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IMAGINING THE HOUSEWIFE: MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER IN  
POST-WAR AMERICA

by

NICOLE WILLIAMS BARNES

Under the Direction of Professor James F. Darsey, PhD

ABSTRACT

World War II women are commonly understood to have come closer to equality than any previous generation. Their mass entry into the workforce is remembered as a united front to support the troops while simultaneously claiming ground to demonstrate their abilities as workers. However, scholarship which emphasizes the collaboration between the government and advertisers to create propaganda that persuaded women to enter the workforce and thus serve as the "domestic front" of the war begins to question the prevailing notion of wartime employment as strides towards equality. This project begins with the question: why did post-war women seemingly willingly abandon these jobs and move to the suburbs?

I argue the construct of the post-war housewife, which positions women as willing to abandon careers for the suburban kitchen, is a social imaginary which responds to and uses social anxieties to constrain women's gender performance and silence gender anxieties. I use the context of the time, as well as rhetorical analysis of mediated artifacts of representations of housewife, to argue this social imaginary silences women's post-war lived experience and replaces it in public discourse with the multimodal image of Fifties housewife. A visual rhetorical analysis of post-war advertisements which portray the housewife reveals the work of the social imaginary using social anxieties concerning gender roles as well as Cold War fears to define woman's place. Examining the way Hollywood uses housewife as a frame for its female stars uncovers how circulated use of the imaginary of housewife perpetuates the imaginary by seeming to evidence its claims to representation. However, an analysis of televised representations of the housewife imaginary reveals the fabric of the imaginary fraying. Television humor illuminates the illusion of the imaginary of housewife's claims to representativeness, and therefore creates a public space in which women can contest the imaginary by exposing women's discontent with the role of housewife. I conclude with a discussion of the ways this social imaginary of housewife continues to define women's lives in political debate seventy years after it began to define and constrain post-war women's gender performance.

INDEX WORDS: Feminist rhetoric, Visual rhetoric, Gender roles, Post-war, Media, Social imaginary

IMAGINING THE HOUSEWIFE: MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF PRIVATE LIVES  
IN POST-WAR AMERICA

by

NICOLE WILLIAMS BARNES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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IMAGINING THE HOUSEWIFE: MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF PRIVATE LIVES  
IN POST-WAR AMERICA

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August 2016

**DEDICATION**

For James Darsey and Andrew Barnes, without either of whom it wouldn't have been possible.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Fifties housewife as a concept is at the center of feminist debate, whether explicitly or not. The Seventies women's movement and its opposition to patriarchal oppression used the concept of the happy housewife to demonstrate the ubiquity and harm of patriarchal society. While liberal and radical factions of the movement argued over the best methods of engaging the public, and ultimate goals, both rebelled against the concept of the happy housewife and fought to secure equality and freedom for those women trapped by its mystique. Radical feminists' search for diversity and more universal equality questioned the representativeness of the suburban housewife, arguing the movement revolved around white, privileged women and failed to address minority concerns (Dow, 2014). As such, feminist debate since the 1963 publication of Friedan's *Mystique* revolves around the representation, and representativeness, of the suburban housewife.

The problem of the post-war housewife is compounded when juxtaposed with the lives these women lead during the Second World War. Their mass entry into the workforce is remembered as a united front to support the troops while simultaneously claiming ground to demonstrate their abilities as workers. Acceptance to labor unions and workplace childcare enabled female workers to participate in the labor force as well as earn comparable money to their male predecessors and counterparts. Adkins Covert's (2012) analysis of wartime propaganda emphasized the collaboration between the government and advertisers to create propaganda that persuaded women to enter the workforce and thus serve as the "domestic front" of the war. Her discussion of wartime roles, however, began to question the prevailing notion of strides towards equality made in women's entry to the workforce. Her analysis of the roles of women depicted within this propaganda foreshadowed post-war gender norms; "The Depression

era program of 'one job per family' privileged male workers and rested on the assumption that female workers were not primary breadwinners"(p. xiv). This project begins with Adkins Covert's analysis of WWII propaganda images to investigate the resurgence of this "Depression-era program" in post-war America and question the construct of the Fifties housewife as representative of a generation of women.

Primary to this discussion is a post-war atmosphere that enabled certain minority groups to find enclaves of freedom and make strides towards acceptance and equality. The war effort placed major restrictions on every aspect of life; at war's end, a nation that spent nearly two decades in the throes of depression and war was suddenly presented with a healthy economy and an atmosphere of opportunity. Minority groups seized upon this opportunity to fight for equality and freedom. Homosexual and black populations both capitalized upon wartime gains towards equality and fought to maintain this newfound status post-war. Ambrose (1991) argued that World War II and the integration of the military sparked further integration throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Eleanor Roosevelt's 1941 visit to the Tuskegee Airmen, which culminated in a thirty minute flight, was integral to the acceptance of African-American soldiers in combat during World War II (Sandler, 1992), led President Roosevelt to order the black population in the armed forces reflect the general population at ten percent, and encouraged the promotion of Benjamin Davis to brigadier general, the highest rank of any African-American soldier (Fairclough, 2001). Truman's 1948 executive order that desegregated the military grew out of these wartime efforts.

Post-war, African American communities began the fight for equality that would culminate in Washington DC in 1963. The 1950s was a decisive decade for the Civil Rights Movement, with the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision in 1954, Rosa Parks and the

Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, Eisenhower mobilizing the National Guard to enforce integration in Arkansas schools in 1957, and Martin Luther King, Jr., establishing roots as a leader of the nonviolent protest movement. Civil rights acts passed in 1957 and 1960 improved black voting rights. In the 1950s, blacks earned more than four times their 1940s wages (Miller & Nowak, 1977). The more famous and successful sit-ins of the 1960s have their roots in sit-in movements of the late 1950s (see Ambrose, 1991; Dupuy, 1969; Fairclough, 2001; Sandler, 1992). Miller & Nowak argued, "Such tangible changes led black reporter George Schuyler to optimistically note in a 1951 Reader's Digest: 'the progressive improvement of race relations and the economic rise of the Negro in the United States is a flattering example of democracy in action'" (p. 183). Gains made towards equal rights during World War II introduced the possibility for equality and inspired a generation to fight to expand these rights to the population writ large.

Gay populations in post-war urban areas were equally inspired to fight for recognition and a space in which to live life (more) openly. World War II, as well as Kinsey's studies on sexuality in the late 1940s, created the opportunity for individual homosexuals to identify within a group and realize commonality (Engel, 2001, p. 29). Burns (2006) explained that, in the crisis of World War II, homosexuals had the first opportunity both to meet more people like themselves and to develop communities around these similarities. Heyl (1989) argued, "[t]he status of homosexuals changed around the time of World War II. Prior to this point, identifications with homosexuality were primarily individual experiences. The identification of homosexuals as a group was given impetus by the actions of the military and the federal government who attempted to identify homosexuals and remove them from military positions" (p. 341). Instead of shaming the gay community into further hiding, attempts to identify



homosexuals in the military in fact created community by introducing them to like-minded individuals and creating a cause behind which to unite and fight.

The environment and disruption of war created a culture of experimentation and openness that allowed for the expansion of this newfound community. D'Emilio (1992) argued that an urban homosexual subculture remained "rudimentary, unstable, and difficult to find" (p. 471) through the 1930s, and World War II created an atmosphere in which this subculture could coalesce into the roots of the gay liberation movement. He continued:

The war severely disrupted traditional patterns of gender relations and sexuality, and temporarily created a new erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression. It plucked millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming, out their homes, out of towns and small of cities, out of the heterosexual environment of the family, dropped them into sex-segregated situations as GIs, as WACs and WAVEs, in same-sex rooming houses for women workers who relocated to seek employment. The war freed millions of men and women from the settings where heterosexuality was normally imposed. For men and women already gay, it provided an opportunity to meet people like themselves. Others could become gay because of the temporary freedom to explore sexuality that the war provided. (p. 471-2)

World War II thus contributed to an alleviation of the stigma of homosexuality through creating a space outside of traditional heteronormative culture in which to explore homosexual feelings as well as meet likeminded people (see Corber, 1997; McKinney and Sprecher, 1989). A diverse urban culture provided the space for this homosexual subculture to thrive.

For women, the obligations of war pulled them into factories and the illusion of more equality. Workplace childcare and entrance into labor unions gave women more access to jobs and higher pay at these jobs. Unions fought the initial attempts for these female "replacement workers" to join their unions and only accepted women workers as members to ensure that pre-war wages would remain the same; they worried that men returning from war would be paid less than before the war because cheaper female labor would drive down labor costs (Adkins Covert, 2011). The lull in the women's movement during and after World War II is a reaction to the war itself (Fowlkes, 1992); while the women's movement of the Seventies has roots in the fight for suffrage and equality of the interwar decades (Lynn, 1992), post-war (white) women are understood to have welcomed the peace and opportunity available at the end of the war and therefore accepted, instead of rebelling against, the post-war atmosphere.

However, the necessity of providing childcare for these women during the war hints at the ways in which these minority groups are fundamentally divergent when it comes to being able to capitalize on post-war opportunities. The end of the war meant the return of the men from the front, and as the baby boom demonstrates, these men were anxious to return to a life of "normalcy" defined as finding a nice girl, settling down, and raising a family. Women "were assigned the primary role in veterans' readjustment to family life" (Hartmann, 1982, p. 25); marrying and having children were a woman's post-war duty. Feminist historical scholarship often attempts to reconstruct feminist movements and actions in the Fifties to argue that women were not universally victimized and forced "back in the kitchen" (Kaledin, 1984). While recovery of women's efforts is an important project, the frame of victimization ignores both women's agency in choosing a "traditional" lifestyle and societal pressures and mores that guided these decisions. Women were both complicit in this social structure and casualties of

social constraints. While other minority populations were necessarily counterculture, as their personhood itself in some way separated them from the dominant, white, majority women are included in the dominant cultural narrative. Therefore, while difference for other minorities provides them the space in which to define their own counterculture, for women to do so they must first turn their back on the dominant culture and their acceptance within it. White women are accepted by the mainstream culture and therefore identify with that dominant culture; they have more to lose, in fighting that culture, than those already considered outsiders. Women's ability to break free from cultural mores thus becomes more complicated, which explains the time gap between when women tasted a life more equal during the war and when she began to fight for that equality in the 1960s.

This project focuses on multimodal representations of white, middle-class post-war women. The above discussion concerning race highlights the primary problem in grouping women of different races and classes together in post-war society. While white women are a part of the majority culture, black women are a double minority, marked by both race and gender. Black women have traditionally worked outside of their own homes, often in the homes of others, and their gender and societal roles did not change significantly during the war. Additionally, post-war changes to mortgage and credit culture which enabled the creation of the suburban nuclear family excluded black families from these suburbs by denying them access to mortgages, lines of credit, and the middle-class more broadly (see Coontz, 2000; Rosenberg, 1982). Therefore an examination of housewife necessarily excludes those populations socially prohibited from realizing middle-class standards of living.

The housewife as a gender role defines white, middle-class women's place within this dominant culture. Examining the concept of post-war suburban housewife through the rhetorical

and feminist concept of the imaginary allows for an analysis of how this concept, with which women to varying degrees identified, defined both their personal lives and accepted social position regardless of their personal gender performance. The role of rhetorical scholarship in the debate of the post-war housewife is to explore the importance of represented lives, as rhetoric emphasizes “the ways in which discourse is always produced with an audience in mind” (Dow, 2014, p. 12); feminist rhetorical scholarship investigates discursive gender constraints. When the concept of housewife is analyzed through lens of the social imaginary, we can explore the ways these public constraints define women as necessarily private, and therefore create an assumption that women’s natural gender performance is fulfilled in the role of suburban housewife. I begin with important contextual components that contributed to the creation and acceptance of this gender norm before explaining rhetoric’s role and contribution to our understanding of gender constraints.

### **1.1 Context**

To understand the conditions that create the constraints of housewife and the conditions which make it the preferred gender role, we must first understand both wartime and post-war contexts to recreate the mindset of its audience and the culture that creates it. Roosevelt’s (1941) Four Freedoms speech emboldened a country belabored by Depression and intimidated by war to exceed all reasonable expectations as to what was possible for an impoverished economy to produce and contribute to the war effort while also initiating a new understanding of human rights (Olson, 1983). A destitute American population embraced the call for a freedom from want to end ten and a half years of poverty. At the same time, Roosevelt’s appeal for freedom from fear spoke to a more global population, promising American goods to aid in the fight against Fascism and fear mongering globally. The American audience of his speech understood

the desire for freedom from fear in a new way after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, as the security of two oceans they thought protected them from attacks on their home soil proved false.

The combination of wartime production needs and military enlistment burgeoned employment opportunities for women (Coontz, 2000). However, dominant biases against women in the workforce prevailed at the beginning of the war, and companies were hesitant to hire women, especially for traditionally men's jobs, and especially married women. Companies were slow to overturn long-standing policies against hiring married women; many argued married women needed to be at home caring for their children, even at the height of wartime labor shortages (Adkins Covert, 2011). Workplace childcare enabled more married women to find employment and diminished biases against hiring married women; however, social biases against placing children in childcare facilities limited the number of women willing to use these workplace centers. While the Lanham Act (1943) designated funds for these centers, most were only partially full, as working mothers would instead find relatives or friends to care for their children while they worked (Rosenberg, 1992). Additionally, at the height of women's wartime employment, only 26% of married women entered the workforce, and the majority of those women had no children under the age of fourteen at home (Rosenberg, 1992). While common belief holds wartime employment opportunities provided equality to women, social biases against a workforce of women with children continued to prevail throughout the war.

Labor unions' treatment of female wartime employees also reflects biases against a female workforce, even at the height of the wartime labor shortage. The War Manpower Commission encouraged a uniform wage scale regardless of gender, and the National War Labor Board's 1942 ruling against Brown and Sharp prevented companies from paying women 20%

less than men for the same work (Rosenberg, 1992). However, these unions maintained separate seniority lists for women, granted seniority including military service time to veterans returning from war, and had the understanding that women workers would be eliminated at the end of the war (Rosenberg, 1992).

Since despite these biases, women were needed in the workforce, government agencies and the workplaces changed to accommodate working women. Defense contracts covered all costs as well as guaranteed a profit to allow companies to retrofit factories to fulfill government wartime needs. Companies could retool and simplify production, which allowed women lacking skills, and not as strong as the male workforce, to learn eighty percent of all factory jobs with minimal training (Rosenberg, 1992). In all, six million women joined the workforce during the war, 2.5 million of whom found work in factories (Adkins Covert, 2011). However, public discourse about these wartime roles established three conditions for the women's labor force: first, their position was only "for the duration" and therefore temporary, with the assumption that men regain their rightful place when they returned; second, these women must preserve their femininity; third, these new roles and their entrance into the workforce were framed as familial obligations and thus kept family at the heart of women's motivation (Hartmann, 1982, p. 23). Adkins Covert (2011) found wartime magazine advertisements encouraged women to "look her best" even in the overalls she wears to work. Encouraging women to pay attention to their appearance while working traditionally men's jobs maintains femininity while reminding these women of their position as substitute, and not replacement, workers; their appearance will be important once the time comes for them to surrender their positions. Wartime propaganda and posters circulated the idea that each ration or job directly contributed to the safety and provision of their sweetheart overseas, reinforcing the temporary nature of their wartime position; women

are sacrificing now for the men overseas while waiting for them to return. Wartime advertisements and propaganda tied each wartime sacrifice, whether it be service, work, or housekeeping related, to a woman's role as homemaker and (future) spouse. Women's Ordinance Workers posters proclaimed, "The girl he left behind is still behind him" "My girl's a WOW" and "Our job: To clothe the men who work and fight." Adkins Covert explained women's place in the war effort:

Wartime government campaigns explained how to deal with rationing and grow victory gardens. American women were admonished to 'Use it Up—Wear it Out—Make it Do' in an effort to reduce the need for consumer durable in the face of increased war production. Women's magazines provided advice on how to prepare nutritious meals in the face of limited access to sugar, butter, meat, and other rationed goods. (p. xi)

While the workforce is their public contribution to the war effort, and thus the contribution most unexpected and outside of gender type, advertisements and governmental campaigns reminded women of the importance of their other, private contributions as well. "Media messages about women's roles also encompassed their responsibilities as mothers, housewives, household managers, volunteers, and consumers... The home front was framed as the 'second front' in the war and women were enlisted as 'kitchen patriots' to do their part to speed the war's end and the return of husbands and sons" (Adkins Covert, 2011, p. xiv). These campaigns reinforced traditional roles as supportive wives and mothers in the home by emphasizing their sacrifices for the men fighting overseas and tying each sacrifice back to the home front. Thus wartime gains in employment reinforced social bias against women in the workforce by framing employment as secondary to family responsibilities and emphasizing the temporary nature of their positions.

With the men who returned at war's end came a new world full of opportunity, peace, and prosperity. Since America did not suffer the losses European countries did in the war, a much higher percentage of men who fought overseas returned. Thus while European countries campaigned to encourage women to both marry and continue working, primarily to bolster workforce numbers, American companies had a different problem as some women fought to remain in the workforce (Rosenberg, 1992). The women who fought to maintain their wartime employment were almost universally skilled laborers; women who worked hard to learn the skills needed to weld, machine, and even fly were reluctant to relinquish their jobs. On the other hand, unskilled labor jobs on factory lines are hardly rewarding, and in fact have deep psychological harms from performing the same menial task day after day (Hamper, 1991). Even most women believed defense-plant and factory jobs were rightfully men's, and willingly surrendered jobs they found strenuous, tedious, and exhausting (Rosenberg, 1992). During the war, this work as fulfillment of patriotic duty was rewarding despite its strain and monotony. At the end of the war, however, not only is the reward of patriotic duty stripped from the backbreaking tasks, but the patriotic duty now is to surrender these jobs to the men returning from the front. The housewife may be seen as liberation from back-breaking factory work.

The end of the war brought with it an age of new-found prosperity peppered with memories of pre-war depression. Memories of want encouraged families to save; fears and memories of the Depression meant families saved more than at any other point in history, typically banking twenty-five percent of their disposable income (Rosenberg, 1992). Hartmann (1982) argued memories of the Depression created fear of an economic collapse as millions of soldiers returned home searching for jobs in an economy without government contracts. However, the Cold War ensured the continuation of enough of these defense contracts to prevent



mass unemployment and maintain post-war prosperity. Concern about job security and availability combined with the Depression-era prejudice against women working creates a society unwilling to continue social programs that enable women's presence in the workforce. The Lanham Act expired in 1946, and with it came the end of most child care programs (Rosenberg, 1992). While the YWCA fought to try to maintain funds for childcare (Lynn, 1992), "the emotional deprivations experienced by women separated from husbands during the war made women willing to concentrate their energies on rebuilding family relationships" (Hartmann, 1982, p. 25), and thus many women were willing and eager to focus their energies on family. A surging birth rate also meant women had more obligations at home.

The post-war suburb came to represent the prosperity of the post-war age as well as security against the anxieties of the age, primarily revolving around potential nuclear war. The ease of home ownership lowered both the average age at marriage and the average age when beginning a family because men felt prepared to support a family with less help from their parents and at an earlier age (May, 2008). The changes to mortgage law also reaffirmed the expectations that families should start younger and maintain their own home apart from extended family members (Coontz, 2000). According to a 1950 study, the average age of marriage was twenty, with most marrying between fifteen and nineteen; this same study explained the prevailing bias against single people as "sick or immoral, too selfish or too neurotic" (Rosenberg, 1992). These young families often struggled to find places to live. In 1945, 98% of cities reported housing shortages (Rosenberg, 1992). These housing shortages combined with the affordability and availability of space to facilitate movement towards the suburbs. The development of highways and the rise in popularity and ownership of the automobile made suburbs an available and attractive option for couples looking to start a family (Jackson, 1980).

The suburbs represented newfound post-war opportunity as a site for economic mobility. Mortgages and payment plans created a credit culture that allowed middle-class suburban families to acquire possessions and increase their perceived income status by increasing debt (Jackson, 1980). The suburban population, and the middle class, skyrocketed.

It's important to note the ways society pressured white, middle-class women into accepting this role in the suburbs. Constructing a role that appeals to the wants and needs of Fifties middle-class women obfuscates societal obstacles that prevented women from performing gender in alternative ways. Most, if not all, new regulations and laws reinforced male breadwinners and heads of households. Veteran's benefits on paper applied equally to men and women; however, men were 98% of returning veterans and thus received the vast majority of GI Bill subsidies, and low-interest mortgages were not available to female-headed households (Rosenberg, 1992). Marriage provided women security and family in a post-war world where employment opportunities for women were shrinking. Rosenberg (1992) argued that, at this time, the "importance of security, both in monetary and emotional terms, took on almost religious significance" (p. 148). Suburban homes, cars, and possessions made possible by the post-war credit culture represented economic security, and the family, emotional security. Families provide reliable emotional support, and as divorce calls this reliability into question, divorce logically becomes a more subversive and controversial threat, hence falling divorce rates at the time (Greenwood & Guner, 2009). For women at the end of the war in search of this security, then, marriage, family, and the suburbs offer them a sense of security missing in their lives during the war.

Women's roles throughout both the Second World War and the post-war suburbs emphasize functionality and a woman's duty to her nature and her family. The frame of service

to men and family both during and after the war to define women's social duties. During the war, women entered the workforce and rationed goods to serve the home front and protect their men overseas. After the war, women's duties were to their men as well as the next generation.

Women's passive role excuses and permits masculine aggression by reinforcing masculine control (Miller & Nowak, 1977). Dr. Benjamin Spock (1944) famously blamed overprotective mothers who dote on their sons for wartime cowardice and homosexuality, while working and indifferent mothers raise delinquents and criminals. Framing women's roles and duties as social service creates a powerful justification for strict gender roles.

