar-crimes/misappropriation-public-funds-penal-code-424> (last visited: Dec. 21, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> *California Supreme Court Clarifies Who is Liable for Prosecution for Misuse of Public Funds*, BEST BEST & KRIEGER LLP (Jun. 21, 2016), <https://bbklaw.com/resources/california-supreme-court-clarifies-who-is-liable-for-prosecution-for-misuse-of-public-funds>.

<sup>60</sup> *Governor Newsom proposes historic expansion of film & TV tax credit program*, GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM (Oct. 27, 2024), <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/10/27/governor-newsom-proposes-historic-expansion-of-film-tv-tax-credit-program/>.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

Given that great success, there may be pushback on using a portion of the tax credit for a scholarship. However, the previous diversity and career pathways updates to the program indicate that public policy may support using a portion of the tax credit for the purpose of increasing women in the industry.

Regardless of how it is funded, this scholarship would be administered through the University of California and the California State University System. To be eligible, the applicant must identify as a woman and be pursuing a degree in TV writing, directing, or producing. Overall, I believe that offering a scholarship would mitigate the decline in female creators in the TV industry, and serve the overall goal of encouraging complex female narratives on television.

### **Conclusion:**

How women are portrayed on television impacts how they are perceived in society. The historical evolution of female archetypes on television supports this notion. Women and gender roles continue to be a prominent conversation in society. The advent of new social media trends, such as Trad Wife influencers and MomTok creators, suggest that society continues to grapple with the meaning of modern femininity, leaning towards a more conservative conception. The rise in popularity of older television series, like *Sex and the City*, and the popularity of specific characters, like Charlotte York, reinforces that younger audiences utilize female archetypes on TV to understand modern femininity. However, the potency of Charlotte York and other female archetypes lies in their complexity.

In order to counteract the possibility of women being portrayed as one dimensional on TV, the TV industry should encourage shows that involve complex narratives about women. To ensure that these complex narratives are told, the TV industry must remedy the decline in female showrunners in recent years. My proposed scholarship program would encourage young women from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in TV, invigorating the narratives that are portrayed on TV. Without providing a solution to the decline in female showrunners, TV runs the risk of backsliding, or at the very least not evolving with the times, when they once were a historical forerunner of depicting the evolving role of women in society. As conservative narratives grow in prominence across both traditional and short-form media, this backsliding threatens the continued portrayal of complex female narratives which could serve as a valuable influence on generations of female consumers. In the words of Charlotte York, “I’m worth a million,” a line that could easily belong to the future generation of female showrunners on TV.