## **1.2 Thesis and Method**

Feminist rhetorical scholarship of the post-war era focuses on critiquing the systems that function to exclude women from the political and public sphere. Spitzack and Carter (1987) contended that a focus on the public and political as criteria for academic inquiry continues to exclude most people from cultural records; Condit (1993) argued that feminist rhetoric must analyze non-speech texts that represent women instead of just those that speak to women to understand how to position women within a society and why women were allowed to say what they said when they had the chance. Ramsey (2004) built on Condit's positionalist perspective to argue that rhetorical scholars can gain insight into inventive strategies of a social movement through an analysis of discourse not distributed by that movement; she argued that through the analysis of texts that represent women, rather than texts that speak to women, we can understand how societal definitions of women influences and constrains their rhetoric.

I extend Ramsey's discussion and argue that an examination of texts that represent women can also explore how representations of women constrain their lifestyle choices. Palczewski's (2005) work analyzing postcards and anti-suffrage postcards fits this mold as she

explained how anti-suffrage discourse reinforced stereotypes and used audience expectations of gender roles to fuel their anti-suffrage argument. She identified visual markers such as children, dress, and occupation to discuss the ways suffragettes were masculinized, and their husbands feminized, to argue the unnatural nature of their cause. Therefore, I analyze multimodal post-war texts to understand the social forces that create gender expectations and silence alternative gender performances.

Rhetorical scholarship that does wrestle with the gender expectations from the era discusses the housewife in two ways: civil citizenship and advertising. In attempting to answer why women embraced a traditional lifestyle, scholarship contends that women were lured from the workplace to the kitchen with propaganda that argued their role in a Cold War society was to protect a capitalist future by producing and raising loyal citizens (see May, 2008; Lewis, 2010; Baldwin, 2002; Nadel, 1995; Corber, 1993, 1997). Nadel (1995) argued that containment was the "privileged American narrative" (3). Corber (1993) contended that this containment narrative led to attempts to connect gender and social identity to issues of national security, and May articulated the ways this containment narrative manifested within the cold war home and gender performance as they imagined they contributed to national security and national interests through enacting these traditional gender roles. Containment performance allows us to examine the relationship between subjectivity and citizenship in this period (Baldwin, 2002). In enacting this containment rhetoric in everyday existence, the home becomes a place both as an escape from these dangers and as the protection from these threats through its stability. Baldwin argued that in this way the "American woman and her sexuality as a function of national reproduction became a focus of domestic cold war policy" (p. 85). Stepping outside of this containment narrative necessarily defined one as a threat as difference became subversive, whether that

difference be gendered, racial, or sexual. This discussion of containment and gender assumes the omnipresence of the nation within this narrative without examining the ways the nation manifests within these narratives as they circulated in the mass media. Texts like Keenan's, the Kitchen Debate, HUAC testimony, and propaganda films are easy case studies for the nation to appear and control these narratives. Stepping outside of these case studies, the nation's presence is hidden, if present at all, while the drive to conformity of gender roles remains. Security concerns are assumed to be assuaged by fulfilling national duty. However, on closer analysis, the construction of the housewife addresses more than just these security concerns, but also concerns about subversion and a place in the new post-war environment. The housewife convinces women and society to accept it as the dominant gender performance by defining women's innate character within acceptable social parameters.

Through the narrative of containment, then, scholars explain away the question of the retreat to the kitchen; women conformed as a branch of national security. Members of gendered, racial, and sexual minorities who stepped outside of these bounds were subversive and therefore a threat to this narrative of national security. This scholarship focuses on the ideological constraints of citizenship and consumerism and the ways that traditional gender roles contributed to a national narrative of patriotism and capitalism, and cannot divorce its analysis from a focus on the state and state institutions. While ideologically constrained by Marxism as well, a discussion of the "culture industry" promotes an understanding of the ways these mass mediated texts encourage the audience to suppress personal desire in favor of assimilation to the narratives contained within these texts.

Containment, however, cannot account for wartime gender constructs. It discusses the safety and security of this national narrative without analysis of the circulation of the narrative

and presumes a scared populace united to squash communism as the propaganda films of the day portray. My discussion, then, begins with multimodal representations of the housewife within popular culture artifacts to explore the ways public conceptions of the private and domestic act as a constraint upon private action and silences alternative gender performances.

Necessary to this discussion is an understanding of the ways public and private are constructed along gender lines to create masculine public spheres and feminine private ones. Feminist explorations of the public sphere focus their critiques of patriarchy on the distinction between a male/public realm and a female/private realm. Weintraub (1997) explained feminist theories of the public sphere as focused on distinctions between the public and the private used to place men in positions of power. These theories examine how “private” is defined to include traditionally feminine occupations to maintain the patriarchal structure of society. Arendt (1998) traced the history of the separation of the political public from the social and private and thus demonstrates the relegation of women to this social, private sphere throughout Western civilization. This creation of one political public distinct from a feminized private sphere consigns women to the home and erases them from important aspects of public-ness. Fraser (1992) critiqued the construction of a singular “public” that excludes women from a “public” or political life in examining the relationship between public discourse and social identities, while “private” functions to demarcate the boundaries of this public in ways that are detrimental to subordinate social groups. Warner (2005) theorized that, in a world in which “the values of both publicness and privacy [were] equally accessible to all... the experience of gender and sexuality [would] have to be different” (p. 21). He explained that the “distinction between public and private... is not just a distinction but a hierarchy” (p. 23), wherein those things considered “private” must be repressed and filtered. The distinctions seem to be natural distinctions closely

ted to ideas of gender, masculinity and femininity; femininity is a “language of private feeling” (Warner, 2005, p. 24).

This seemingly natural distinction is key to understanding how the housewife as a construct both creates and perpetuates the social assumption that women belong in the home. The problem of the public/private distinction post-war lies primarily in re-defining the gendered aspects of these distinctions. During the war, women entered the public sphere when they entered the workforce. After the war, the popularity of the nuclear family, increased distance between extended families, and younger age at marrying necessitates formerly private instructions and guidance as to housework and childrearing become public, as women turn to Dr. Spock and magazines for advice on how to keep house and raise a family. These private actions now have a public presence. Additionally, as scholarship on containment culture and national security notes, the post-war private sphere is politicized and has public significance in the fight against communism (see Nadel, 1995; Corber, 1993; Baldwin, 2003). The post-war private sphere attains a new level of cultural significance as it contributes to this containment narrative.

However, these public representations and uses of the private sphere adhere to strict gender lines. The public presence of the private sphere serves to validate the private sphere as a feminine space, and publically defines what women do, and their responsibilities, in private. These public representations of private action allow rhetoric scholars insight into the ways public discussion acts as a constraint upon private action. Additionally, gender constructs gain acceptance and dominance by establishing themselves as the natural embodiment of biological gender impulses (see Beauvoir, 1949; Butler, 1990; Young, 2005). The theory of the imaginary, which unites both rhetorical and feminist scholarship, allows rhetorical scholars to uncover the

ways the construct of housewife becomes the dominant gender performance by defining housewife as the gender role which fulfills natural and biological feminine impulses.

### **1.3 Imagining the Housewife**

Alternatively discussed as imaginaries, social imaginaries, and collective and individual imaginaries, the imaginary as a social construct explores the ways representations of others appear within publics and cultures (Gaonkar, 2002; Castoriadis, 1994). Asen (2002) articulated two approaches for scholarship invested in the imaginary debate: individual and collective imaginaries. Individual imaginaries examine the influence of the imaginary on individuals within that culture; Lacan, drawing heavily from Althusser, explained the imaginary as the way in which individual people interpret and understand their relationship to their lived experience (Jameson, 1977). Likewise, feminist sociological scholarship theorized the internal nature of the imaginary as the relationship between women and their own gender performance (Irigaray, 1985b; Whitford, 1986; Ingraham, 1996). Collective imaginaries, meanwhile, imply a public process; “interlocutors engage in processes of imagining about people they regard as similar to and different from themselves, and the processes and products of the collective imagination are accessible to others” (Asen, 2002, p. 349-350). Public sphere theory uses the social imaginary to explore the ways populations underrepresented within public spheres are represented within those spheres (see Asen, 2002; Calhoun, 2002; Taylor, 2002). The social imaginary constitutes social roles and expectations by providing a sense of who we are and what we should expect from others, thus legitimizing common practices into normative behaviors (Taylor, 2002). The social imaginary therefore contributes to the public/private dichotomy by examining how the public sphere understands, characterizes, and defines the private sphere.



The power of social imagining engages the representational power of discourse to assign meaning and define attitudes towards those imagined representations through their portrayal as natural, universal, and objective (Asen, 2002; Hutcheon, 1989). Societal representations manifest both visually and verbally; Gatens (1996) argued the imaginary is “ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value [and] their status” (p. viii). Asen (2003) defined these images and symbols as “verbal images,” or imagined images invoked by written and spoken discourse dependent upon “shared perceptions” which structure the ways people understand segments of the population different from themselves that “invoke and reconfigure social norms and hierarchies” (p. 286-7). Those representations thus replace underrepresented populations within public discourse of gender, silencing gender performances outside those chosen as representative by public discourse, by portraying the represented gender performance as innate and universal.

The social imaginary acts as a constraint on private action by defining expectations of the private within the public sphere. Since populations excluded from the public are present in public discourse primarily, if not solely, in the social imaginary, representations of these populations will represent the sphere of their existence; meaning, these representations define a concept of private within public discourse. Therefore, while actions in the private sphere may differ from those represented in the public sphere, those variations are silenced by a lack of representation in public discourse. As the social imaginary defines expectations of gender performance, alternative gender performances are silenced by the social imaginary. Those aspects of women’s lives that fall outside of acceptability as defined by the social imaginary are ignored; as the social imaginary defines acceptability, women seeking acceptance hide aspects of their private lives

that fall outside of public standards of acceptability and therefore alternative possibilities for gender roles and performance are silenced by the imaginary.

For Lacan (1975), the imaginary is the assumption that external representations, i.e. a mirror, signifies identity. He argued we internalize these external stimuli to understand and define ourselves as one complete entity. The illusion of the imaginary is in this assumption that we embody these outward representations; the subject is imprisoned in her inability to distinguish herself from images which represent her. While Lacan believed the mirror stage moment at which this imaginary contains the most power for self-determination and understanding, introducing the variable of gender to the equation changes the formula.

Feminist theorists build upon Lacan's conceptualization of the imaginary to explore the power of representations of gender in women's ability to self-determine and therefore the importance of the imaginary in understanding social place and gender across the lifetime. The male imaginary of gender and identity is inevitably hierarchical, creating tension between gender categories (see Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b; Whitford, 1986; Ingraham 1994). Ingraham (1994) followed Althusser's imaginary as "relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1971, p. 109) and argued the imaginary conceals the operation of social structures and silences analysis of organizing institutions while defining its social mandates as naturally occurring and prohibiting our ability to question their nature or occurrence (p. 203-4). The illusion of the imaginary is the resulting assumption that gender difference is biological fact.

The social imaginary thus provides a provisional answer to the quandary of the post-war housewife, as opposed to other minority groups post-war. As the social imaginary defines acceptable roles, it also silences differences and alternative performances of those roles. Groups considered subversive or nonconformist within the social imaginary, such as the post-war

African-American and homosexual populations discussed above, may have more freedom and opportunity to perform outside social norms and expectations because the imaginary expects them to; as it defines social expectations, it defines those populations expected to rebel against social norms. The social imaginary is therefore a useful concept by which to understand the confines of housewife as gender performance because it defines the ways public representations constrain the private lives and behavior of these women even if they do not accept or claim representation. Like Asen (2002), I use the social imaginary as a critical concept by which to investigate the ways women appear within Fifties public spheres. However, social imaginary scholarship traditionally focuses on how the social imaginary defines those populations which rebel against society, like the “welfare queen” of Asen’s (2003) analysis. My analysis instead of analyzing how the social imaginary ostracizes a particular population explores the creation of the ideal in the social imaginary. This project thus analyzes popular culture artifacts from the Fifties to explore the ways the social imaginary defines women’s nature to position her as in need of supervision and protection: understand the way social use of the imaginary perpetuates the illusion of representation: and expose the fraying of the imaginary that creates a bridge for populations to publically argue against it.

The home represents these social structures which create the assumption of gender as biological fact. The home is a problematic concept for feminist theory as the representative site of patriarchal oppression. Designed and built by men, the home contains and constrains women’s movements and performance and defines standards for social acceptability (Tange, 2004). Irigaray (1992) argued men use women as mirrors to reflect their own identity, and building a home, as well as placing a woman within it, reflects a man’s social standing (see also Wittig, 1980). Thus the home and its housewife are the husband’s material possessions to demonstrate

his importance and value to society. However, the home is more than merely a marker of class standing. The home is not a feminine space simply because men place her within it. Rather, the home is so closely related to the feminine because building a home is man's attempt to physically recreate the security of the maternal bond (see Irigaray, 1992; Young, 2005, p. 123-130). Marriage creates family, and therefore in marriage, men find the security of family. Women's role in childbirth positions her as maternal nurturer, which encourages viewing her position in society as one of security and nurture. The Fifties home offered security and refuge from social anxieties for both men and women (May, 2008). For women, this security is a refuge from society, as the isolation of the role of housewife physically distances the housewife from social concerns (see Ferguson, 1989, 1991; Bartky, 1990). For men, the security is emotional, represented by the family the home contains, as a recreation of his maternal attachment (see Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b; Wittig, 1980).

The home as the natural environment of the housewife is the physical manifestation of its woman's role and character. Tange (2004) analyzed the Victorian home as a visual representation of respectability that maintains class and gender identity. The post-war era demonstrates how the home also visually establishes and defines gender identity. Post-war volumes of *Good Housekeeping* include blueprints to introduce young couples to the variety of housing designs available for suburban development. These articles explain the benefits of each home based on the type of mother the housewife wants to be; for example, kitchens at the rear of the home allow mothers to allow their children free rein of the yard while being able to monitor their play and prepare the evening meal at the same time. The physical layout of the home, then, enables the woman of the home to embrace and fulfill her role as mother. These architectural discussions define the home as feminine, and in particular a reflection of the woman at its heart.

Thus the home is the external representation women are encouraged to internalize to define and understand their own identity.

The Fifties housewife today is a stereotypical representation of the repressed lives of post-war women. As such, the Fifties housewife erases difference in each woman's lived experience by emphasizing similarities. Historical scholarship thus approaches discussions of the Fifties housewife by verifying the stereotype as representational lived experience (see Matthews, 1987; Lopata, 1971; Harvey, 1994; Bernard, 1975) or delineating the ways in which the stereotype fails to fully account for the lived experience of Fifties women (see Coontz, 2000; May, 2008; Meyerowitz, 1994; Rosenberg, 1992). Investigating representations of the Fifties housewife within its original context, in post-war popular culture, allows for an analysis of how the concept of housewife becomes the dominant gender representation of an era, and thus an exploration of the housewife not as stereotype, but as a cultural reaction to post-war anxieties. As such, this dissertation examines representations of gender and gender performativity within Fifties popular culture to understand how the housewife as a social imaginary uses the anxiety and prosperity of the age to position women outside the public sphere. As the dominant gender performance, the social imaginary defines acceptability standards for housewife that obscures individuality, providing the security of conformity as well as nostalgic security that connects the suburbs to a collective imagined past. I argue the concept of housewife as a part of the social imaginary explains how the concept of the housewife comes to culturally represent all women and no women simultaneously. Exposing the illusory nature of the representativeness of housewife allows post-war women to find a space in which to create a community which can begin to fight the imaginary of housewife.

## **1.4 Case Studies**

Exploring the creation and maintenance of the social imaginary necessitates examining popular culture artifacts to recreate the context and audience of the imaginary. Chapter Two of this project analyzes the image of the housewife within advertisements to argue the housewife fulfills the desires of this population for freedom from fear by depicting the housewife as security and luxurious prosperity, while also situating women's innate character as dangerous and immature and therefore in need of a strong male hand to control and provide for her. Chapter Three argues Hollywood in using the social imaginary to define the private lives of its female stars perpetuates and seemingly validates the imaginary as representative of all women. In Chapter Four, representations of housewife in the characters of Lucy Ricardo and June Cleaver expose the discontent of women attempting to perform housewife, and the imaginary as old-fashioned and unrealistic. I conclude with a discussion of the continued cultural presence of the social imaginary, as women continue to fight the characterization of being relegated to "the kitchen." The housewife as a part of the social imaginary both silences Fifties women and provides a public representation which they can argue against to define their own space in the public sphere.

### ***1.4.1 Advertising***

David Ogilvy (1985), "The Father of Advertising," argued: "I have a theory that the best ads come from personal experience. Some of the good ones I have done have really come out of the real experience of my life, and somehow this has come over as true and valid and persuasive." The more personal and "real life" these advertisements read to their audiences, the more "true and valid and persuasive." Advertisements, then, contribute to an understanding of what society believed represented the "real life" and "personal experience" of the housewife. A

visual analysis of the components of these advertisements to uncover their recurring thematic aspects defines the characteristics of housewife most important to the creation of housewife as the feminine ideal of the social imaginary.

Adkins Covert (2011) in her discussion of the role of advertisements and propaganda in encouraging correct gender performance during World War II defined different categories of magazines based on the primary focus of the magazine: pulp (entertainment, escapism for lower class women), service and home (whose middle class readership focus on the down to earth conceptions of what it means to be a housewife and mother) and fashion and society (whose depictions of upper class lifestyle is beyond the reach of the average American woman). Since advertisers focus their advertisements according to audience, I chose to focus on advertisements in service and home magazines because this audience is the one most likely to (attempt to) replicate the gender performance represented within the magazine, and these magazines are most likely to represent the chosen gender performance. As service and home is a recognized type of magazine from the era, and advertisers target their advertisements to audience, choosing the two most representative examples of this type of magazine covers the audience I am interested in investigating; the similarity and repetition of advertisements within these magazines demonstrates the advertisements contained within are found across magazine type. As Adkins Covert noted, “Service magazines for women assumed a middle class readership and the advice, advertising, and fiction contained in these magazines oriented women to the middle class lifestyle” (p. 26). The two most influential and longest running service and home magazines, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*, provided the basis for this research. *Good Housekeeping*, while not the most widely circulated or read magazine of this type, is perhaps the most representative of this style of magazine (White, 1970): its editorial mission to “produce and

perpetuate perfection—or as near unto perfection as may be attained in the Household” (Endres & Leuck, 1995). An important aspect of *Good Housekeeping* to any discussion of advertisements within magazines is the *Good Housekeeping* advertising guarantee located on page 6 of each issue analyzed; *Good Housekeeping* guarantees the products advertised within its pages fulfill each promise made within the advertisement, and removes advertisements from those who fail to meet this standard. Importantly for this discussion, this advertising promise demonstrates *Good Housekeeping's* commitment to ensuring their readership's experience with the materials advertised is the same as the advertisement's representation of that product. Thus *Good Housekeeping* contributes to the imaginary that advertising emulates and represents “real life.” *Ladies Home Journal* as the first magazine to reach a circulation of one million is the most circulated of the service and home magazines, and its focus is on fiction and entertainment, as well as domestic life and parenting, situates the magazine as representative of the type.

For this discussion, I analyze advertisements from *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* from 1945-1953. Several notable changes in advertisements occur in 1953 that lend to my decision to end my investigation there. First of all, the image of the housewife in advertisements in 1953 begins to slacken and allow for more informal portrayals; women begin to appear in slacks as opposed to dresses or skirts, and shoes begin to advertise flats instead of solely heeled options. Secondly, the image of the housewife stabilizes in the early 1950s; while multimodal representations of housewife are under construction in the early post-war period, the housewife shown varies in age and appearance, and as the social imaginary stabilizes so does the image of housewife into identifiable themes and parts.

I argue the ideal of housewife in the social imaginary defines gender performance to silence characteristics socially perceived to be dangerous in women. Housewife as a social



imaginary silences feminine sexuality and assertiveness by containing it within the institute of marriage. I use a contextual discussion of gender anxieties and social beliefs that inform why the housewife is socially preferable as a gender performance. The housewife of the social imaginary is defined and portrayed to confirm common social assumptions that women belong in and prefer the private and domestic sphere to create a representation with which women believe they should identify. The housewife also functions to isolate women, silencing opposition to its representativeness, and encouraged women dissatisfied with the role to believe it a personal and not social malady.

#### ***1.4.2 Celebrity***

Rock Hudson's status as Hollywood's most "eligible bachelor" is one of the most famous "scandals of Classic Hollywood." He, the Hollywood studios, and the gossip machine of Fifties Hollywood perpetuated the myth of Rock Hudson as the epitome of masculinity (Petersen, 2001). His public appearances with long-time costar Doris Day contributed to his public persona of prototypical heterosexuality that masked his subversive homosexuality for fear of the potential detriment to his blockbuster appeal. Hollywood learned early on its status as an important contributor to culture, fashion, and morals. Leading ladies were understood to be role models for the millions of women who both watched and emulated their movies and their fashion. Millions of women flocked to the newest Doris Day film to see what she was wearing and how she styled her hair. Off-screen scandals involving movie stars combined with risqué themes in movies lead to the creation of the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 which attempted to rein in the perception of immorality in Hollywood (Doherty, 1999; Vieira, 1999). The Hays Code, as it was commonly known, remained on the books until 1968. Hollywood's preoccupation with the public persona of its stars, as well as the morality of the content of its films, therefore continued through

the 1950s. Fears of HUAC and blacklists intensified efforts to appear to conform to social gender expectations. Joan Crawford famously publicized her family life to counteract her villainous and subversive onscreen persona. The paradox of celebrity is while they provide an escape from the drudgery of everyday life, as role models their private lives must survive public scrutiny.

Hollywood publicity used the housewife of the social imaginary to define the private lives of its female stars and justify their position as role models. In doing so, Hollywood both uses the social imaginary and perpetuates the social imaginary; their representations of the private lives of their leading ladies served the social imaginary by perpetuating the assumption that housewife defined all women's private gender performance. Housewife as the representation of a white, middle class feminine ideal in the social imaginary therefore simultaneously represents all and no women, as the imaginary must be broad enough to account for all white women, even those who make a very public living, to try to fit their lives to its constraints. I begin with an analysis of two of the most prominent Fifties starlets: Joan Crawford and Doris Day. These stars create opposite problems for the Hollywood press which result in similar publicity campaigns. Joan Crawford's public face is of a decadent diva whose three divorces question her character and suitability as a role model for Fifties women. Her publicity created a private persona using the image of housewife to frame her home life as typical. An analysis of Hollywood's attempts to frame this glamour girl as a typical housewife contributes to the illusion of the social imaginary. Meanwhile, Doris Day found fame portraying the feminine ideal, yet her private life undermined the ideal she sold in movies. Her press, therefore, must argue life imitated art. I argue through an analysis of the layering of celebrity persona Hollywood serves the social imaginary by creating and maintaining the illusion of representation.

### 1.4.3 Television

The end of World War II brought with it a technology new to most American households: television. NBC, CBS, and ABC all began broadcasting regular programming between 1947 and 1948. This new (to the general populace) technology brought with it faces to go with the voices already familiar to the average American. Most of the first television shows were continuations of radio programs, including *Ozzie and Harriet* (first aired radio 1944, television 1952) and *Father Knows Best* (first aired radio 1949, television 1954). The transition to moving images from disembodied voices focused attention away from mere plot considerations to the visual component of these stories. Plot lines already familiar to audiences from the radio had a new visual component.

*I Love Lucy*, in some regards the most popular television show of all time, likewise began as a radio program. *I Love Lucy* began in 1950, when the Columbia Broadcasting Systems approached Lucille Ball with a proposition: transition her popular radio show, *My Favorite Husband*, into a television series. Ball accepted under the condition that her real-life husband, Desi Arnaz, replace Richard Denning, her husband on the radio show. Her insistence stemmed from her desire to share a schedule, and home, with her husband, an attempt at mending a fraying relationship pulled apart by hectic Hollywood schedules (Sanders & Gilbert, 1993). Ball and Arnaz, together with the producer and screenwriters for *My Favorite Husband*, created a vaudeville show to counter CBS's argument that an American audience would be unable to relate to their interracial marriage. They toured with great success, and convinced CBS to greenlight the pilot (Arnaz, 1977; Ball & Hoffmann, 1997). Upon viewing the pilot, whose material drew heavily from this vaudeville act, CBS wavered. They failed to commit to producing *I Love Lucy* until it became clear that, if CBS passed on the pilot, other networks were interested. CBS

offered the same excuses for their hesitation as they did when Ball first requested Arnaz play her television husband; their audience would find their marriage unbelievable and unsuitable (Sanders & Gilbert, 1993). However, the success of Ball and Arnaz's vaudeville tour weakened CBS's position and made the CBS argument problematic, as the vaudeville act dispelled concerns about the American public's willingness to accept their marriage. It seems odd, then, that CBS's problems with the pilot would be the same as before it filmed, especially since CBS agreed to fund the pilot based on the vaudeville show's performance.

Fifties broadcasters filmed pilots to attract sponsors for their programming and never intended to televise these pilots. A modified script of the *Lucy* pilot served as the basis for season one episode six, "The Audition." A copy of the pilot unearthed in the late 1980s aired for the first time in 1990. As a draft of "The Audition," the original pilot reveals unspoken arguments against the show as originally conceptualized, and the aired episode resolves subversive gender performance that questions the representative nature of the housewife. Changes to the pilot to create "The Audition" revolve around Lucy's character, implying concerns with the show's concept revolved around gender roles and Lucy's characterization of housewife. *I Love Lucy* reveals the fabric of the social imaginary is fraying, as televised portrayals of housewife question its representative nature and therefore its role in the public sphere. I begin my discussion with an analysis of changes in the two episodes of *I Love Lucy* to reveal the problem of the imaginary of housewife; women failed to find it representative. In fact, mediated representations of housewife like Lucy Ricardo provided women a space in which to find common ground with other housewives discontent with their role, as Lucy publicized the problem of bored housewives dreaming of the chance to self-determine.

June Cleaver would seem to make an opposing argument. She first entered American living rooms October 4, 1957, first serving her family dinner the same day the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. She continues to represent the social imaginary of what it meant to be a woman, wife, and mother in the Fifties suburbs. Douglas and Michaels (2004) used June Cleaver's name interchangeably with "Fifties housewife" throughout their book to debunk and criticize the ways the "mommy myth" continues to define and restrict women's lives. However, the nostalgic tone of *Leave It to Beaver* defines its portrayal of the suburbs as idealized and old-fashioned, and therefore undermines June as the representative housewife. As such, June and Lucy both allow women silenced by the social imaginary to begin the fight against its claims to representation. Situation comedies reveal the social imaginary faltering when confronted with the lived experience of its female suburban audience by exposing the discontent of housewives and portraying the role of housewife as idealistic and old-fashioned. These televised portrayals of housewife begin to create a space for women to contest the social imaginary by creating a community united in a fight against an unrepresentative imaginary.

## 2 VISUALIZING THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY: THE IMAGE OF THE FIFTIES HOUSEWIFE

Visualize, if you will, the Fifties housewife. The complexity of the image of the post-war housewife lies in this simple request. While the housewife imagined by each individual person may, and does, vary, the similarities far outweigh these slight differences. And while June Cleaver, perhaps the most common visual representation of housewife, may epitomize the Fifties housewife in the minds of generations who grew up watching her portray the perfect housewife on *Leave It to Beaver*, June's apron, heels, and pearls all derive from visual portrayals of housewife more than a decade old by the time her family's antics first aired.

Barbara Billingsley's portrayal of America's favorite housewife may be the most popular representation of housewife because of the secluded nature of the role. To perform housewife correctly, the woman is in the home. The Fifties' call to domesticity maintained a strict gender distinction between the public and the private even as the barrier between the spheres became problematic, and public representations of private lives continued to position women's proper social role in the private sphere (see Arendt, 1998; Fraser, 1992; Warner, 2005). With few women represented in the public sphere, fictional portrayals of her everyday life reproduce and then replace women's actual lived experience in the public's imagination.

Feminist historians and sociologists predominately use these portrayals to attempt to recover these actual lived experiences. Adkins Covert (2011) maintained: "Given the influential role of the media in our society, we can assume that the actual roles women decided to undertake in the wartime economy were, at least in part, influenced by the messages created through the cooperative efforts of advertising agencies, corporations, and government representatives" (xii-xiii). In focusing on the "real" lives of women in the era, Adkins Covert, Stephanie Coontz

(2000), and Elaine Tyler May (2008), among others, failed to account for the ways societal expectations frame the lives of the women within their study. However, these attempts ignore the importance of the role of housewife in defining real women's relationship with their gender and their social position. The question in the end is not the extent to which women chose to participate within these social norms, but how these norms frame their gender performance, whether or not women accepted them, and how these norms silenced alternative gender performances and minority populations.

The housewife of the public imagination defines women's position and roles within society. In order for the social imaginary to take hold, the represented population must interpellate with the imaginary. As the individual imaginary is the impulse to internalize externalized representations of self, and gender performance (Lacan, 1975; Irigaray, 1985), and the social imaginary is the representation of minority populations with little to no public presence in public discourse (Asen, 2002), analyzing the creation of an imaginary is a necessary first step to understanding how the imaginary can be used to both oppress a particular population and foster social movements which contest social expectations. One significant aspect of the housewife as a part of the social imaginary is its ability to quell dissatisfaction amongst housewives for more than a decade. A rhetorical analysis of the creation of the imaginary of housewife in magazine advertisements explains how the social imaginary asserts social dominance and silences dissent and alternative gender performances. The imaginary of housewife defines gender in response to anxieties of the age by positioning the housewife as the realization of innately feminine impulses while simultaneously silencing perceived dangers of feminine sexuality and assertiveness. I first analyze the imaginary of housewife through a contextual discussion of gender anxieties and suppositions that inform why the housewife is

preferred as a feminine gender performance. I then continue to explore the ways the housewife as a role is defined and portrayed to confirm common assumption and knowledge at the time and argue women belong, and prefer, the private and domestic. The housewife as a part of the social imaginary responds to and uses common knowledge to create a representation of women with which women believe they should identify, and therefore silences opposition to the housewife through isolation, as housewives dissatisfied in the role believe it a personal and not social malady.

## **2.1 Reflections of Real Life: Revolutionizing Advertising Techniques**

Advertising attempts to ally products and consumerism with the American way of life began during the Great Depression, but came to fruition in the post-war era (see Adkins Covert, 2011, p. 17). During WWII, “[a]dvertising epistemology had substantially shifted from an external, rational, salesmanlike orientation of thought to an internal, nonrational, empathic orientation, characterized in a phrase of Norman J. Norman as the ‘I-know-all-about-you’ psychology” (Fox, 1975, p. 94). While post-war advertisements continue to include a large amount of text that appeals to the rational side of their audiences, touting benefits and features of each product, the images in the advertisements, in an effort to encourage readers to visualize themselves using and appreciating the item advertised, depict families living with and using advertised appliances. This shift to empathic relationships with the audience encourages the audience to visualize themselves in the advertisement, instead of reading advertisements to choose the product best suited to needs by comparing lists of available options. Advertisements attempt to position themselves as a reflection their readership’s lived experiences while also



encouraging them to visualize the potential of technological advances to improve their everyday lives.

As the psychology behind advertisements changes, so does the relationship between the advertisement and its audience. In visualizing themselves living the lives depicted within advertisements, women accept the advertisement as an imaginary: an external representation of appropriate gender performance. Marjorie Ferguson (1983) explained women's magazines are among the more important influences on "the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time" because they "help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her" (p. 1). Post-war women's magazines served as "advice manuals, fashion guides, marriage counselors, and catalogs" (Walker, 1998, p. 1), and both the magazines and the advertisements within define socially acceptable gender performances (Adkins Covert, 2011, p. 23). Women's magazines therefore tell women both what social gender expectations are, and through advice, prescription, and representation, how to perform these gender roles correctly. Kitch (2001) argued representations of middle-class family life resolves social gender tensions by portraying gender roles as natural and innate through repetition of nineteenth century gender expectations. As such, women's magazines function to persuade women to accede to social expectations of gender performance by creating and reinforcing the social imaginary as natural performance of gender difference. However, Kitch's claim that the Fifties housewife is merely a repetition of nineteenth century gender roles paints the roles of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century women with too broad a stroke. While the cult of domesticity and the Fifties housewife share some important similarities, primarily in the importance of domesticity to women's character and moral development, the assertion that one is

merely a repetition of the other ignores the aspects of housewife that develop specifically to address key concerns of the era.

Studies analyzing the image of the housewife in Fifties advertisements focus on consumerism, primarily because the image is inherently tied with advertising. Catalano (2003) argued that housewives are defined as consumers within advertisements because it is in that role that they have economic power. Advertisements sell commodity narratives (Williamson, 1978) that create self-identity in their audiences tied to a commodity ideology (Goldman & Wilson, 1983). Goldman, Heath, & Smith (1991) argued that advertisements create commodified audiences through the construction of visual abbreviations that eventually eclipse the original referent; women therefore in self-identifying with the ad accept their position within the patriarchy as commodities. These ads, they argued, invite the reader to position the self in the ad, exchanging that self for the improved self-plus-product the advertisement sells. Ramsey (2004), however, argued feminist rhetoricians must expand exploration of context to explore the ways certain rhetorical constructions become more salient than others. Ramsey's visual analysis of Twenties *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements opens the door for the analysis of more expansive contexts for a visual rhetorical analysis of advertisements to understand advertisements and visual representations outside of their immediate consumerist context. Analyzing representations of the housewife through the lens of broader cultural contexts of prosperity and anxiety exposes the ways the role of housewife is created to manipulate women into accepting such a restrictive gender role.

Visual rhetorical history explores the text as a response to a problem of the era as well as a representation of the ideals of the era (Finnegan, 2004). Mitchell (2005) argued visual scholars must ask what pictures want, as well as what audiences want from pictures, to understand what

claims images make upon the viewer as well as how the viewer is to respond. As these advertisements want their audience to picture themselves within the world of the advertisement, advertisement's conscious effort to reflect the lived experience of the female audience marks the representation of housewife within these advertisements as an external representation with which women are encouraged to identify. Therefore individual women's relationship with these advertisements is imaginary, as they internalized this representation to define their own gender performance. Through an analysis of the patterns within the texts (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007) and an analysis of the structure, characters, and features of the text (Palczewski, 2005), visual analysis defines cultural expectations. Analyzing advertisements for patterns, structure, and characters reveal how the social imaginary of housewife uses social common beliefs about gender to encourage women to accept the performance of housewife.

As advertisers' goal was a reflection of lived experience, we can study advertisements as common belief as to gender performance in the era, or what Farrell (1976) called "social knowledge:" knowledge assumed by the rhetor to be shared by the audience that is confirmed in the actions and decision-making processes of the audience. Enos (2013) argued that, to establish ethos, rhetors draw upon presumptions of human nature to appear both knowledgeable and sincere (p. 243). As at the heart of rhetoric is the science of human nature (Campbell & Bitzer, 1988), studying the components and construction of the housewife reveals social thoughts and anxieties concerning common knowledge about human nature. In constructing an imaginary whose aim is to represent women's lived experience, advertisements then reflect and use social knowledge about gender to create a gender performance which women will internalize as the socially acceptable representation of their proper place. Thus the first step in my analysis is to understand contextually the anxieties and social knowledge about gender that inform how a

representation of a gender ideal is constructed in the social imaginary to encourage acceptance as a valid representation of lived experience.

## **2.2 “Natural” Urges and the Social Imaginary**

For the imaginary of housewife to do its work, it must convince post-war women to accept it as a reasonable approximation of their everyday private lives. The construction of the housewife as a gender role does so by adopting socially accepted gender roles as biologically driven and uses the newfound importance of science to evidence these gender roles as innate. To understand how the social imaginary is contextually driven by anxiety and science, we must first explore post-war contexts. Social knowledge defines women’s natural urges in two ways that in turn define the social imaginary of housewife: first, as a response to gender anxieties, and second, as fulfillment of what society deems women’s natural desires.

### **2.2.1 *Response to gender anxieties***

The Fifties as the Age of Prosperity enabled and encouraged the creation of the middle class as well as the role of housewife. Newfound lines of credit, mortgages, and employment opportunities enabled younger marriages and individual households (see Rosenberg, 1992; Jackson, 1980). Wartime profits and factory development created a post-war technology boom (Adkins Covert, 2011). However, housing shortages and fears of Depression and war abounded. Prosperity and anxiety both encouraged young couples and families to relocate to the suburbs. Families could afford their own homes at a younger age, and highways and increased car ownership facilitated movement towards the suburbs (Jackson, 1980). However, housing shortages and fears of nuclear war, with cities as targets, also drove these families to suburban neighborhoods (Dickson, 2011).

Society's attitudes towards atomic energy and the atomic bomb epitomize the social paradox; while an optimistic society dreamed of atomic energy powering lawnmowers and cars and providing cheap, abundant energy (Boyer, 1985), the anxiety of the age centered on fears of mutually assured destruction and the Soviet bomb. Kiernan (2013) explained the contradiction inherent in atomic energy: "With the advent of the Atomic Age came both trepidation and fascination, ... And as the cloud of mystery lifted—or at least dissipated a bit—from the Manhattan Project, a new darkness fell. Dread of "the bomb" combined with the promise of the power of the atom in your kitchen or garage" (p. 298). This dichotomy of "trepidation and fascination" continued throughout the Cold War, as bombs became more powerful and atomic energy more promising. Immediately post-war, with sole American ownership over nuclear technology, only 37% of Americans polled believed in a "real danger" from nuclear war; by 1955, pollsters shifted from optimistic questions about atomic energy and the morality of the bomb to questions about the realities of nuclear war and preparedness (Erskine, 1963). Americans convinced of a Soviet predilection to world dominance feared atomic war and mutually assured destruction (Johnson, 2005); anxieties mounted as the Soviet Union overtook the United States in both the arms and space races (Dickson, 2011). At the same time, Walt Disney's friendly voice and cartoons introduced atomic powered submarines and other developments in peaceful atomic energy in "Our Friend the Atom," whose fairy-tale style explains the expansive potential of nuclear technology by drawing comparisons to the genie in *Arabian Nights* (Haber, 1956).

The post-war environment enabled advertisers to adopt increasingly nonrational and empathic advertising strategies by creating an audience in search of new sources of advice and information. The move to the suburbs, driven by both the availability of land and homes as well

as anxieties regarding city centers as targets for potential nuclear annihilation, increased alienation from one's own extended family, as ease of travel, employment opportunities, and the affordability of suburban property encouraged young families to establish themselves in different states than they were raised (Hartmann, 1982). This distance, coupled with the increasing number of well-off and well-educated women with children, encouraged the development of advice columns and child-rearing manuals and books, as new mothers turned to social sciences instead of physically-distant family members for child-rearing advice (Rosenberg, 1992). This move to the suburbs problematizes the public/private distinction as well as the assumption that housewife is a natural gender performance. Women's magazines, and the advertisements held within, therefore assume new significance to women isolated from traditional sources of shared knowledge. These advertisements are also necessary to help women follow this new advice. Dr. Benjamin Spock, author of best-selling child-rearing manuals, encouraged mothers to trust their instincts and offer gentle guidance and encouragement to their children. Dr. Spock's reassurance that young mothers can trust their maternal instinct validates the assumption that motherhood is a natural process innate to womanhood, and therefore all women instinctively know how to be mother. However, the move to the suburbs means this advice, before the war passed down from generation to generation in the private sphere of the shared home, is necessarily public, as women no longer have the support of extended family at hand. Advertisements as a source of shared knowledge seemed to confirm Spock's advice, as they encouraged mothers use of their products verified that they knew how best to care for their children. These advertisements and advice manuals instruct women how to best perform wife and mother while defining this knowledge as fulfillment of their natural urges and desires. Advice columns and advertisements which portray the lived experiences of their audience position themselves as guidance towards

fulfilling natural desires and reassurance in trusting her instinct. Instruction for housewife is a gentle reminder that each woman knows what is best, and social guidance calms anxieties by reassuring her that she is right.

Crucial to this discussion is the importance of scientific knowledge and discovery on the Fifties general population. First of all, science seems to answer all of life's questions. Splitting the atom and the potential of atomic energy also reveals the importance and potential of science to explain how the world works. The Fifties are the height of Freud's American popularity as an anxious population sees the power and potential of scientific discovery and seeks scientific answers to more problems. Burke (1963) critiqued the objectivism of the age as he discusses the social authority of the voices of verifiability and rationality. Dr. Spock's popularity therefore mirrors the popularity of other scientific advances in the social sciences, as the anxious population turned to science for answers. In an age in which atomic science seems to answer so many of life's questions and make life so much easier (Boyer, 1980) and a society that values objectivism and observable and demonstrable facts, social sciences attain new value. The popularity of psychiatric drugs increases, as Yates' (1961) *Revolutionary Road's* depiction and critique of tranquilizer use reflects women unhappy with their lot in life turning to drugs to maintain the appearance of happiness and address their concerns.

Gender roles and tension reflected the anxiety of the age, and necessitated the creation of a gender role which contained and controlled characteristics socially perceived as dangerous (Kitch, 2001). Dr. Spock and others encouraged both parents to set strong gender examples for their children; strong men who control their household and women whose primary concern is their children are the proper role models. Dr. Spock's science evidenced the importance of these gender roles. He insisted mothers devote themselves to their children full-time, as children of

working mothers feel abandoned and therefore become juvenile delinquents. His two cardinal sins for mothers included rejection and overprotection, and he traced most of society's problems to one of these two faults, including wartime cowardice (Spock, 1944; Miller & Nowak, 1977). Dr. Spock's advice capitalized on an age when new mothers sought advice from new sources and heightened their anxieties. His opposing cardinal sins encouraged women to worry that they provided their children with both too much and too little attention. No mother, therefore, could escape Dr. Spock's scrutiny. A career meant a mother ignored her children, and so the stay-at-home housewife is fundamental to Dr. Spock's advice. However, a mother whose sole concern is her children overprotects and therefore causes equal psychological damage to her offspring.

This anxiety silenced dissent and created an atmosphere of "harsh conformist pressures" (Miller & Nowak, 1977, p. 147). People seeking a sense of place, identity, and security found it in the family (May, 2008). Miller & Nowak documented ways in which cultural anxieties manifested as gender tension by placing the blame for all unhappiness in relationships on women refusing to fulfill their social and familial roles. Women who refused to accede to the role of housewife faced social scorn and the possibility of labels of neuroses and psychoses, which could result in confinement in a psychological ward. Woman as nurturer and server nullifies "masculine aggression" within the home (p. 153-154), and childless women, even those who desired children, were emotionally disturbed, as they were unwilling or unable to fulfill their natural instinct to nurture. Social assumptions about gender combined with pressures to conform created both a strict gender imaginary and the pressure to (appear to) conform to that imaginary.

The complexities of the age manifest in the problem of creating a role for women that fulfilled desires driven by both anxiety and prosperity. The housewife in Fifties advertisements is outwardly a symbol of the prosperity of the age. However, advertisements that explore the



“double life” of the housewife hint at the anxiety of the age. Exposing the multi-faceted lifestyle of housewives as well as the concealed aspects of femininity hints at the housewife as an attempt to contain the subversive potential of women. The housewife must lead the life of both mother-nurturer and wife-appropriate sexual outlet, represented within the compound noun itself: housewife. I first discuss how the visual representation of housewife creates an air of nostalgia that makes the role of housewife feel as if women performing housewife in the Fifties suburbs are recreating gender performance from a time before Depression and war upended society. Secondly, social anxieties and views on science and psychiatry isolates women by discouraging them from discussing any malcontent with the role of housewife, as this malcontent would evidence their neurotic or subversive character.

An analysis of more than 6,000 unique representations of housewife within magazine advertisements from 1945-1953 reveals the housewife within these advertisements is a visual representation of her husband's success. I ended my analysis in 1953 for several reasons. First of all, the number of unique advertisements drastically dropped beginning in 1952, as advertisements repeated with more frequency. For example, in 1948, each magazine volume had an average of 72 advertisements relevant to this discussion, and unique as the first time they appeared in my analysis. By 1953, that number was cut more than half, to 34 unique and relevant advertisements per magazine volume. Secondly, the image of the housewife began to stabilize in the early Fifties, as the appearance of women within the advertisements took on the appearance of housewife epitomized in June Cleaver's portrayal on *Leave It to Beaver*. These advertisements portray two sides of the life of housewife, reflecting both the prosperity and anxiety of the age. The housewife of these advertisements is a status symbol that attempts to control anxieties concerning female sexuality.

To define the double life of the housewife in terms appropriate to public discussion of the age, advertisements emphasized attractiveness as a marker of class and as an outlet for upward mobility. As such, the theme of a housewife's double life attempts to prioritize the age of prosperity and conceal the anxiety of the age. As housewife is representative of middle-class status, beauty advertisements emphasize attractiveness as markers of class. The upper class to which the newly-formed middle class aspire can afford both the time and money to look their best at all times. The problem for the housewife is the visual markers of status that remain after the housework is complete, as they belie the need for housewife to perform household tasks the upper classes leave to their staff.

The anxiety of the newly minted middle-class lies in these visual markers of class status. Early, infrequent portrayals of race within these advertisements underscores the housewife role as service as well as the anxiety of the middle class. White suburban housewives unable to afford the domestic help must do the work of servants who are predominantly black. These white women must do the same work as the domestic staff of the upper class while visually maintaining their whiteness by masking the markers of housework. Two early postwar *Good Housekeeping* advertisements include a black "mammy" figure in an advisory role instructing young suburban housewives as to how to do their job properly. Positioned at the top left corner of the screen, the large black woman, shown only from the chest up, wears a white, full, functional apron and a scarf in her hair. Her colloquial speech is spelled to phonetically replicate her Southern accent. Her character is thus established as traditional house servant rooted in representations of domestic slavery. As such, she has performed household chores for years, and is an appropriate authority figure for new, young housewives to learn proper performance of household chores. However, the infrequency of their portrayals within the advertisements

implies representing these laborers as authority figures is problematic. Characterizing the role of housewife within the frame of domestic servitude with historical ties to slavery creates an awkward representation of the relationship of husband and wife, using too heavy a hand to paint the husband as master of the house and defining the role of housewife using terms few, if any, women would accept. The black maid as authority figure is also problematic as a class marker, performing tasks black and lower class women have performed for years to provide for their own families. These two examples thus demonstrate the silencing act of housewife, as it eliminates race to redefine housework as white and middle-class.

Working a full day within the home justifies the necessity of the housewife, as maintaining a home and raising children are full-time jobs. However, maintaining the appearance of class necessitates she nullify any visual markers of doing actual work. A Trushay hand lotion advertisement in the April, 1951, issue of *Ladies Home Journal* represents this problem visually as a housewife divided into “day” and “evening” halves (Figure 1). The “day” half, defined within the advertisement as her “energetic” self, defines the job of housewife: “Cooking, baking, doing dishes, washing fine things every day...” The “day” half thus emphasizes the first half of the noun “housewife” by prioritizing the home as the employment of the woman. These chores create and necessitate the traditional image of the housewife; the apron, hair styled tightly to keep out of the way, depicted vacuuming or washing dishes. Half of the double life is the practical nature of the maid aspect of housewife as she maintains the home during the day. However, of primary importance in the Trushay advertisement is in prioritizing

*For every woman who leads a double life...*



**ENERGETIC YOU!** Cooking, baking, doing dishes, washing fine things every day. Such busy hands, yours! But they never need look rough or kitcheny—if you keep a big bottle of creamy, fragrant Trushay right by your sink, and smooth it on BEFORE each washing chore! Then when evening comes, it's...

**EMBRACEABLE YOU**—with the soft, smooth hands men adore. Yes, unique Trushay—used BEFOREHAND—guards hands even in hot, sudsy water! But that's just the start of Trushay's magic. It's such a wondrous, quick softener to use any time, you'll want a bottle for your dressing table as well as for your kitchen!

**TRUSHAY...** the "beforehand" lotion... guards your hands even in hot, sudsy water!



**Marvelous, too, as a quick skin softener!** Trushay's special oil-richness makes dry skin feel soft—so quickly! Smooths elbows, heels, knees.



**Such a flattering powder base.** Trushay holds your powder with a lovely natural-beauty look! Never cakey, gummy or greasy!



**So soothing when your skin is chapped.** When weather or washing tasks chap and crack your skin, velvety Trushay soothes it back to comfort.



A PRODUCT OF BRISTOL-MYERS

**BUY TWO BOTTLES OF TRUSHAY—ONE FOR YOUR KITCHEN AND ONE FOR YOUR DRESSING TABLE**

Figure 1

the “wife” of housewife as stylish and fashionable. The double life of the housewife necessitates the woman be wife when her husband returns from work: attractive and desirable with no telltale signs of the hard work of home maintenance. Trushay lotion promises to prevent “dishpan hands” and therefore signs that the woman worked throughout the day; thus the housewife at the end of the day becomes the “embraceable” high fashion wife the husband can be proud to have on his arm. The “double life” of the housewife is therefore performing “house” during the day and “wife” in the evening.

Emphasizing the surface of appearance necessarily implies the existence of, in its attempts to cover and/or hide, the other half of the surface/essence dichotomy. A wife’s attractiveness is a status symbol for her husband, in that in “winning” her, her presence argues his status and talents warrant such a prize. However, her attractiveness is also representative of anxieties that necessitate controlling women. As the object of heterosexual desire, any claim by the housewife to her own sexuality is necessarily subversive, as it places her in the subject instead of object position. Miller & Nowak (1977) explained the sexual landscape:

Males were the aggressive partners, females the passive. Lovemaking had to be heterosexual. It had to be between people married to each other, and she a ‘good girl,’ a virgin until the wedding night. An unsatisfying sexual relationship... was the fault of the woman. The smart woman will keep herself desirable. It is her duty to herself to be feminine and desirable at all times in the eyes of the opposite sex. (p. 157)

Sexually passive females not only accept their role as object of her husband’s desires, they also strive to maintain their position. As long as she is the object of her husband’s desire, their marriage can be a happy one; if she fails to maintain her husband’s interest, he will look

elsewhere, and the resulting infidelity is her own fault. However, positioning herself as the aggressive partner, or claiming the subject position of her sexuality, repositions power in the sexual relationship. If the woman is the subject, and the man the object, of sexual desire, satisfying the wife's desires becomes the first concern of the couple's sexual relationship. The complexities and mysteries of feminine sexuality bewilder most men, causing anxiety enough. However, if the woman is the one whose sexual urges must be met, she is the one who may stray from her marriage bed if she finds it unsatisfying. Ancient anxieties regarding paternity and cuckoldry necessitate women be the object, and not the subject, of sexual desire.

The wartime environment amplified these ancient anxieties. A lapse in sexual mores allowed "victory women" to have sex freely with departing soldiers (Rosenberg, 1992). Cowardly men on the front in World War II were the result of overbearing and overprotective mothers who focused sexual energy on their sons instead of their husbands (Spock, 1944; Rosenberg, 1992). Society thus teemed with literature explaining the dangers of women who ignore social sexual dictates. Lundberg and Farnham's (1947) best-selling *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* traced feminism to neuroticism of women abused by their fathers' as girls and seeking revenge by stealing masculine power. Helene Deutsch, colleague of Freud and the first psychologist to specialize in women, argued in 1945: "normal, feminine woman accepted her distinctive sexuality and lived through her husband and children. Women who through some unfortunate turn in their psychic development did not follow this pattern developed a 'masculinity complex' in which the 'cold, unproductive thinking' of manhood overwhelmed the 'warm, intuitive knowledge' of womanhood" (as quoted in Rosenberg, 1992). The cultural force of Freud's views of women as the weaker sex seemed to verify scientifically women's inferiority to men and their "proper place" as within the home, as women need men to tell them how to

think and act (Miller & Nowak, 1977). Assuming an aggressive sexual position revealed deeper character flaws and psychological maladies, and encouraged husbands to seek solutions in the guise of psychiatry, including psychiatric wards. Marital problems were all thus the fault of the woman and stemmed mainly from her not accepting her role of housewife.

Considered in the terms of this discussion, the passive, virginal “good girl” is the surface of the housewife. Implied on the other side of the dichotomy, then, is aggressive sexuality as the essence, and danger, of femininity. Here Miller & Nowak’s discussion of sex reveals the subversive potential, and anxiety, inherent to femininity at the time. As the object of heterosexual desire, women are necessarily dangerous if given the ability to express her own sexuality, as it may ignore or counteract men’s desires. Insisting the male be the aggressive partner, and female the passive, necessarily places women in a subversive and receptive position. Any attempts by women at expressing their own sexual desires negates this subversive position, as women instead assert their own subject position. While Miller & Nowak focused on the attractiveness of the woman as vital to a satisfying sexual relationship for the man, the emphasis on a passive, virginal “good girl” defines feminine sexuality as necessarily dangerous and therefore confined to the marriage bed. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the most common wardrobe for women in post-war advertisements is a wedding dress. Defining these sexual roles so strictly implies the danger and subversion of women who position themselves as the dominant, or aggressive, partner, implied in the above discussion in the blame placed on women for an unsatisfying sexual relationship. It is not only the woman’s duty to be attractive, but also worthy of her husband’s attention. Housewife as a surface performance of gender in attempting to define itself as innate to gender attempts to erase and correct the subversive sexual potential of women.

The “double life” of the housewife exposes the sexual component of housewife while attempting to keep it in its proper place. Two types of advertisements emphasize the double life of the housewife: one advertisements for shoes, soap, and undergarments; the other, as discussed above, the dichotomy of work and leisure. Advertisements for shoes, soap, and undergarments are similar as they cut away from the dress, apron, jewelry, and other outer wardrobe features standard to the housewife’s image to shift the eye’s focus away from the prototypical housewife image and towards the layer normally covered by this image (see Figure 2). The advertisements do so by dividing the image in half vertically; one side of the image portrays a typical housewife, while the other half of the image reveals the aspects of her wardrobe normally concealed under layers of housewife accoutrement. Those accessories highlighted reveal the hidden ways women maintain her appearance to ensure her husband’s continued sexual interest. The shoes shown are, until 1957, exclusive heeled, which places a woman’s figure to best advantage by lifting her *derriere*, tightening and therefore emphasizing calf muscles, thereby showing legs as “shapely,” and encouraging posture that accentuates the chest and slims the waist (and further aided by the presence of a girdle). Undergarments shown include thigh highs, nylons and stockings, slips, garters and garter belts, brassieres and lingerie; all items of clothing fetishized as the height of sexual appeal. The 1947 Ivory advertisement of Figure 2 reinforces the importance of the girdle, panties, and chiffons to attracting and keeping a man’s attention; calling her both “popular” and a “big hit” because she is “fresh, feminine, and appealing.” Revealing these articles of clothing hidden behind the façade of housewife implies the dormant sexuality contained within each housewife, and her potential at subversive manifestations of that sexuality. Visual representations of this sexuality within these



## What puts the go in the gals they go for?

● Those gals aren't always pretty. But they're always pretty *smart*—specially about their clothes. They know the knack of keeping everything they put on fresh, feminine and appealing.

Get the inside story on a popular gal. See some of the little things that make her a big hit.

### beguiling freshness

She knows how to keep her undies dainty and attractive. Hers always get babied in Ivory Flakes suds. That helps guard against fraying and fading. Everybody knows *no soap gives clothes or colors gentler care.*

### streamlined curves

She counts on her girdle to control 'em! And she counts on safe Ivory Flakes to help keep her girdle on the job. See *how much longer* your girdle keeps its fit and stretch with frequent sudsings in this fast flake form of baby's pure Ivory.

### fun-loving clothes

She keeps 'em ready for fun! That eye-catching dress of Lanaset<sup>®</sup>-treated wool jersey gets sudsed in Ivory Flakes. It's one soap *fashion designers and fabric experts recommend* to help keep pet washables looking bright, fitting right. So take their tip and skip strong soaps—rough handling. Head for twice the wear with Ivory Flakes care.

### eye-filling legs

Does she worry about needless runs in those flattering chiffons? No, ma'am! Her stockings get daily dunkings in baby-mild Ivory Flakes. No strong soaps for her. Not when strain tests prove regular, gentle Ivory Flakes care slows down runs up to 50%.

LANASET<sup>®</sup> Pat. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



if it's lovely to wear  
it's worth Ivory Flakes care

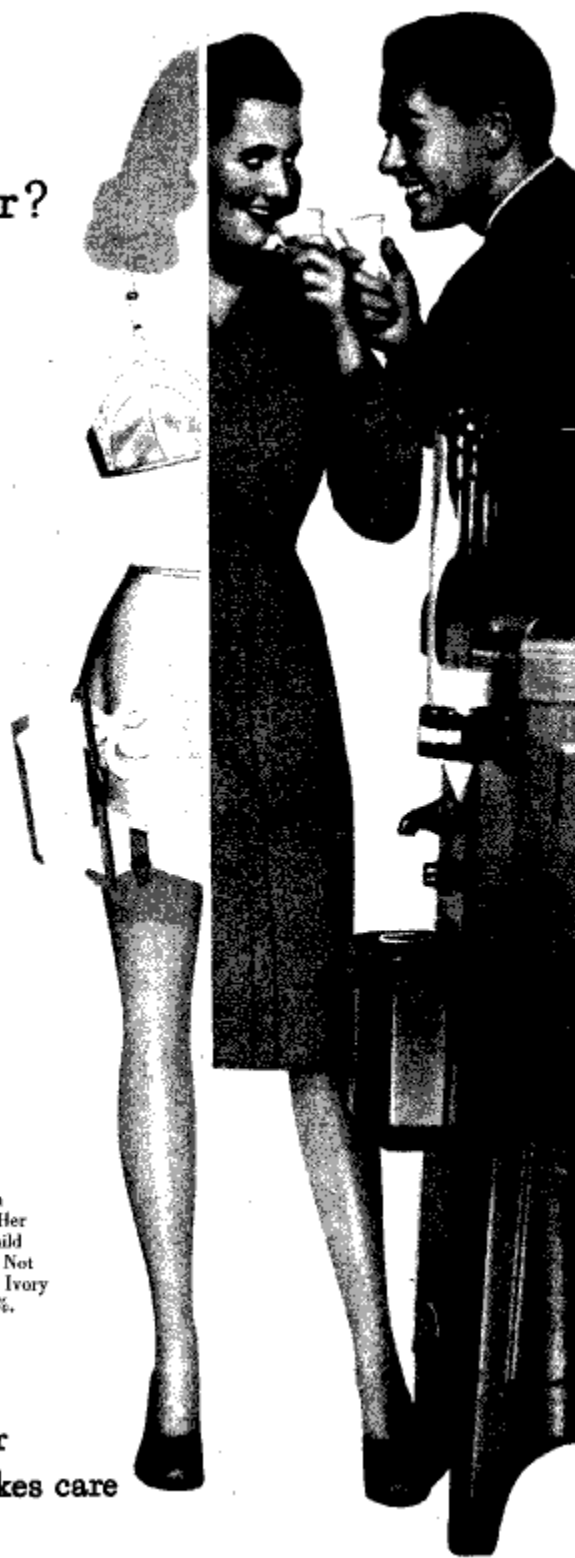


Figure 2

advertisements therefore rhetorically positions women as either objectified and passive, or subversive and dangerous, reinforcing social pressure to conform to housewife type.

### **2.2.2 *Woman's natural desires***

For the social imaginary to do its work, it must convince post-war women to accept its representation of housewife as a reasonable approximation of their everyday private lives. The construction of the housewife as a gender role does so through adopting socially accepted gender roles as biologically driven and uses the newfound importance of science to evidence these gender roles as innate. Janeway (1971) argued social mythology positions a woman's place within the home as prescription and not description, meaning society defines women's natural desires as nurturing and caring and therefore she may only find fulfillment within the home. The importance of science is again important to this discussion. Science is socially accepted as true and correct and therefore guides social knowledge. Therefore, as evidenced in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) critique, biology at the time was able to define gender difference as scientific fact. Biology, as per Beauvoir, looked at nature, specifically animals and insects, to demonstrate the innateness of gender roles to our scientific natures. Women as the weaker sex are therefore biologically determined to be submissive to stronger and more dominant men. Broader hips, breasts, and the facts of childbearing all scientifically evidenced women's natural role as one of nurturer and at the home tending and protecting the fruit of their loins. Secondly, the popularity of Freud and his disciples evidenced the harms of women not accepting this social role. Neuroticism stems from women who refuse to accept this biological fact of maternal and nurturer as definitive gender role. Guitton (translated 1965, original published 1961) in response to Beauvoir, showed how society views Beauvoir's treatise as well as women's nature:

While man is essentially *act*, woman is essentially *nature*. Her intellect does not function like man's. However, woman certainly has the ability to mime; and since our civilization is an entirely masculine one, the woman mimes man's ways of doing things with ease. This does not prevent her mind, were she left to herself, from functioning differently. Instead of analyzing and synthesizing the object, she places herself at a central point, deciding the relationship which the object has to her own life. We express this by saying that she is intuitive and that she understands through the heart. Proofs hold little interest for her and it is very difficult to prove to her that she is wrong. (pg. 1)

Here woman is anti-science and anti-rational: woman cares not for evidence, as she intuitively knows right from wrong, and evidence never leads the heart. While woman can act as though she appreciates science, logic, reason, and other aspects of "man's way of doing things," if left to her own devices, and if she stops miming masculine society, her nature is led by emotions. This belief in the primacy of emotion to feminine understanding portrays rationality as unfeminine and informs a discussion of post-war social knowledge in which women's nature prevents them from successfully navigating the public and political sphere of rationality.

The empathic nature of post-war advertisements encourages women to accept this nonrational, intuitive nature. These advertisements position themselves as advisors while simultaneously arguing against women's need for advisors, as they intuitively understand how to perform the role of housewife. Advice in these advertisements is gentle guidance and reassurance that the women of their audience know how to perform correctly and merely need to be reminded.

Advertisements argue for the innateness of housewife, and position themselves as a gentle reminder, by positioning the housewife of the advertisement as a woman's conscience. Early post-war advertisements portray the housewife as conscience by representing the housewife as a small stock image instructing the woman within the larger advertisement as to the proper behavior in a given situation. The housewife as conscience silently corrects gender performance through juxtaposition of proper and improper appearance and behavior. A September 1945 *Good Housekeeping* advertisement for Florence appliances is representative of advertisements at the time, which include both rational and emotional appeals to their audience; in it, a small representation of a housewife in the corner of the advertisement instructs housewives how to be good and patient post-war consumers (Figure 3). The wife within this advertisement wears a robe and headscarf, traditionally worn over curlers, to serve her husband breakfast. Her informal appearance within this everyday breakfast scene reflects the housewife's role of serving her husband breakfast with no emphasis as to her appearance when she does so. As a reflection of the typical breakfast scene, then, this advertisements demonstrates no standardized attire nor expectation that the wife be appropriately clothed and styled to serve her husband breakfast. Instead, the more traditional housewife image is an anthropomorphism of the appliance. Both she and the company are named Florence, and she is therefore the embodiment of the appliances. The manifestation of the qualities of the appliance within the representation of the housewife necessarily associates those qualities with the female consumer.

# "WHAT DO YOU MEAN... YOU WANT FLORENCE TO LIVE WITH US?"



"DON'T GET  
EXCITED, DEAR!  
I'M TALKING  
ABOUT  
FLORENCE  
RANGES!"



"WHEN THE ARMY  
AND NAVY PERMIT,  
I'M SURE THOSE  
FLORENCE PEOPLE  
WILL AGAIN  
MAKE THE FINEST  
RANGES AND  
HEATERS"



"DARLING, YOU'RE  
RIGHT! WE DO  
WANT FLORENCE  
TO LIVE WITH US  
AS SOON AS  
RANGES AND  
HEATERS ARE  
AVAILABLE"

You have always expected those values from Florence Stove Company that only an old and experienced company could give you. Now you can look forward to a new FLORENCE—with new streamlined beauty; with new advanced features; with a quality of construction and engineering made even greater by FLORENCE'S war experience.

### FLORENCE SAYS:

"IT ALWAYS PAYS TO WAIT FOR THE BEST! FLORENCE RANGES AND HEATERS ARE PROVEN TOPS IN VALUE, BEAUTY AND RELIABILITY"



As soon as conditions permit Florence will again produce all of these types of appliances for you.  
**WAIT FOR THEM!**

**FLORENCE**  
ONE OF AMERICA'S OLDEST AND LARGEST MANUFACTURERS OF  
*Ranges and Heaters*

**FLORENCE STOVE COMPANY**  
Factories: Gardner, Mass., Kankakee, Ill., Lewisburg, Tenn. Offices: New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas

190 See Good Housekeeping's Advertising Guaranty—Page 6

Figure 3

Florence's placement in the advertisement positions her character in an advisory role. As she is off-center from the primary images of the couple discussing her, she observes the action of the advertisement and functions as commentator to instruct her audience as to the lesson from the scene portrayed. The wife within the advertisement is portrayed as impulsive in her immediate reaction to her husband, justified though it may seem as a response to her husband referencing another woman. Her impulsive reaction implies men make more informed and therefore better decisions and reinforces social biases of women as emotional and reactionary. Her husband therefore must instruct her as consumer. Women outside of housewife, then, need their husband's guidance. However, the housewife, as represented by Florence, knows what is best. Prioritizing Florence's wartime experience has helped her to realize and develop the skills necessary to exist in a post-war world and to make the best decision when it comes to household purchasing. The housewife is therefore a smart consumer who understands how to make purchasing decisions for her household. Importantly, the housewife also validates the husband's side of the argument. As conscience, Florence is calm and rational, as opposed to the impulsive and emotional wife within the advertisement. Unifying the housewife of Florence and the husband through this argument emphasizes the housewife as extension of her husband. Under his guiding hand, she makes the correct decisions, and can overcome feminine weaknesses of emotion.

Florence also defines a visual standard for the appearance of housewife, juxtaposed with the unkempt appearance of the wife within the advertisement. Florence's tidy appearance, nearly entirely concealed behind a clean, white, frilled apron, silently chastises the wife's robe and curlers. Her A-line knee-length dress is stylistically representative of the wardrobe of the Fifties housewife, accentuating a small waist and reflecting social attractiveness standards. Her hair is

neat and styled away from her face to enable her to perform household tasks, and her apron protects her dress from the rigors of housework. Most importantly, Florence is dressed and prepared to begin her day before breakfast. Florence's appearance within the advertisement when combined with her placement, as commentator and advisor, corrects the performance of housewife in the scene she observes. Since she is a female advisor, her position as commentator also implies that women implicitly understand the lesson she provides. Advertisements, then, encourage women to embrace their femininity by persuading them that they must only accept and listen to their conscience and its instructions to perform housewife.

Guillon's (1965) assertion that women is "essentially *nature*" reflects social knowledge that, because women carry and birth children, women are necessarily connected to the natural world in a way men are not. Beauvoir's (1949) argument explained and contested this assumption about the nature of femininity, as the gulf between transcendence and immanence, the domain historically assigned to women. As "active," men are powerful, productive, and public, and able to transcend themselves to realize and influence the external universe. Women, meanwhile, are enslaved by their reproductive urges. Beauvoir's "immanence" is private, as women are passive, and their biologically driven connection to the natural prevents them from transcending the physical world. Immanence manifests in social knowledge as nurture and maternal instinct, as women's reproductive urges define their nature as their ruling biological drive. Motherhood is therefore socially believed to be woman's natural impulse and source of fulfillment, as her essential nature. Creating a dichotomy between nature and action positions nature as private, as action is public. Thus in the social imaginary defining motherhood as women's natural position, the social imaginary is a self-fulfilling prophecy: it represents women as private to define them outside of the public sphere and maintain its position as the dominant

representation of gender within that sphere. The social imaginary of housewife positions the Fifties housewife as the natural return of feminine gender performance to establish housewife as a traditional gender role, first by modeling behavior and second by portraying the role as generational.

### **2.3 Essentially Natural: The Imaginary of Housewife**

The social imaginary must convince women that they can perform housewife, even if they believe they lack the skills and motivation to perform the role properly. The ease of technology and domestic advances like prepared meals enables women to perform to type. Whether the new housewife is deficient in cooking, cleaning, or child-rearing skills, advances in household technology, prepared foods, and baby products allow even the most unskilled woman the ability to perform housewife well. A 1945 Heinz Condensed Soup advertisement tells women who “ha[ve]n’t the knack” for making soup themselves without “keeping the cream from curdling, seasoning the soup just right – or finding really good tomatoes” to trust Heinz to provide a meal their “whole flock” will love (Figure 4). Aimed at an audience without the skills to replicate proper housewife performance, Heinz excuses housewives unable to perform correctly with the ability to purchase performance. While an advertisement proclaiming their product a substitute for a day’s labor might imply women could work outside the home while continuing to provide for her family, Heinz instead defines their audience as those who desire to perform housewife to reinforce the idea that women’s natural place is within the home. The first image of their advertisement is therefore a housewife who longs to possess the requisite skills to serve her family. While the “slaving” metaphor, replete with chains binding her to the stove in the second frame, could imply the housewife unhappy with her role and longing to escape, the following still defines her lack of skill as the reason behind her discontent.



# IF YOU'RE THE TYPE WHO—



1 Gets positively ravenous at the very thought of old-fashioned homemade Cream of Tomato Soup



2 But dreads slaving over a hot stove all day—and simply hasn't the knack...



3 Of keeping the cream from curdling, seasoning the soup just right—or finding really good tomatoes...



4 Here's a tip: Next time you go to the grocers (on your weekly butter hunt!) ask him...



5 For Heinz Condensed Cream of Tomato Soup! You (and your whole flock) will rave about



6 The wonderful flavor of "Aristocrat" tomatoes, and sweet, heavy cream (rich as Croesus!)



7 And all blended together in small batches—the way you'd make soup yourself (if Heinz didn't!)



8 Look gals, here's another swell hunch: Heinz Soup makes a marvelous sauce-base for spaghetti, meat loaf, casseroles!



By adding one tin of milk or water to one tin of soup, you get four portions of Delicious Soup

**HEINZ** Condensed  
**CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP**

Smoke fills her kitchen, and we the audience understand the milk on the stove is curdling as she holds her nose from the smell. When combined with the first image, this portrayal reassures her audience that the forlorn housewife desires to perform correctly, but lacks the training to do so. She feels trapped by the stove, not because she dreams to escape the role of housewife, but because she is unable to perform correctly. The family's celebration in the fifth frame pardons the wife's inability to cook in that the soup gives the appearance of cooking, and therefore reveals appearance, rather than skill, as of primary importance to the performance of housewife. The availability of prepared meals expanded the population qualified for the role of housewife by limiting the skills necessary to perform her task well. By providing cover for women who cannot or will not perform the role of housewife correctly, this Heinz advertisement uncovers the primacy of appearance over aptitude for Fifties housewives. Appliances and prepared meals forgive a lack of skills.

To provide the necessary motivation to convince women they want to embody housewife, the image of housewife must speak to its audience. Dickinson (1997) argued memory as a resource for the rhetorical performance of the self constructs individual identities through nostalgic representations of the past. Visual identification of mother and daughter creates a nostalgic tone to the role of housewife that allows women to emulate an ideal not necessarily present in their childhood during the Great Depression and Second World War by implying that housewife as gender performance is passed from generation to generation. The image reframes individual memory within the construct of housewife to articulate gender performance through memory and nostalgia. Therefore representations of housewife within post-war advertisements depict young women fulfilling lifelong dreams for love, security, and financial stability in their homes. These advertisements suggest housewife is the fulfillment of childhood aspirations

through depictions of children wearing the same clothes as their mothers, treating dolls as their mothers treat them, and styling doll houses and toys as their mothers style their homes. Instead of these daughters appearing mature, however, the visual juxtaposition of mother and daughter infantilizes the position of housewife through immature girlish colors, styling, and accessories.

Daughters strive to emulate both their mother's style and approach towards housework, and thus in performing housewife correctly, the housewife provides a model by which her daughters learn proper desires and concerns. Ipana toothpaste advertisements throughout this time period encourage mothers to be "model mothers" by portraying models' lives at home with their children. Word play reminds mothers to model correct behavior for their children while also encouraging them to emulate these models' performances as mothers as they attempt to emulate their fashion and appearance. Importantly, these Ipana advertisements were the first page of nearly all volumes of *Ladies Home Journal* during the time period analyzed. As mothers look to models for performances to emulate, daughters look to their mothers. The first message of advertisements in these magazines, then, was a reminder that mothers model behavior for their children. This modeling message is reinforced by encouraging mothers to dress themselves and their daughters in similar clothing. For example, a 1951 A&P Super Market advertisement in *Ladies Home Journal* portrays a mother teaching her daughter to be a smart consumer (Figure 5). Her daughter not only models her mother's dress and apron but also her demeanor as she discusses her decision to switch to A&P markets. Stylistically, the mother and daughter are identical apart from the mother's makeup; hair is parted on the same side, curled at the bottom, and pulled away from the face the same way. The dresses and aprons are styled the same and from the same material, implying either the mother made them or purchased them together; their coats and hats in the small portrayal of the two in the grocery store are also the same.

"With so much of my money being 'eaten up'... I did something about it!"



"Feeding my family well these days take some tall doing! For a while, trying to cut corners, I tried tracking down 'week-end specials and even 'one-day' features. But a few foods at low prices didn't do much to cut my total food bill. Friends told me about A&P's store-wide low prices on hundreds of items every day... and there was the answer to my problem! I'm so pleased that I'm telling everybody that A&P is the place to really cut food bills. Say... why don't you Test Shop A&P. See how well you eat... see, how much you save!"

# Test Shop A&P

Store-wide low prices on hundreds of items every day... instead of a few "one-day" or "week-end" specials!



## 1. "I found—"

that A&P makes a profit of only about 1¢ out of every dollar I spend there. Naturally, that means I'm getting more good food for my money. Wouldn't that help your budget, too?"



## 2. "I found—"

the correct price marked on every item... no guesswork here. Speeded things up at the check-out stand, too... and this price-marking policy helps me check the itemized cash register slip when I get home."



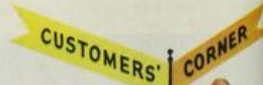
## 3. "I found—"

values in every department, and this makes a big difference in the 21 meals a week I have to plan. More variety makes eating more fun... more low prices make shopping more fun... I know!"



### SUPER MARKETS

**A&P's PRICE POLICY**  
Store-wide low prices on hundreds of items every day... instead of just a few "one-day" or "week-end" specials.  
*We believe this policy helps our customers save more money.*  
With the correct price marked on every item, plus an itemized cash register slip... you know what you save at A&P.



How do you like the Fish Department in your A&P Super Market? Do you like the variety of fresh fish and seafood? Is your selection properly cleaned? If there's anything about our handling of fish and seafood that you don't like, our skilled clerks would like to know about it. Please write:  
**CUSTOMER RELATIONS DEPARTMENT**  
A&P Food Stores, Graybar Building  
New York 17, New York



Figure 5

Encouraging mothers to dress themselves and their daughters in matching outfits modeling the mother's behavior as well as identification between the two; the daughter is housewife-in-training, and the mother the realization of a daughter's goals of performing housewife correctly. The housewife is thus established as the fulfillment of a childhood impulse to imitate mother through emulating proper housewife performance.

Likewise, in advertisements which portray a daughter helping her mother with housework, the mother and daughter wear the same clothing. A 1948 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for Rinso laundry soap portrays a daughter assisting her mother with laundry; both wear the same outfit, and the mother trains the daughter in the ways of the housewife by encouraging she assist with household chores (Figure 6). The back view of the daughter provides the rear view of the mother's apron and thus the frilled straps; the mother's front facing position shows green heart-shaped embellishments on the plain white fabric. These embellishments underscore the decorative nature of aprons while maintaining their practical aspect, as the aprons protect the yellow dresses the mother and daughter wear underneath from splashing water and an unfinished basement. In this advertisement, the girl literally looks up to her mother as she assists in hanging the laundry to dry. The framing of girlhood in this advertisement reminds women that their daughters look up, both literally and figuratively, to them, as they did their own mothers. Girls imitate mothers through performing household chores, and thus in performing housewife these women fulfill a childhood desire to emulate their mothers. In doing so, both women and children learn correct gender performance through the portrayal of the housewife in these advertisements.



# New Rinso with SOLIUM

—the *scientific Sunlight Ingredient*

## puts sunshine in your wash

...even on rainy days!



That's why *ONLY NEW Rinso*

WASHES WHITE CLOTHES  
**1 WHITER**  
 THAN BRAND NEW

WASHABLE COLORS GET  
**2 BRIGHTER**  
 THAN BRAND NEW

THINK of it! All the year 'round . . . rainy days or sunny days . . . whether clothes are hung indoors or out . . . new Rinso with Solium, the scientific Sunlight ingredient, puts a new brilliance in your wash—a brilliance never known before!

Results will amaze you! In your very first wash, you'll see white clothes come whiter *than brand new!* You'll see washable colors look brighter *than brand new!* You'll even see yellowed and grayed clothes made whiter *than brand new!* No other soap can do this because no other soap contains Solium.

And, the oftener you wash clothes THE WHITER AND BRIGHTER THEY GET! What's more, you'll see these results no matter how hard the water. Get new Rinso containing Solium today!

**No other soap can give these results because no other soap contains Solium**



#### SOLIUM

...the miracle Sunlight ingredient...is an exclusive development of wartime scientific research by the world-famous laboratories of Lever Brothers Company.



*NEW Rinso with SOLIUM*  
 SO SAFE FOR CLOTHES... SO KIND TO HANDS

Figure 6

Dolls that appear in advertisements frame young girls as practicing mothers. A 1948 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for USS Steel portrays two young girls, each with their own doll, washing and drying dishes in a stainless sink (Figure 7). This advertisement in portraying two small girls, with dolls, performing their mother's chores demonstrates the role of housewife being handed down from generation to generation. The two young girls assume both the appearance and the role of housewife. The presence of the dolls is reminiscent of mothers with children, as girls learn correct gender performance by observing their mothers. The dolls wear the same outfit, including apron, socks, and shoes, as the girls. Wearing the same outfit encourages identification between the dolls and girls; the size differential between the dolls and girls calls to mind mothers and babies, and dolls allow young girls to pretend, and in a way practice, the role of mother.

The home as a feminine space conflates girlhood and womanhood. Housewife allows women to realize childhood dreams for security and prosperity in their stylistic choices for both their wardrobe and their homes. A 1948 Quadriga advertisement (Figure 8) the housewife's daughter, in the forefront of the picture, places a doll wearing the same dress as the housewife in a small doll bed styled identically to her mother's bed. Styling the doll and mother identically visually amalgamates the two as one experience; the doll sleeps in the same bed, and wears the same clothes, as the mother, and so the daughter learns to replicate the mother's gender performance. As such, the mother's performance is the actualization of a childhood dream of how gender should be performed, and the doll represents the dream as it is passed down the generations. The doll bed in the forefront of the image defines the tone of the room as childish realization of dollhouse décor. The girls care for, and train, their dolls as their mothers do them.



LADIES' HOME JOURNAL



**STAINLESS STEEL IS SANITARY - STAINLESS STEEL STAYS BRIGHT -**  
*and this trade-mark means the product is made of quality stainless*

NOTHING equals stainless steel in lasting loveliness, easy cleaning, economy and immunity to destructive agents. And any time you see the U-S-S trade-mark on a stainless steel article you're buying . . . whether it's a kitchen sink or a roasting pan . . . you can be sure you're getting *good* stainless steel. For the U-S-S trade-mark means just this: the manufacturer has made his article of quality steel . . . and wants you to know it.



U-S-S STAINLESS STEEL is the lasting decorative metal . . . for everything from automobiles to watches.



U-S-S STAINLESS STEEL assures cleanliness and economy in hospitals, food plants, schools, laundries.

The U-S-S trade-mark shown above is one of a family of U-S-S trade-marks. Some say "Premier Spring Wire" or "Vitrenamel" or just plain "Steel" . . . but all have the big letters U-S-S prominently displayed. Whenever you see these letters U-S-S—the trade-mark of United States Steel—you know the steel is good.

**UNITED STATES STEEL**

Subsidiary companies: AMERICAN BRIDGE COMPANY • AMERICAN STEEL & WIRE COMPANY  
 CARNEGIE-ILLINOIS STEEL CORPORATION • COLUMBIA STEEL COMPANY • CYCLONE FENCE DIVISION  
 GENERAL SHIPBUILDING & DRY DOCK COMPANY • GERRARD STEEL STRAPPING COMPANY • NATIONAL TUBE COMPANY • OIL WELL SUPPLY COMPANY  
 PENNSYLVANIA COAL, IRON & RAILROAD COMPANY • UNION SUPPLY COMPANY • UNITED STATES STEEL EXPORT COMPANY  
 UNITED STATES STEEL PRODUCTS COMPANY • UNITED STATES STEEL SUPPLY COMPANY • UNIVERSAL ATLAS CEMENT COMPANY • VIRGINIA BRIDGE COMPANY

Figure 7



LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

**E&W Quadriga CLOTH**  
by-the-yard or ready-made

# Heirloom-ed

for lasting beauty . . . for carefree living



*At the Memphis Cotton Carnival... this dressed-in-Quadriga Room featured heirloom pieces from some of Memphis' finest homes.*

Decorator's Quiz: What is the cotton you can live with  
without a **Qu**alm? That fits all your schemes,  
from **Qu**aint-to-Contemporary? That you can flounce, or ruffle,  
or tailor, or **Qu**ilt? That you can mix and match, in prints and plain colors  
from **Qu**iet-to-Bold? That sun won't fade,  
and water won't **Qu**ench? And that costs so little  
you can buy **Qu**antities . . . without  
exceeding your **Qu**ota? Right! It's  
**Quadriga Cloth**

**E&W WALKER, St. Louis** • World's Largest Dry Goods Manufacturers, Converters and Distributors

LOOK FOR THE LABEL THAT SAYS

**E&W Quadriga CLOTH**

Tub-Fast • Sun-Fast • Needleized Finish  
E&W Quadriga Shirts for Men and Boys  
E&W Quadriga Jane Clay Dresses  
E&W Quadriga Pajamas  
E&W Quadriga Dorna Gordon Dresses  
E&W Quadriga Spring-Bak Shorts

AMERICAN  
CERTIFIED  
WASHABLE  
MADE IN U.S.A.  
Guaranteed by  
Good Housekeeping  
to be the  
BEST WASHABLE CLOTH

COPYRIGHT 1949, E. J. & WALKER DRY GOODS CO.

Figure 8

Portraying the housewife as realization of girlhood dreams, however, reinforces social assumptions that women are the weaker sex, less fully developed adults than their male counterparts. The housewife's aspirations never move beyond those girlhood dreams, defining womanhood within the confines of childhood. While framing the housewife as fulfillment of childhood aspirations creates a sense of nostalgia, and in turn a sense of security, well-being, and belonging, (Coontz, 2000), this frame also confines the housewife to immature imaginings of adulthood. As such, it justifies a woman's place as in the home as she is childlike and therefore must be protected along with the children.

By the same token, the housewife matures the young girl emulating her mother. Games in which girls pretend to be adults with houses and families encourage early adoption of prescribed gender norms and reveal anxieties concerning those who refuse to accept these roles. Advertisements that portray mothers and children emulating the same standard remind mothers that they provide a model for their daughters as to proper behavior. Likewise, alternative and therefore subversive gender performances model problematic behaviors. The housewife silences alternative gender performances by portraying the innateness of the role through early adoption of housewife norms and behaviors as well as by encouraging daughters to emulate their mothers. In doing so, they silence childhood fantasies and teenage rebellion by portraying housewife as gender norm for all age ranges; young girls are housewives-in-training, young women are housewives-in-waiting, and their mothers are housewives-in-action.

Emphasizing the femininity of the home is essential to defining the housewife as a fulfillment of innately feminine desires. The husband's presence is silenced within these advertisements to verify the argument that the home is a woman's place. The portrayal of men within domestic advertisements silences the masculine presence in the home in two ways;

visually styling the home as feminine, and emphasizing the husband's lack of skills. Many stylistic choices of the housewives in advertisements silence the man of the house, reinforcing the home as the woman's domain. The 1948 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for Quadriga cloth of Figure 8 shows a Memphis housewife and her bedroom. The drapes, bed cover, canopy, pillow shams, dust ruffle, lamp, upholstered chair, rocking chair seat, and window seat are all covered in the same pink ruffled fabric, its color reminiscent of the dresses the USS Steel girls wear while washing dishes. Pink as the dominant color within the image obscures any male presence in the room.

Secondly, advertisements position husbands as visually and therefore innately out of place in household tasks, best portrayed in a USS Steel advertisement in *Ladies Home Journal* (Figure 9). Palczewski (2005) in analyzing anti-suffragette postcards argued the use of gender-bending themes underscores the inappropriateness of women going against nature and assuming men's roles, and vice versa. Likewise, in this advertisement, the juxtaposition of the pink frilled apron with a business wardrobe traditionally worn with a suit jacket, as well as a pipe, emphasize the man as out of place in a woman's world. He reads a cookbook while he attempts to make dinner; however, he is oblivious to the pan in his lap spilling onto the floor, and the dog lapping up its contents. The oven is ajar, and steam above the pots on the stove implies he is burning their contents. While the daughters in the previously discussed USS Steel advertisement perform the duties of housewife unassisted and unsupervised, the wife and daughter of this man attempting to perform housewife laugh from behind the door, implying both are proficient at performing the task the husband fails to perform correctly. Their laughter also allows the man's failure to be charming; they stay out of the frame of the kitchen to allow the husband/father to attempt to cook and their laughter cues the audience of the advertisement that they find his





**STEEL IS STRONG . . . STEEL IS LONG-LASTING . . .**  
*and this symbol means the product is made of quality steel!*

THE men and women who make U-S-S Steels are proud of them. Proud of the craftsmanship and hard-won knowledge that go into them. That's why they like to "sign" these steels with the U-S-S trade-mark . . . just as an artist signs a painting. And that's why you'll often find the U-S-S trade-mark on articles you buy . . . on cooking utensils, furniture, wheelbarrows and hundreds of other things made of steel. The manufacturers of those products want you to know they've used good steel in making them . . . U-S-S Steel.



The U-S-S symbol shown here is one of a family of U-S-S trade-marks. Some are different in color, some say "Stainless Steel" or "Vitronamel" or "Premier Spring Wire" . . . but all have the three big letters U-S-S prominently displayed. Whenever you see these letters U-S-S—the trade-mark of United States Steel—you know the steel is good.



FURNACE and ductwork of U-S-S Steel mean a trim, modern basement . . . good looking and efficient.



KEEP ODORS in, water and dogs out . . . with a swivel garbage container of U-S-S Steel.

**TEN TO...**The Theatre Guild on the Air, presented every Sunday evening by United States Steel. American Broadcasting Company, coast-to-coast network. Consult your newspaper for time and station.

**UNITED STATES STEEL** Subsidiary companies: AMERICAN BRIDGE COMPANY • AMERICAN STEEL & WIRE COMPANY • CARNEGIE-ILLINOIS STEEL CORPORATION • COLUMBIA STEEL COMPANY • CYCLONE FENCE DIVISION • FEDERAL SHIPBUILDING & DRY DOCK COMPANY • GERRARD STEEL STRAPPING COMPANY • NATIONAL TUBE COMPANY • OIL WELL SUPPLY COMPANY • TENNESSEE COAL, IRON & RAILROAD COMPANY • UNION SUPPLY COMPANY • UNITED STATES STEEL EXPORT COMPANY • UNITED STATES STEEL PRODUCTS COMPANY • UNITED STATES STEEL SUPPLY COMPANY • UNIVERSAL ATLAS CEMENT COMPANY • VIRGINIA BRIDGE COMPANY

Figure 9

attempt at cooking endearing and charming, instead of annoying or aggravating. Since the wife and daughter will undoubtedly clean the mess the husband has created in the kitchen, their good-natured laughter underscores him as out of place within the kitchen, his effort extraordinary, and imply his attempts at relieving his wife and daughter from cooking duty is an unusual one. The man in this advertisement tries to perform housewife successfully and fails, and his wife and daughter's reaction from the next room underscores the ease with which women perform the same tasks. As such, the housewife becomes a woman's calling as well as her place within society, and in performing housewife, women can fulfill their own potential as well as a social need. In defining the actions of housewife as innately feminine, advertisements position the role of housewife as fulfillment of their inborn womanly desires.

The home and its nostalgia is also isolating. Emphasizing the home as the realization of childhood dreams focuses attention on the individual home and housewife. Ferguson (1989, 1991; see also Bartky, 1990) argued defining women's labor within the home, as caring and nurturing, creates women who are less likely, and less motivated, to self-identify outside of social norms, as their work necessitates they develop familial structures in which their work is valued. Women are thus encouraged to define their own worth in the family structure. The housewife therefore discourages women from protesting gendered oppression because they perceive benefits in the system as it is structured and are reluctant to lose what position they have. Portraying the housewife as the fulfillment of childhood dreams thus frames the benefits of housewife to persuade its audience to accept the accompanying social structure. Likewise, encouraging women to turn inward, to their own family, disables social protest, as women are discouraged from discussing discontent with other women and instead told to turn to their own families for fulfillment (see Ferguson, 1989, 1991; Bartky, 1990). Visually, the vast majority of

housewives depicted in Fifties advertisements are, as in the advertisements analyzed here, shown in a family setting. When others are present in the scene, they are often identifiable as family members. Depicting women with husbands and children positions the value of the housewife to the family unit. For example, in a 1951 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for Simtex cloth (Figure 10), the housewife's vibrant red dress set against the neutral earth tones of her husband and visiting in-laws draws attention to the role of housewife. The housewife is often at the center of the scene, and visually depicted such that the eye is first drawn to her. As such, the housewife is the most important element of the scene of the home, as the first aspect of the advertised scene the viewer sees. Post-war advertisements thus define the benefits of housewife by positioning women within the frame of the advertisement as vital to the home.

The housewife is particularly isolating for women who refuse, or are unable, to accept the benefits of the role. The psychological climate of the age defines women who fail to find this fulfillment in their families as neurotic, which discourages housewives from admitting these feelings to others, as they are evidence of psychological maladjustment. These housewives are less likely to turn to female friends to find solidarity and comfort in women with similar experiences, as those experiences are instead a source of shame. The focus on the home, and the role of housewife, isolates women from other women, as the suburbs isolate them physically from their extended families and socially from other housewives.





(Illustrated: SIMTEX hand-printed "Symphony" Set: 54" x 72" tablecloth with six matching napkins priced at about \$5.95. Other Simtex Cloths from \$2. to \$10.)

## SIMTEX CLOTHS

*Thrifty for Your Family; Charming for Your Friends*

Every mealtime is happier with a SIMTEX Cloth on your table . . . even the food you serve is more tempting! Yes, SIMTEX colorful hand-prints (illustrated), lovely formal Damasks and smart novelty weaves have eye-appeal and budget-appeal, too. Thriftily priced, SIMTEX cotton cloths launder easily and beautifully without losing their crisp-as-new look. Available in boxed sets, they make wonderful gifts. Look for the SIMTEX label at your linen counter.

SIMTEX MILLS, 40 Worth St., New York 13, N. Y. (Division of Simmons Company, Makers of the famous BEAUTYREST Mattress)

THE SIMTEX FAMILY OF PRODUCTS:

Tablecloths & Napkins • Bedspreads • Flannelette Sport & Utility Shirts • Nightwear Flannelette • Mattress Tickings • Furniture Fabrics

Figure 10

## 2.4 Conclusion

The process of imagining is an act of creation, building a community out of people identified as similar who will not know and never meet most of the members of that community (see Anderson, 2003). As the social imaginary is the public representation of minority populations excluded from the public sphere (Asen, 2002), the social imaginary works to create a sense of identity and therefore community amongst populations excluded from the public sphere. Therefore, the imaginary is important for post-war women isolated both physically and socially in suburban communities as it creates a justification for their social place as well as an idea of community which encourages a sense of belonging based on gender performance. The imaginary of housewife forges connections between women, both contemporaneously and to past generations.

The isolation of the housewife begins to explain why women are initially unable to contest the social imaginary of housewife, and why it takes so long for personal unrest and unhappiness to manifest as social backlash against this representation of their oppression. The creation of the housewife in the social imaginary uses social knowledge of the science of gender to silence social and gender anxieties. Concerns over the subversive potential of feminine sexuality necessitate marriage be at the heart of any socially acceptable gender performance to contain women's sexuality within acceptable confines. Women's biological role as reproductive defines her essential nature in a society yearning for scientific explanations of social phenomenon. The social imaginary combines these attributes in the role of housewife while creating additional arguments as to why women belong in the home; namely, the same nature that draws them to the role of mother precludes women from successfully navigating the public sphere, as they have neither the inclination nor the maturity to provide for themselves. While the



illusion of the imaginary becomes obvious as women see the gulf between representations and real lived experiences, the creation of the imaginary as it responds to social beliefs and anxieties maintains its hold on society regardless. The construction of the social imaginary of housewife reveals how the long it can take to build a movement to fight an imaginary that's taken hold and isolates its targeted population.

What underlies this conversation is the masculine voice dictating both feminine desires and resolutions. Women and men alike found inspiration in Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" address, as the promise of future human rights and fulfillment enabled an impoverished population to find the strength to soldier on and face impending war. After the war, male advertisers used familiar images to create a gender concept that represented women in social mediated discourse, and society accepted this concept as representative of the middle class way of life. Individuals who protested or refused this gender norm were silenced by dominant representation of their population within the social imaginary. The image of the housewife is therefore important to consider not as a representation of how women in the Fifties lived their lives, but how post-war society created constraints upon private action through public discourse. This chapter examined the creation of the imaginary of housewife to understand how social imaginaries use social knowledge and anxieties to construct a salient representation. In the following chapter, I examine the illusion of the imaginary to analyze how this distance between the social imaginary and lived experience provides the rhetorical space for the creation of a movement against this imaginary.

### 3 THE DAMNED AND THE BEAUTIFUL: DOMESTICITY IN HOLLYWOOD CELEBRITY

The housewife is the frame by which women understood their social role and position in Fifties society. As the predominant representation of white, middle-class women in the social imaginary, the role defines social gender expectations through public representations that then act as a constraint upon the private lives of those women represented. However, this imaginary is a distorted view of the lived experience of the female audience it claims to represent. The imaginary of housewife works by convincing its female audience that it represents how other women live their lives, thereby implicitly arguing that they should model their own gender performance on this socially acceptable depiction. The housewife is thus able to become a symbol of patriarchal oppression primarily as it is patriarchy's definition of how women should live their lives.

Lacan (1975) in his discussion of the imaginary emphasized the illusory nature of the process of imagining, or internalizing external stimuli, and feminist scholars extend this illusory nature to emphasize the unrealistic expectations and the oppressive functions of imaginaries which define and restrict gender performance (see Irigaray, 1985a; Whitford, 1996; Butler, 1990). Ingraham (1994) is an entrance for rhetorical scholarship of the imaginary as a social institution which encourages audience identification. The previous chapter discussed the ways the imaginary of housewife forges connections between women, both contemporaneously and to past generations. This chapter includes women outside of the role of suburban housewife to explore how the layering of celebrity persona allows for an examination of the space in which the imaginary works to create the illusion of representation. In this chapter, I examine the tension between the illusion of the imaginary and women's lived experience through an analysis of

representations of public women's lives. The hegemonic function of the imaginary of housewife positions women without an acceptable alternative gender position, enabling both women and society to believe housewife is the only available gender performance.

Hollywood's attempts to pardon their stars' behaviors reveals an obvious tension between the social imaginary and women's reality. The use of the housewife in portrayals of gender performance in Hollywood post-war public relations campaigns demonstrates the power of the illusion of the housewife imaginary, as even those who assist in the creation of the imaginary fall victim to the illusion and therefore are in its service. I focus my discussion on two female celebrities whose film careers created opposing problems necessitating similar publicity campaigns. The first, Joan Crawford, achieved her highest cinematic acclaim in films portraying her gender performance as problematic, necessitating a publicity campaign that corrected her public image as a subversive character. The second, Doris Day, achieved success primarily in her portrayal of the everyday feminine ideal of the social imaginary, while her problematic private life necessitated publicity that persuaded her fans that life imitated art. Herein I analyze the layering of these celebrities' lives to argue that the power of the imaginary is in the illusion of representation, convincing even those who contribute to its creation and circulation that it represents a real audience. In using the social imaginary to frame the lives of these stars through the lens of the housewife, the Hollywood press is in service to that imaginary by obscuring the illusory nature of representation.

### **3.1 Pressures to Conform: HUAC and the Blacklist**

We know the damage celebrities can do to their own persona in the media. Hanoi Jane Fonda had difficulty finding work after protests against Vietnam painted her as an un-American

communist. Similarly, Hollywood actors, directors, writers, and producers blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the Fifties found themselves searching for new careers. Celebrities called to testify before HUAC understood the potential for that testimony to devastate their popularity and thus career, incentivizing some to name names. The blacklist and spy hunts of the era means even Hollywood, perhaps especially Hollywood, feels pressure to conform.

Necessary to understanding why the blacklist held so much power is post-war context over fears of communism. The Truman Doctrine and accompanying legislation, including Executive Order 9835 establishing a “loyalty-security” program, resulted from the 1946 midterm elections. Republicans had labeled Democrats as “soft on Communism” during the election cycle, and Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives (White, 2004; Rosenberg, 1982). Whittaker Chambers only added to this pressure when he accused Alger Hiss, Roosevelt’s assistant at the Yalta conference chosen by Harry Truman to be acting secretary general of the San Francisco conference establishing the United Nations, of being a Communist and, later, a Soviet spy.

Whittaker Chambers’ (1952) *Witness* framed the battle between capitalism and Communism as “the historic ordeal of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For in this century, within the next decades, will be decided for generations whether all mankind is to become Communist, whether the whole world is to become free, or whether, in the struggle, civilization as we know it is to be completely destroyed or completely changed. It is our fate to live upon that turning point in history” (7). Chambers, initially a Soviet spy, changed sides in the struggle, and cooperated with both FBI and HUAC investigations into Communist sympathizers in the federal government (see Chambers, 1952; White, 2004). While Truman and members of both his and Roosevelt’s

administrations (including former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt) sided with Hiss and argued against HUAC and their investigations as “witch hunts,” a 1948 Gallup poll demonstrated overwhelming public support for HUAC and congressional spy probes, even among Democrats (Oshinsky, 2005).

Media coverage of the Hiss trial lent credence to Joe McCarthy’s claims that Soviet spies had infiltrated the State Department. McCarthy capitalized on anti-Communist sentiment and public anxiety over Soviet spies in the Wheeling, WV speech that made his name. Here he first produced a list of “members of the Communist Party” employed by the State Department; he would continue to refer to this same list until the Senate unanimously voted to investigate. McCarthy’s failure to support these claims with hard evidence at the hearings did little to assuage McCarthy or the public’s interest. For four years, McCarthy capitalized on public anxieties over the Soviet threat, accusing Democrats of “twenty years of treason” while conducting his witch hunt for communists within the State Department, administration, and Army. While nothing ever came from his assertions, his rhetoric capitalizes upon the anxiety of the age through unproven assertions which seemed to validate social anxieties, despite never revealing the documents he claimed proved his assertions (see Oshinsky, 2005; Darsey, 1999).

Stories of Soviet espionage enabled McCarthy’s four years of Communist accusations. While Alger Hiss’s espionage case preceded and therefore enabled McCarthy, the Rosenberg case seemed to validate McCarthy’s concerns that spies threatened American security. David Greenglass and George Koval worked for a time during the war in Oak Ridge, TN, the site of the Manhattan Project; Greenglass and his wife, Ruth, passed sketches of an implosion-type atomic bomb to his sister and her husband, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg (Kiernan, 2013). Ashe (1995) argued Ethel Rosenberg was executed primarily because she failed to perform her gender

correctly. While Ethel Rosenberg was initially accused and charged with espionage to coerce her husband into a confession, the charges against her stood long after it was clear this strategy had failed. J. Edgar Hoover, in a July 1950 memorandum, noted, “There is no question [but that] if Julius Rosenberg would furnish details of his extensive espionage activities it would be possible to proceed against other individuals... proceeding against his wife might serve as a lever in this matter” (as quoted in Ashe, 1995). Hoover was “appalled” that this strategy failed yet prosecution against Ethel continued, citing her two young children as reason to drop the charges in another document (Radosh & Milton, 1997). However, even Hoover eventually changed his mind, deciding that Ethel had been a bad mother and terrible influence and thus her two young sons were better off in the care of others. During their sentencing, Judge Kaufman observed, “Love for their cause dominated their lives—it was even greater than their love for their children” (as quoted in Ashe, 1995). Eisenhower justified his denial of clemency for the Rosenbergs by claiming, with little to no evidence, that Ethel was the strong-willed mastermind who controlled the weak-willed Julius and forced him into committing espionage (Ashe, 1995). Philipson (1993) argued Ethel Rosenberg accepted Fifties expectations of motherhood and recognized her own failure to adhere to that standard. Communist fears labeled all acts outside social norms and mores as subversive and dangerous, and therefore performing the appropriate gender role took on additional significance. Ethel Rosenberg served as an example of the dangers of subversive gender behavior.

Conformity was therefore comforting, as individuality had the potential to be labeled subversive. *Time* (1951) explained: “There is also the feeling that it is neither desirable nor practical to do things that are different from what the next fellow is doing. Said a girl in Minneapolis: ‘The individual is almost dead today, but the young people are unaware of it. They

think of themselves as individuals, but really they are not. They are part of groups” (53).

Conformity and Cold War concerns about “subversive” behaviors limit individual expression and opinions when the danger of disagreement and divergent opinions is being blacklisted. When the young feel the only dreams available to them are secure jobs and suburban homes (*Time*, 1951), blocking employment with a blacklist is a most frightening punishment.

For Hollywood, the community most threatened by the blacklist, conformity became obligatory for those who wanted to keep working. In 1947, the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Hollywood Ten became household names, as HUAC investigated Communist propaganda in Hollywood and imprisoned those who refused to testify for contempt of Congress. Fears of perceived Communist affiliations compelled Hollywood to respond with the blacklist, publishing a list of those men and women with assumed Communist ties and refusing to hire anyone named on the list (White, 2004). The power of the blacklist, and HUAC, meant any association at all with the committee could threaten any career. Lucille Ball’s 1953 sealed testimony, when leaked, demonstrated HUAC could jeopardize the reputation of even the star of the most popular television show. She testified that she was just a granddaughter making an old man happy by registering Communist, and relied on sympathetic audiences interpreting her testimony as a woman dedicated to pleasing her grandfather even as she undermined his legacy (see Sanders & Gilbert, 1993, p. 76-83). As the blacklist victimized even those purportedly sympathetic to the communist cause, Ball’s ability to overcome these hearings and maintain her popularity and status in Hollywood is a true testament to what society believed women would do for the men in their lives.

The media, then, can devastate or revitalize a celebrity’s persona and reputation. As celebrities maintain power and status only through popularity, they must turn to the public to

maintain this popularity in times when their status is threatened. Cold war anxieties, at their heyday in the Fifties and Sixties, centered on nonconformist behavior and its subversive potential to destabilize perceptions of American superiority. Celebrity lives lived under public scrutiny must reflect a clean, nonthreatening, conformist image to avoid the label subversive. Palmer (2010) argues while we remember the Fifties as “a placid decade marked by untroubled acceptance of collectivism in both economic and personal life” and an “age of conformity to social norms,” they were also “vexed by public issues that simmered often just beneath an only apparent surface calm, held in check for the most part by a consensus desire for their repression” (2). Celebrity media coverage contributes to this desire to repress subversive gender performances by using the social imaginary to silence the subversive lives of female stars idolized by fans.

As the social imaginary is the primary means by which underrepresented populations exist in the public sphere, representatives from those populations within the public sphere must adhere and reinforce the public imaginary to maintain their position. The mere presence of women as public figures could easily be perceived as subversive in the Fifties, an era whose strict gender roles defined a woman’s place as in the home at the heart of the family. Women in the public sphere earn acceptance within that sphere as exemplar representatives (see Cloud, 1996; Biesecker, 1992), and their public presence in turn defines those characteristics most desirable in the population they represent. Richard Dyer (2008) argued stars define norms for fans who identify with the social type that celebrity represents; audiences seek to identify with the stars of the films they patronize to escape the drudgery of their everyday lives (see also Higashi, 2014). Public women’s presence within the public sphere, then, must reflect the values and expectations of womanhood as defined by the social imaginary or risk losing their status as



exemplar and thus their position as public figures. This chapter analyzes public representations of celebrity's private lives to explore the ways celebrity uses the social imaginary to maintain and excuse their status as public figures. In doing so, however, celebrity is in service to the imaginary, perpetuating unattainable standards for gender performance by reinforcing the illusion of the housewife as representative of gender experience

### **3.2 Crafting the Illusion: Joan Crawford's Publicity**

Joan Crawford died before her daughter Christina published her now-infamous memoir *Mommie Dearest* (1978), and for a certain generation, Crawford's most famous film may be Faye Dunaway's (1981) performance in the campy cult classic of the same name. Her daughter's memoir continues to taint memories of Crawford's career and especially Crawford's media presence. Joan Crawford is synonymous with celebrities lying to the press about domesticity and commitment to family. Douglas & Michaels (2004) in discussing "celebrity mom profiles" explained that stars have, since the 1920s, used the media to circulate stories about their home lives "to make them seem like nice, decent, normal people and to boost box office revenues... *Mommie Dearest* revealed the extent to which Joan Crawford used her adopted children to paint herself in the press as a doting mother..." (p. 117). Vital to the maintenance of popularity and therefore star status for post-war celebrities was maintaining an appropriate public image. Although even Crawford's children are divided as to the truth of Christina Crawford's portrayal of her childhood, the memoir did irreparable harm to Crawford's legacy.

Whatever the harm *Mommie Dearest* has done to Crawford's public memory, her media struggles began long before Christina entered her life. Crawford rose to fame as one of the few stars able to successfully move from silent films to "the talkies," and she was one of the highest paid actresses of the Thirties. Multiple divorces, media rumors of a nightclub lifestyle and

affairs, and the label of “box office poison” all contribute to her release from MGM and move to Warner Bros. Studios, where she voluntarily removed herself from the payroll after a year of refusing every part offered to her. 1945 saw Crawford’s reentry to Hollywood royalty as, with a new studio and after a year of not appearing on film, she won the Oscar for Best Actress for her first role with Warner Bros., *Mildred Pierce* (1945). *Mildred Pierce* is the first of four movies in which Crawford portrays the femme (though not always fatale) in film noir, along with *Possessed* (1947), *Sudden Fear* (1952), and *The Damned Don’t Cry* (1950). While *Sudden Fear*’s female protagonist is the innocent victim who happens upon a taped conversation in which her husband and his mistress plan to murder her, Crawford’s other film noir performances more closely resemble the “femme fatale” type common to the genre. These women, as defined by Burroughs Hannesberry (1998):

...use their wiles to get their way, as often as not at the expense of their male counterparts. The mystical French figure of *la belle dame sans merci* – the beautiful woman without mercy – is personified in these productions... [actresses] portrayed the dark side of the female; women who, in turn, could be avaricious, selfish, possessive, slovenly, calculating, masochistic and callous. While usually possessing a keen intelligence and shrewd cunning, these were women totally lacking in morals, bent on satisfying their own lustful, mercenary or violent desires, utterly aware of their unique feminine tools, and willing to capitalize on them whenever necessary (p. 2).

Crawford achieved renewed success and acclaim as a *femme fatale*; all three Oscar nominations for Best Actress are for a performance in film noir. However, these same roles problematize Crawford’s public image, as on screen she portrays women who use men to win the affection of

a spoiled child (*Mildred Pierce*, 1945), maniacally plot reunions with a jilted lover, or, if they fail, his demise (*Possessed*, 1947), and who abandon a blue collar husband to assume a new identity and a string of gangster lovers (*The Damned Don't Cry*, 1950). Off-screen her life was, by her account, much more “normal” than her fans would otherwise assume. Coverage of Crawford’s personal life depicts her as a reformed girl-about-town who has settled down with her four<sup>1</sup> adopted children: Christina, adopted 1940; Christopher,<sup>2</sup> adopted 1943; and twins Cathy and Cynthia, adopted 1947. Crawford excuses her subversive on-screen persona, as well as her nonconformist past divorces and lifestyle, with the normalcy of her life with her children.

The Hollywood public relations machine builds a layer of persona for Crawford which positions her real life as cover for her onscreen persona. Crawford, then, has three layers of persona: her real life, her screen life, and her mediated life. The layering of these personae mirrors and magnifies the illusion of the imaginary, as readers of these Hollywood magazines believe that these small insights into Crawford’s everyday life represents her lived experience. Therefore, an analysis of the creation of the illusion of celebrity personae allows us to see how the illusion of the imaginary works for everyday women as well, as women’s lives lived outside the public sphere may prove impossible to recover. Those who construct the imaginary can manipulate this illusion to convince an audience of its representativeness; however, they are also in service to the imaginary, as in using the illusion they perpetuate and seemingly verify the imaginary’s claims to representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford adopted five children and raised four; a son, her first named Christopher adopted in 1941, was reclaimed by his birth mother a year later. She named her second son Christopher as well.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher was originally adopted with Crawford’s third husband, Phillip Terry, and named Phillip after his father; upon their divorce in 1946, when Christopher was 2, Crawford renamed him Christopher.

Crawford's Hollywood publicity was long in the service of the imaginary and dominant ideology. Her story changes as the preferred ideology changes, and demonstrates how Hollywood press uses preferred imaginaries to create personae for stars. Crawford's life story is defined by this press in two stages, representing two distinct trends: the Algerian myth of pulling oneself up by her bootstraps, and the imaginary of housewife.

Integral to the narrative of Crawford's rise to fame is the Algerian myth emphasizing hard work and talent as inherent characteristics to achieving the American dream. As a woman, Crawford's hard work must use those talents and skills inherent to women to achieve her goals. Depicting Crawford as the "winner and still champion," St. Johns' (1951) boxing metaphor explores Crawford's drive and struggle to achieve her celebrity status through the lens of the American dream of pulling herself up by the bootstraps; she entered Hollywood with "too-tall heels, too-frizzy hair" and learned over time "simple elegance." St. Johns' Crawford is "a generous, kind-hearted, hard-working kid with nobody to back her," who "scrubbed floors, cooked and swept when she was 10 years old to get herself an education" and whose hard work eventually granted her acceptance to the upper class and high society. Crawford's insistence on earning herself instead of accepting gifts and charity reinforces the Algerian nature of her backstory. Crawford, St. Johns explains, refused to accept "charity" when her mother could no longer afford to pay for Crawford's schooling, and agreed to work in exchange for school. Similar to the works of Horatio Alger upon which the myth of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" is based, the story of Crawford's life ignores the help and luck that allowed her to successfully rise from the lower to upper class. Instead, St. Johns' Crawford uses the skills she possesses as a girl to clean and cook in exchange for her education. Crawford's press is in this way much like Cloud's (1996) discussion of Oprah's tokenism; the creation of persona serves the

dominant ideology by demonstrating that Oprah (or Crawford's) hard work, determination, and personal talents raise her to her position, validating the American Dream as attainable for any and all who work for it, which creates a token of Oprah (and Crawford). However, Crawford's story perpetuates the exclusionary function of the housewife as social ideal, as this comparison to Oprah's press demonstrates. Importantly for Crawford's story, she works her way into Hollywood stardom by performing domestic labor, gendered feminine. Crawford's story maintains her proper social place by emphasizing the domestic nature of her work cleaning and cooking. Crawford's social rise allows her to do this work for herself, instead of others. While she earns enough to pay others to do the work for her, her press insists she does the work herself to forge identification between Crawford and a readership of housewives. However, Crawford is able to rise, and use the social imaginary to her advantage, because she is white. Oprah's story is unimaginable in the Fifties as the social imaginary failed to provide a redemptive representative of black women by which a black woman could rise to social prominence. Necessary to Crawford's Algerian myth, then, is the white feminine ideal of the social imaginary which Crawford works to attain.

Press coverage of Crawford uses American mythology to justify her public status by emphasizing individual talent and hard work and, as Cloud explains, perpetuates the problematic associations of this mythology by placing the blame for one's position in life on the individual; if you cannot achieve the American Dream, it is because you did not work hard enough. This places the onerous and responsibility for achievement on the individual and obscures societal pressures, biases, and structures which prohibit the ascension of minority groups up the social ladder. As such, Cloud's Oprah, and Hollywood's Crawford, are in service to those social

structures that create obstacles to minority population's success by obscuring their role in maintaining distinct differences between majority and minority populations.

Likewise, Crawford's domestic persona later in her career is in service to the imaginary of housewife. The American Dream story of Crawford's past begins to use the imaginary of housewife to establish Crawford's domestic credentials. Depicting the ten-year-old Crawford's skills as cook and maid underscore the innateness of these qualities to womanhood; all women can cook and clean if they are hard-working, and can use these skills to earn the life they desire. In positing herself as a hard-working girl who exchanges cooking and cleaning skills for an education, Crawford is the typical hard-working American woman. The post-war problem of anxiety and the threat of communism means people don't want to stand out. Individuality, while at the heart of the American Dream, can become problematic in a conformist culture in which people just want to fit in. The pressure to conform changes Crawford's story from one using the ideology of the individual American Dream to justify her public position, to one of domesticity and the home to excuse it. In each instance, her press's use of an imaginary is in service to it by perpetuating the illusion of representation. The housewife is depicted in Crawford's press as representative of all women's experience and relationship with her home. Defining family as the path to Crawford's fulfillment and happiness perpetuates the assumption that all women want to be a housewife, and the illusion of both representation and fulfillment.

### ***3.2.1 The Home: Representation***

Stories which purport to reveal the "true life" Crawford home evidence the home as woman's natural environment and therefore serve the imaginary by framing public women as dependent upon the private sphere for self-determination and fulfillment. Crawford's publicity argues her home reflects her true character to allow an audience of housewives to identify and

relate with the private life of a Hollywood icon. This publicity represents Crawford's home as the physical manifestation of her personal character. A prime example of such a discussion is "Prince Romanoff's" (1948) exposé, which promises the reader insight into the life and character of Crawford. Problematic though its authorship may be, as "Romanoff" was a well-known pretender to Russian aristocracy, its discussion focuses primarily on Crawford's home through the eyes of a friend and welcomed guest. The "Prince's" in depth discussion of the architecture and design of Crawford's home is the most in depth discussion of the home in the collection of Crawford's publicity of the time, and stands as a Burkean representative anecdote (Burke, 2009, pg. 59; see also Brummett, 1984), as thematically characteristic of portrayals of the Crawford residence. "Romanoff" first argued: "You can't tell a book by its cover, but you can tell a woman by her home." The "Prince" here reveals societal assumptions about the relationship between a woman and her home as more than a cosmetic relationship. Offsetting the relationship between a woman and her home and a book and its cover uses the common phrase to position the relationship between a woman and her home as a definitive one. "Romanoff" describes the accessories and interior design of Crawford's house as "the signs of her soul." While a book's cover reveals little about its contents, and therefore evaluating the work by its cover is problematic, a home reveals its woman's true character, and therefore through observing one you learn about, and can evaluate, the other. The choices a woman makes in the style and design of her home are physical manifestations of the essence of her nature.

Gender is an important modifier in the "Prince's" analogy, as it positions the home as a feminine domain. "Romanoff" validates the relationship between a woman and her home in his discussion of why he visits Crawford's home in the first place. "The Prince's" description of his conversation with Crawford reveals a woman passionate about her home, its appearance and its

construction. “Excitement was dancing in her eyes, and a smile was waltzing on her lips” as Crawford “clasped her hands” and told him that she had finished fixing and decorating her home, and excitedly described renovations to “this wing and that room.” Crawford’s eagerness to share the details of her work on her home, and the invitation in which she exclaims “Romanoff” “must come out and see it!” portrays the bond a woman and her home share. His portrayal of Crawford’s intense connection with her home parallels social assumptions that the home is a feminine space. As discussed in my analysis of post-war advertisements in the previous chapter, the Fifties suburban home is a feminine space because the woman is responsible for the style and design of the home, and the masculine presence is often eliminated in this design. Therefore when “Romanoff” says the home reveals much about its woman, the gender of the referent is an important component of his reflection of Fifties social assumptions.

Romanoff’s discussion of the relationship between Crawford and her home lends credence to a social imaginary in which women must identify with and in her home. However, the depiction of the home in Crawford’s press also serves the housewife as the feminine ideal of the social imaginary by perpetuating the illusion that the home is where women can find and embrace their identity. Arguing Crawford’s home reflects her true character positions Crawford as any other housewife whose home is equally important to establishing her identity. Crawford is a glamour girl, and famously fastidious with her appearance. As her house is an extension of her person, this same fervor for cleanliness and appearance applies. “Romanoff,” echoing popular sentiment, explained the kitchen is “always an excellent place in which a woman may reveal her true character.” This assumption that Crawford, a woman with a visible presence in the public sphere, reveals her “true character” in her kitchen, and her home, implies she is unable to do so in public. In using the private space of her kitchen to verify, or correct, audience assumptions



about Crawford's character, "Romanoff" implicitly argues that Crawford is unable to "reveal her true character" in her public life. While this is an important move to alter public opinion about Crawford's nature, "Romanoff's" discussion evidences the social imaginary's assertion that the role of housewife allows women to thrive in private and domestic spaces, as they are unable to do so in public.

### 3.2.2 *Fulfillment: Attainability*

The home is representative of family life and its importance to a woman's character and development. Remember psychiatrists and sociologists at the time felt women who did not accept their natural position as one subordinate to men, and one that nurtures and protects the next generation, were considered at best neurotic, and at worst subversive and dangerous (see Rosenberg, 1992; Spock, 1944; Lundberg & Farnham, 1947; Miller & Nowak, 1990). A *Time* (1951) article epitomizes the perceived danger of single women; the article bemoans their desire to "have it all: a career and a family, both" as a threat to social order. Therefore, a husband and children are important to establish a woman's acceptance of her proper social place. Crawford's Hollywood publicity attempts to silence her subversive potential as a woman living on her own, in the public sphere, by positioning Crawford's public life as unfulfilling and incomplete, and portraying her search, and discovery, of fulfillment in the private sphere. Crawford's continued insistence on the importance of men, and her personal need of a husband, perpetuates the assumption of the social imaginary that all women want to be a housewife. This need for a male presence in her home appears at two important stages in Crawford's publicity: after adopting her twin girls and thus completing her family, and in her fourth and final marriage.

Crawford's portrayal of her family life after adopting her twin girls reveals the importance of a definitive male presence to a woman's identity. Children help Crawford avoid,

but not eliminate, the loneliness caused by singlehood; only a man can provide Crawford what she feels is necessary to escape the drudgery of a lonely existence. After her children have gone to bed she complains of “a sense of incompleteness. The house seems empty and this is a lonely time for a woman who has no man around to share things with” (Crawford, 1950). Thus children are a necessary but insufficient component to a woman’s fulfillment; women are still incomplete, empty, and unfulfilled without a man around.

For Crawford, her fourth marriage, a reportedly happy union with Pepsi executive Alfred Steele, confirms her belief in the fulfilling power of marriage. Crawford demonstrates that, rhetorically at least, she is willing to place her husband, rightfully, before and above her. Crawford claims that she is determined to be, for her fourth husband:

[T]he best wife in the world. From here on in...he's the boss. Whatever he says goes. If he wants me to give up my career, I'll do it gladly. I've already told the children that we're moving our headquarters to New York. They know Al and they love him. I'm a lonely woman no longer. This is everything I've ever wanted. I've got one more picture to do for Columbia—that's in July after our honeymoon. After that I plan to commute to Hollywood if Al will let me. In my book he comes first. I've never been so happy to put my career in the back seat. I've waited a long, long time for this fulfillment. (Hoffman, 1955)

Crawford’s effusiveness over this marriage demonstrates woman’s position as awaiting definition by a masculine presence in several ways. First of all, despite the importance of Crawford’s Hollywood home in defining her identity, once happily married she eagerly leaves it for her husband’s hometown. Abandoning the personification of her identity demonstrates her commitment to accepting her proper place. Secondly, Crawford’s use of language and metaphor

reinforces women as subordinate to the men in their lives. While most literally she moves place, from Hollywood to New York, she also transitions her authoritative position within the family to Steele by referring to the familial home as a “headquarters.” “Headquarters” as a business metaphor positions Steele as the head, or boss, of the family. Another place metaphor, “back seat,” defines the importance of Crawford’s career to her newly completed family. Crawford’s language thus reinforces women’s natural position as one of awaiting definition and fulfillment by men.

Crawford is therefore unable to find fulfillment and happiness in her public life, and is willing to completely abandon her established life, her fame, and her income for the man she loves. While this is a romanticized happy ending akin to a Doris Day film, perhaps even the plot of Day’s 1963 *Move Over, Darling*, Crawford seems to have willingly accepted the role of subordinate wife for the short tenure of her marriage, fulfilling her contracted picture with Columbia and retiring to a private life; she only returned to acting after Steele died in 1959.<sup>3</sup> What this does for an audience who have repeatedly been encouraged to identify with the Crawford of her press is demonstrate that Crawford is actually envious of their lives, and in the end, prefers their lifestyle to one in Hollywood. It argues Hollywood attempted to convince housewives they were the envy of Hollywood starlets. Thus Crawford validates the social imaginary in which housewife is the preferred gender role by upholding social expectations that women in the public sphere, or women who work, quit their jobs when they marry and embrace their role as housewife. In portraying the Steele marriage in this light, Hollywood publicity

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, she returned to acting almost immediately. Steele died in April of 1959, and Crawford was cast in *The Best of Everything* in May, ten days before shooting began. See Hopper, 1959.

perpetuates and validates social assumptions that all women, even glamorous Hollywood divas, at their heart want to be a housewife.

Problematizing this discussion is the layering of Crawford's persona. In this layering lies clues as to how the social imaginary attempts to maintain the illusion of representativeness. Examining this layering reveals the gaps between Crawford's mediated persona and lived experience. Crawford's constantly undermines her insistence that she is "normal" by revealing glimpses of the glamour girl she is. Crawford's personal attempts to fit her story to housewife are much more a caricature of housewife than true performance, which emphasizes the gulf between her everyday life and the everyday lives of her housewife audience.

Important to Crawford's, and Crawford's press's, attempts to persuade a housewife audience that she understands and values their domestic labor is her insistence that she does the same domestic work. *Screen Guide's* (1950) insistence that they show their readers a Crawford "You Might Not Know About" portrayed Crawford "sans domestic help"; their Crawford invited directors and producers to her laundry room to meet while she did her own laundry in a cotton housedress, and invited old friends to sit and talk with her while she finished scrubbing the kitchen floor on her hands and knees. They claimed, "Doing housework is one of Joan's most satisfying outlets." However, friends of Crawford portray her approach to housework, and her domestic life, differently. Crawford's insistence that she scrubs her kitchen floor on her hands and knees is the most prevalent evidence as to her domesticity. When friends are asked, they agree that yes, Crawford does scrub her own floors, but does so in eight hundred dollar designer dresses, and not the cotton housedress of the *Screen Guide* piece. While she may perform housewife, her wardrobe choice while doing so demonstrates the distance between her performance and that of her audience. The equivalent of more than \$8,000 dollars today, her

housework dress costs more than most housewives spent on their entire wardrobe in a year. Scrubbing the floors on the maid's day off allows Crawford to perform housewife, but her choice of wardrobe reveals she doesn't understand the everyday performance of the role. She needn't worry about ruining expensive clothing, as she can afford to replace it. She needn't worry about maintaining the cleanliness of her house herself, as she has a household staff.

Additionally, Lusk's (1948) portrayal of a Crawford dinner party revealed the extent to which Crawford is, actually, domestic. When he explains her frustration and tears at her cook's cold kidney bean salad instead of the warm kidney bean dish with a side salad she requested, Lusk is attempting to demonstrate Crawford's femininity as emotional and intimately concerned with domestic affairs. However, the problem here is the domestic staff, and not Crawford's domestic performance. In attempting to frame Crawford as domestic, Lusk instead emphasized her privilege, and the staff that performed domestic duties for her. Using the housewife of the social imaginary to discuss Crawford's home life often fails in similar ways, as it exposes the difference between Crawford's domesticity and that of the housewife of her audience. Crawford can essentially play at housewife when it pleases her, or when she can benefit from the story. These stories expose Crawford's attempts at domesticity as persona and not a reflection of her true experience.

Additionally problematic in attempts to know the "real" Crawford stems from her work experience. Lusk (1948) argued Joan was "always the actress" (109). While he established Crawford's character as such to demonstrate the extent to which she embodies his Hollywood ideal, his attempt at exposing her feminine domestic side is undermined by that very fact. He explained that, as a young actress, he found Crawford vulgar and persnickety, and heard his public criticisms of her character often brought her to tears. Years later, upon meeting again, she

had become one of his “ideals. The understanding and compassion in her eyes, the simplicity of her gestures—they all belonged to a star who was first of all a woman, and a woman with a troubled soul and a mothering heart” (109). He chronicled her response to his praise, and in so doing exposes the problem of his portrayal of Crawford as “first of all a woman.” She wrote:

Dear Norbert Lusk: Since I can't have you knighted, I've seen to it that you shall have saint in front of your name when you go to Heaven. What I am about to say comes from my heart. I want you to believe that. I wanted us to be friends, you and me. For a long time I've wanted that. Because as I told you, you have no enemies, so whatever stood in the way of our understanding each other was on my side. Please believe me when I say I wanted your friendship for its own sake, and not for what you could do for me in your magazine. I wanted terribly for you to know that, and now we shall never mention it again. My heart is so full of gratitude and warmth! I've tried to write and thank you dozens of times, and I couldn't. I can only say that your opinion means so much to me, that with your friendship and letters I want to work harder than I've ever worked. I want you to be so very proud of Joan (110).

In this letter, Crawford is someone who observes what others expect of her, and then works to fulfill those expectations. She shoulders all of the blame for any misunderstanding, as it was “on my side,” which means she accepts his criticisms as valid. In emphasizing the amount of work she has put into pleasing him, she reveals an eagerness to change her character to secure others' good opinions. Likewise, St. John's (1951) portrayal of Crawford's early years in Hollywood, in which she tried too hard, wore heels too high, and laughed too loud, explained Crawford had to work to be a star and learn to be a glamour icon. Crawford as actress is therefore an observer

who works to portray the woman her audience wants her to be. The “consummate actress” of Lusk’s discussion (110) points to the falsity in Crawford’s portrayals: she acts as people want her to act.

Day, on the other hand, is seemingly much more down to earth. Unlike Crawford, Day failed as a “glamour girl,” as her look is much more girl-next-door. Therefore, her persona would seem to be easier to uphold, as she doesn’t need to try to square domesticity with established expectations of glamour. However, for Day, the problem is one of what can/not be said. Day says much less of her private life, even rendering some topics off-limits to her press coverage, to obfuscate the gulf between her mediated persona and true character.

### **3.3 Illuminating the Illusion: The Problem of Doris Day**

When the wives of the first seven astronauts posed for the cover of *Life* magazine in 1959, they dressed in their “fashionable best: Doris Day-like finery for the Mercury missions” (Koppel, 2014, p. 2) to project the image of the “typical” American housewife. NASA was adamant the Mercury astronauts project an all-American image, and vital to this image was the perfect family and family life. NASA organized the wives’ publicity to introduce America to the perfect supportive wives behind their brave test pilot husbands who volunteered to lead America in the space race against the Russians. When asked to represent the American domestic ideal, the astronaut wives turned to Doris Day for guidance and inspiration, as did many other female fans of that generation. Publicity around Day’s “togetherness lifestyle,” characterized in *McCalls* in 1954 as “a comfortable suburban family life” (Higashi, 2014, p.6), encouraged adoring fans to imitate Day’s on-screen persona as the typical and ideal girl next door. Doris Day’s life seemed charmed both on-screen and off.

In truth, Day's off-screen life more closely resembled film noir storylines than those of the romantic comedies and musicals in which she starred. Pomerance (2005) argued during the Fifties, "America was a culture daydreaming of a false world, with Mr. Clean, Doris Day, General Ike, and universal luxury, without stress, Negroes, or genitalia" (312). While Day represented the American daydream of prosperity, virginity, and happy housewives, her personal life demonstrated the housewife as an American daydream and not American reality. Day's image as the perfect girl-next-door was problematic when juxtaposed the realities of her personal life. Two unhappy marriages and a number of Hollywood affairs preceded her marriage to her manager, which ended with accusations of abuse, both physical and verbal, of herself (from friends of Day but never Day herself) and her son from a previous marriage, as well as embezzlement, which resulted in a years-long court battle. On screen, however, Day's smile and voice perpetuated the myth that a woman's happiness comes from men, and careers are for single women; while she often portrays a singer, as in her first movie, *Romance on the High Seas* (1948), as well as *My Dream is Yours* (1949), the plots revolve around her relationships with men, and use her career as a platform for her singing voice and the means by which she meets the men in her life. While *Pillow Talk's* (1959) interior designer chooses to ignore numerous proposals from the man her career brought into her life, her career cements and validates her relationship with Rock Hudson's playboy songwriter. Day's onscreen persona, then, reinforces societal opinions on gender performance.

Day's press must argue this public face represents her private life to conceal her personal nonconformist lifestyle. Day's private life often failed to reflect an image compatible with her on screen persona, as she refused to sacrifice her career for her husband or her son. She left her mother to raise her son as she traveled the country as a singer, and explained her second marriage



failed because she was more successful than her husband. The Hollywood publicity machine worked hard to hide and excuse stories of infidelity, divorce, mental instability, embezzlement, and abuse. The gulf between Day's lived experience and her press coverage, as well as the ways she herself discusses her life, is extreme, and demonstrates the harm of the imaginary of housewife. By all accounts Day was unhappy and her personal life in shambles for much of the Fifties. Her press's attempts to silence this discontent and maintain Day's all-American image demonstrates the work of the social imaginary in maintaining the illusion that the social imaginary represents women's lives.

Exploring coverage of scandals in Day's life reveals the work of the imaginary, as her publicity must respond to stories which could damage her reputation and carefully crafted persona. After filming *Calamity Jane* (1953), Day's health faltered. Hollywood press circulated and attempted to silence rumors about a nervous breakdown; *Modern Screen's* (January, 1954) story of the year described these stories as "gossip, innuendo, exaggeration—everything but the truth" (Carleton, 32). This article, in attempting to silence this gossip, innuendo, and exaggeration, and replace it with a story replete with pathos for the actress's condition, reveals how the social imaginary uses housewife to silence nonconformity, excuse gender malfeasance, and define socially acceptable explanations.

Most important to the role of housewife in the social imaginary is marriage. Day's multiple divorces problematized her position of role model, making it even more vital that her third marriage, to manager Marty Melcher, be perceived as a blissful and successful union. In chronicling Hollywood gossip about Day's illness, Carleton mentioned a Los Angeles columnist's claim that "Doris Day has had what practically amounts to a nervous breakdown and chums claim that difficulties with husband Marty Melcher are a big part of her trouble" (32).

Throughout her third marriage, friends of Day would contend that Melcher was violent, both physically and verbally, to both she and her son Terry (Kaufman, 2008). Day's persistent silence on the topic, both during and after her marriage, when viewed through Ratcliffe's (1996) lens of "what is (not) being said," demonstrates one way in which Day herself contributed to the creation and perpetuation of her perfect persona within the press. Day's refusal to speak on the subject is not necessarily verification that Melcher was abusive; however, biographers now take as fact Melcher's abusive relationship with Terry, if not Day. If Melcher were abusive, Day could not speak to the problems of her marriage to the press without shattering the illusion and appeal of her ideal life. As the rumors stem from anonymous friends, a response necessitates explaining the situation as wrongly interpreted, necessarily revealing some truth of her relationship to the press. Any scenario that can be interpreted as abusive, when published, necessarily damages an ideal reputation. Day cannot speak of, or even refute, any press story of discontent in her marriage without destroying her public persona and revealing the illusion at work.

Day's press uses the components of the housewife of the social imaginary to excuse this public malfeasance in the Melcher marriage. Carleton immediately moved on from rumors about problems in the Melcher household to Melcher's comments concerning his wife's illness to portray a healthy marriage and as such disprove the gossip of marital discord. However, problematic for the publication is the falseness in Melcher's discussion. As the article purported to tell the "true" story of Day's illness, an illness previously discussed in other publications, it must frame previous press coverage as false. Melcher's presence in this press coverage, then, must also be false. Carleton used the social imaginary's representation of housewife, specifically the marital bond and relationship, to excuse Melcher's fervent lies to the press. When a

“newspaperman” asked Melcher to “level with me, Marty,” Melcher responded: “Nervous breakdown? That’s a lotta bunk. Doris is just tired. She’ll be okay. There’s nothing wrong with her...” The reporter again insisted Melcher tell him the truth: “That’s on the level now?” Melcher confirmed: “On the level” (32). Problematic in this exchange is Melcher’s twice insistence that he tells the reporter the truth. Carleton must uncover the dishonesty in Melcher’s statement without harming his, and through him Day’s, personal integrity and character. She did so by framing Melcher’s response within the social imaginary of the housewife’s perfect marriage. Carleton explained, “[Melcher] loves [Day] very much. In her hour of need, he wants only to help and protect her and if this seems to call for more tact than truth—well then, it’s understandable” (32). Carleton here both used and perpetuated assumptions about gender roles within marriage. Love creates the desire to help and protect, and misbehavior in the name of love is forgiven. However, portraying husbands as the familial protector implies women need protecting, and validates social assumptions that women are the weaker sex, and therefore dependent upon men to protect them. Carleton continued in this vein by defining Day as unwilling or incapable of protecting herself, and so in need of protection. Only once her husband and her studio have registered concern for her well-being and insisted upon a medical examination does she finally agree to consult a health-care professional. In this depiction, the men in Day’s life know what’s best for her, and do what’s best for her, most especially when she won’t do it herself. Day needs the men in her life to protect her, and make decisions for her. As Day is representative of the girl-next-door, this portrayal reinforces the ideology of the weaker sex and justifies women’s place as in the home. Day, and women, cannot be trusted to make the right decisions and need to be protected, and therefore can’t be trusted in the public sphere.

The story frames Day's illness as emblematic of the problem of public women, and as such serves the housewife of the social imaginary by portraying women as uncomfortable and even incapable in the public sphere. Carleton identified Day's medical issue as one of "cancerphobia." Day instinctively knew that she was unwell; she decided she had cancer without consulting a medical professional. At work here is the imaginary of woman's intuition, perpetuating the assumption that women are more instinctively attuned to the natural world and therefore also their bodies. Beauvoir (1945) argued the mythology of a woman's intuition stemmed from her position of immanence, as she is assumed to be biologically tied to nature and therefore unable to transcend her physical being. Woman's intuition thus can justify a "neurosis" or "phobia" which otherwise may problematize Day's position as role model, as Day's possible need for psychiatric assistance may reveal a character flaw or malady. As psychiatry at the time believed neuroses resulted from women refusing to accept their position as women (see Miller & Nowak, 1970; Rosenberg, 1980), and Day's life as a public figure necessarily eschews acceptable gender performance, her malady evidences the inability of women to successfully manage life in the public sphere.

Important to Day's image is the impression that she's an unwilling star, as it allows her to maintain the illusion that she represents the perfect housewife. Her illness, for Carleton, confirmed her disinclination towards stardom. Carleton argued Day's illness stems from her giving "her all" to a career "she never wanted" (31). Her explication of Day's search for happiness insisted Day desires a traditional life yet cannot escape her fame: "I am not a physician and I do not know the underlying causes of the psychoneuroses, but in the case of Doris Day I honestly think that this girl is unhappy because she doesn't want a career but is trapped by one.... All she has ever wanted is to leave the rat race, to get away from it, to settle down with

her husband and family in a nice, middle-class neighborhood” (110). As such, Day seemingly validates social belief that all women want to be a housewife. Day’s press used this belief to excuse her position as a public figure, as she would rather be at home with her family, but instead continues in her career for her fans. Her accidental fame keeps her from assuming the private life she desires. Day’s press does the work of the social imaginary to argue all women want the life of the housewife.

Important to the work of the social imaginary is maintaining the illusion that these stories represent Day’s opinions about proper gender roles and true lifestyle. However, this story lies in opposition to how Day herself discussed her career. When discussing the breakup of her second marriage, she explained: “The only way we’d find happiness would be for me to retire to private life... I couldn’t do that. I... worked too long and hard to get where I am to throw it all away” (as quoted in Higashi, 2014, 38). Day thus demonstrates the gulf between how women are represented and how women themselves feel, or experience housewife. She portrayed housewife as “throw[ing] it all away” and not, as Crawford does, in finding fulfillment. What Day is trapped by seems to be more the social imaginary than her career, as she can’t escape people assuming that she would rather be at home with her family.

Here Day reveals the illusion of the imaginary, as she must act as if she wishes she could be a housewife and can’t talk about how much she loves her career. The social imaginary silences Day’s ability to discuss her lifestyle and aspirations outside of the context of housewife by censoring her opinions; while Crawford’s voice is throughout her press in ghostwritten articles and interviews, Day’s voice is constantly mediated and interpreted by Hollywood reporters. Morgan and Carlson’s (1954) profile of Day insisted Day preferred her private life: “She’d rather putter in her garden than flutter at a Hollywood premier. Rather than bask in the

spotlight, she prefers to bathe in the sun” (56). Trent (1952) insisted Day “never wanted to be *somebody*. I just wanted to be married and have a family” (93, emphasis in original). Silencing Day’s reluctance to perpetuate the story that she would rather be at home obscures the illusion of representation.

The layers of Day’s persona are muddled in her press. Wade (1949) argued Day’s acting was a reflection of herself; she knew what she would do in any situation, and so she did it. Morgan & Carlson used the face of her acting career to insist she was the same person on film as in private: “Because she likes the role of Doris Day better than any she’s played on the screen, she insists on remaining ‘in character’ in her private life” (Morgan & Carlson, 1954, p. 55). This Day is confident and content. More importantly, this Day is not an actor. By reversing Stanislavski method acting, private Day and public Day are the same character, and therefore representations on screen are the same off screen.

Press here attempts to convince Day’s audience that they know her true character by watching her on-screen. However, Morgan & Carlson’s reference to Day remaining “in character” in her private life portrayed Day as constantly acting, undermining their intent to conflate the public and private Day. This character subsumed Day for even her biographers, as Braun (1991) insisted “home and marriage were the only career [Day] ever wanted” (50). However, perhaps the best insight into what Day couldn’t herself say is in her choice in husband. As she married her manager, she married a man whose income was intricately tied to her own. If she gave up her career, she would harm his as well. Therefore Day’s choice of husband negates claims that she would gladly abandon her career for her family if she could by choosing a marriage dependent upon her career. If Day were trapped by her career, it was a trap of her own devising. Day’s marriage reveals what Day herself cannot in the housewife of the Fifties social

imaginary; her aspirations and career ambition must be silenced to maintain the illusion that she represents housewife. Thus Day's publicity acts to obscure the illusion of the social imaginary that housewife represents all women.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

An analysis of Hollywood press coverage of Day and Crawford's private lives attempts to excuse their status as public figures by positioning them within the confines of the social imaginary. Crawford and Day's public faces were representative of the ways Hollywood portrayed the private lives of its stars. The importance of the home to this public representation of private lives reinforces social expectations that women are defined by their homes. Even women who are prolific and successful in the public sphere of Hollywood are expected to only truly feel comfortable and themselves in their homes; they are not "at home" in the public sphere, and therefore are necessarily out of place. In this instance, in public they are, literally, outside of proper social place by having a public life.

The controversy of communism and the assumed liberal leaning of Hollywood necessitated Hollywood stars represent American ideals. As such, Hollywood believed its women must present themselves to their fans within the imaginary of housewife. This imaginary of housewife was so hegemonic in the Fifties that even Hollywood believed the only way to make its stars acceptable role models was to represent them as conforming to the same social ideal as their fans. Hollywood thus reinforced and perpetuated the housewife as imaginary in part because the ideal of housewife was so ubiquitous and far-reaching, it penetrated even left-wing liberal Hollywood. As such, Hollywood in using the social imaginary to frame the private lives of its stars is in service to the imaginary of housewife by obscuring evidence that it is not actually representative of women's preferred place. In my next chapter, I examine the ways in

which this illusion of representation begins to fray through an analysis of *I Love Lucy* and *Leave It to Beaver*.



#### 4 LUCY AND THE BEAVE: A FRAYING IMAGINARY

June Cleaver represents the social imaginary of what it meant to be a woman, wife, and mother in the 1950s. The social imagination excuses the lack of presence within the public sphere by replacing the real life experience of this population with the existence imagined by those active within the public sphere (Asen, 2003). For feminist psychoanalytic scholars, the social imaginary is important as a male construct of what society should look like, and therefore the importance of the mother to the nostalgic male imaginary defines expectations regarding the role of women within society (see Jacobs, 2007; Irigaray, 1985a; Gatens, 1996). June Cleaver is thus important to our understanding of the 1950s, not because she represents how women lived in the 1950s, but because she represents the public representation of the role society believed women filled.

The same year June Cleaver entered American living rooms, *I Love Lucy* departed. Tension in the Ball/Arnaz marriage instigated a change from a weekly portrayal of the life of the Ricardo's to longer but less frequent glimpses of their life, now set in suburban Connecticut and titled *The Lucy and Desi Comedy Hour*. A discussion of the two seemingly divergent characters of Lucy Ricardo and June Cleaver reveals a similar problem with the housewife of the Fifties social imaginary. Televised portrayals of the imaginary of housewife allow women the opportunity to see others' discontent with the role disguised as humor. While Hollywood attempted to obscure the gap between representation and lived experience in using the housewife to define and excuse the private lives of its leading ladies, television elucidates the gap as a source of humor to parody societal gender expectations. Ball's Lucy is discontent in the role of housewife, and the humor of her portrayal, and her parody of societal expectations of women's private lives, questions the representativeness of the social imaginary. When discussed alongside

*Leave It to Beaver's* perfect housewife in June Cleaver, nostalgia combines with representations of gender expectations to reveal the fabric of the social imaginary is fraying. Television humor reveals the extent to which the illusion of housewife faltered when confronted with the lived experience of the suburban woman. Television illuminates the illusion in the social imaginary of housewife's claims to representation, and thus allows women a space in which to realize that others are malcontent in their roles of housewife. Therefore televised representations of housewife begin to create a space for women to contest the social imaginary.

#### **4.1 Loving Lucy's Discontented Housewife**

Lucy's relatability and popularity demonstrate that the illusion that the housewife is a representation of women's lived experience is fraying. Lucy's portrayal, while parodic, also argues women can't expect to live this ideal by portraying the discontent of the housewife at home. Lucy's relatability is key to exposing the housewife as an imaginary representation of the performance of housewife, as in relating to Lucy's attempts to perform housewife, her audience also relates to her failures. The humor stems from the exaggerated failure, and not from her efforts to attempt to leave the life of the housewife, primarily because, at the end of each episode, if posited the choice, she chooses Ricky. Lucy is relatable for an audience who recognizes the gap between the imaginary and lived performance of housewife, as her humor is in that gap. However, key for Lucy is that she try. In emphasizing effort, Lucy argues trying to perform housewife correctly excuses what would be inexcusable if the woman did not put forth an honest effort. Lucy's appeal to effort can be viewed as an answer to the problem of the imaginary of housewife: women recognizing the social imaginary does not reflect their lived experience. Lucy's effort can be thus seen as a response to a society who feels the housewife is an unrealistic portrayal of gender identity as Lucy portrays an imperfect housewife. Emphasizing effort and

attitude over results positions the important part of housewife performance in the attempt, and therefore it matters less if the position is a reflection of lived experience, as the attempt is relatable.

In developing *I Love Lucy*, producers, writers, and the television network all focused on finding an audience through creating relatable characters. When the idea for Lucy was first pitched, as a television spin-off of Lucille Ball's radio program *My Favorite Husband*, Lucille requested her radio show husband, Richard Denning, be replaced by her real-life husband Desi Arnaz. CBS balked at the idea of an American audience accepting an "all-American girl" married to a Cuban immigrant, and Lucille and Desi took a vaudeville act on the road to prove that they have a show Americans would want to watch. Race is an important element here, as the white, middle- and upper-class audiences are economically desirable as ones with disposable income who draw sponsorship. Therefore an interracial marriage could problematize a television show necessarily aimed at reaching, and representing, a white, suburban audience.

*Lucy* solves the problem of her interracial marriage by emphasizing its characters' relatability as middle-class. At first, the show would be a facsimile of Lucille and Desi's real life: she a successful actress and he a successful band leader. While reports about whose idea it was are conflicting, the production team of Desi, Lucille, and Jess Oppenheimer decided to make their characters more relatable by instead depicting the two as middle-class, he a struggling band leader and she a housewife. While none of the memoirs or biographies of the principle people involved in the decision making process discuss the decision to have Lucy not work, the housewife as gender type already exists in the social imaginary at this point thanks primarily to advertising, and is the assumed situation of a middle-class woman. Ball in her memoir (1996)

explains that in making Lucy a housewife with dreams of stardom but no real talent opened room for comedy ensured the audience finds her character relatable.

Lucy's characterization of housewife toes the line of acceptable and subversive. Primary to Lucy's acceptability, and her character is general, is that above all else, she tries. She tries to sing, in some episodes more successfully than in others; she tries to dance, again with mixed results; she tries to demonstrate, often with talent overshadowed by exigent circumstances; she tries to keep house for her husband and keep him happy. Without earnest attempts at pleasing her husband and acceding to these gender roles, Lucy's position as an unsuccessful actress, showgirl, dancer, television presenter and demonstrator, and housewife would be unconvincing at best, her character's just desserts at worst.

The original pilot of *Lucy* demonstrates Lucy's character as important in addressing the fraying imaginary. In the original pilot, the fraying is obvious; Lucy's sarcasm and demeanor all point to her dissatisfaction with housewife. However, in order for the show to be an acceptable portrayal of gender identity, Lucy must toe the company line, and accept her position as subservient to the man in her life. Lucy's lackluster housekeeping efforts and general disdain for the position of housewife make the original pilot problematic and ultimately untenable as a television show aimed at housewife consumers.

The recovered text of the pilot reveals the extent to which Lucy oversteps her character's position. While throughout *I Love Lucy*, we the audience understand that Lucy struggles to perform housewife, her attempts to perform her prescribed gender role correctly endear her to the audience; Lucy is a well-meaning buffoon who constantly gets in her own way. The original pilot, however, characterizes Lucy much differently. We the audience understand Lucy as a selfish and indifferent housekeeper before she says word one of dialogue, calling Lucy's

commitment to fulfilling her wifely duties into question. The set of the Ricardo's bedroom is littered with various articles of clothing, and Lucy fails to address this issue, or to make either bed in the scene (Oppenheimer, Pugh, Carroll, & Levy, 1990). Lucy's halfhearted attempt at making the bed never progresses to actual housework, as she stops fluffing pillows and arranging sheets once she is distracted by Ricky's forthcoming audition for television sponsors. The beds remain unmade while she prances around the apartment wrapped in the bedspread with a lampshade on her head, demonstrating her skills as a showgirl to Ricky as an attempt to persuade him to put her in his show. In the original pilot exists very little pretense that Lucy attempts to perform housewife; she is indifferent to the role.

Lucy's selfishness combined with this indifference undermines her claims to the identity of housewife. Ricky's first action upon awakening is to kiss his wife's head, implying Lucy is his first thought of the day and therefore his love and devotion to his wife. However, Lucy's first action is to walk to her mirror. This move establishes Lucy's selfish character by portraying Lucy's physical appearance as her first thoughts upon waking. Her initial dialogue reinforces the implication of Lucy's selfishness. To see the mirror, Lucy must remove Ricky's shirt from its surface. She muses, "He looks like he got in later than I did," as she drops the shirt on the floor beside her vanity (Oppenheimer et al, 1990, 3:13). Lucy's musing relays several notable character flaws to her audience: first, she is a married woman who stays out late without her husband; second, when she returns home, she doesn't notice whether or not her husband is home; third, she is unaware of and unconcerned with her husband's schedule or after-work activities as she gallivants through town. Lucy's move to drop her husband's shirt on the floor also establishes her character as an unwilling and unskilled homemaker. This shirt joins a wide assortment of clothing items strewn throughout the bedroom, which Lucy at no point considers

washing, folding, or putting away. Lucy's performance within the pilot thus ignores fundamental characteristics of housewife that problematize her character's later attempts to identify as housewife, and therefore limits her audience's capacity to relate to her performance.

Lucy's blatant disregard for the role of housewife in the original pilot is can be seen as a statement of protest; changes to the script from the pilot to "The Audition" make changes Lucy from a malcontent to discontentment with the role of housewife that is more subtle, understandable, and therefore relatable. In relating to Lucy's malcontent, a female audience acknowledges the housewife of the social imaginary is not representative of their everyday lives; in seeing this portrayal on television, women can recognize that their discontent is not an individual phenomenon. Changes to Lucy's character must therefore portray a Lucy who loves her husband, but feels she can contribute in the public sphere as well. In "The Audition," Lucy is no longer the wife who was out until all hours of the morning; she instead is awake when the episode begins and attempts to awaken Ricky, pleading, "Aw, come on, now, honey. You said you had an appointment at 11 and it's after 10" (Oppenheimer et al, 1951, 0:44). Ricky has told Lucy about his day and his plans, and unlike in the previous version of the script, Lucy knows her husband's plans and whereabouts. Not only does she know his schedule, but she helps to keep him on schedule by waking him. The tone of the episode establishes Lucy as a caring wife who watches over her husband. The oddity of Lucy's character is maintained in her method of waking him and preserves her desire for a life of show business as she plays Ricky's conga drum and sings "Babalú." However, she is also a devoted wife, and while she goes about her everyday tasks differently than most, the results, and intent, are the same. Ricky becomes Lucy's primary concern. Whereas in the original pilot the two main characters are often in separate rooms, in "The Audition" the two only fail to share a frame when Lucy leaves the room to prepare Ricky's

breakfast. “Audition” Lucy follows Ricky throughout the apartment, standing beside him and even mirroring his facial expressions as he shaves; “Pilot” Lucy looks in the mirror to reflect upon her own appearance. Lucy’s priorities have thus shifted from herself to her husband. In fact, even Lucy’s desire to work in show business follows this shift. She broaches the subject of joining Ricky’s show with a discussion of Burns and Allen: “George Burns uses his wife on the show” (1:36). A vague dream of being famous in the original pilot, the initial motive for this dream in episode six is an opportunity to spend more time with her husband, with fame and fortune a perk. Her intent to spend time with her husband therefore excuses her desires to step outside prescribed gender roles; she adores her husband to the point that she wants to be with him every moment of every day.

Attitudinal shifts between the two scripts turn Lucy from sarcastic to doting and thus from a blatant disregard and disrespect for the imaginary of housewife to a more subtle discontent. Pilot Lucy is told to fetch Ricky’s breakfast, and responds to his request for her presence with “Coming, Master,” as she brings his coffee (Oppenheimer et al, 1990, 9:38). Her sarcastic aside reinforces her disdain for the role of housewife as a second-class citizen within the home through its comparison to her position as one of servant. Alternatively, Audition Lucy proffers Ricky’s breakfast without prompting, accepting her role as cook and server without complaint (Oppenheimer et al, 1951). Likewise, Lucy as housewife must demonstrate the requisite skills for her audience to believe her claims to housewife as identity. While Pilot Lucy can only offer toast and coffee for Ricky’s breakfast, Audition Lucy offers a full (although undefined) meal. Pilot Lucy has no demonstrable cooking skill; Audition Lucy can both cook and bake, as she bakes Ricky his favorite pie as an apology for ruining his chance at a television show.

Ricky's role in both episodes is to validate and correct Lucy when she oversteps the role of housewife. Ricky in verbally defining the social imaginary emphasizes Lucy's inability to follow this prescribed role. When Lucy insists Ricky explain to her why he is unwilling to allow her to explore a life in show business, the exchange is nearly identical between the two episodes. In the pilot, Ricky explains: "I don't want my wife in show business . . . . We've been over this ten thousand times. I want a wife who's just a wife. Now look, all you gotta do is clean the house for me, hand me my pipe when I come home at night, cook for me, and be the mama for my children." Lucy retorts, "You don't smoke a pipe," to which Ricky responds, "It doesn't matter, just do the orders." Lucy's final rejoinder rebukes Ricky for having no imagination (Oppenheimer et al, 1990, 5:47). While in "The Audition," pipe is changed to slippers, the exchange is otherwise identical between the two episodes. Lucy in this protest of the identity to which she's been assigned allows an audience of housewives discontent with the social imaginary to find solidarity in Lucy's attempts to escape the role. Here the attitudinal shift in Lucy's character between the two episodes may be most important; while her initial sarcasm is off-putting as overbearing, her devotion to her husband allows an audience who loves their family, but not social dictates which force that family to define their entire identity, to relate to the problem at the heart of Lucy's character.

This exchange between the two characters also functions to downplay Ricky's race. Ricky explicitly gives voice to the gender expectations of the social imaginary, as he expects Lucy to cook, clean, and raise his children. Playing to the idea of Latin machismo in this context emphasizes the way Ricky is similar to his white male audience and therefore downplays the significance of his race. Ricky expects the same performance of Lucy as the social imaginary



dictates for white, middle-class women. Their interracial marriage is less problematic if the expectations on Lucy's womanhood are the same.

While the final scene of both episodes is nearly identical, Lucy's gender performance to that point in the episode alters the tone and validity of her response within the scene. Both versions end with Lucy racked with guilt over ruining Ricky's opportunity at a television show. Lucy's immediate response is to fully embody housewife to convince Ricky, her immediate audience, of the validity of her identity claim. The apron over her coat and broom in her hand reveal her intentions to embrace her obligations as housewife in her attempts to placate Ricky's temper and her commitment to correcting her performance immediately upon entering their apartment. When Ricky enters the apartment, she immediately apologizes for overstepping: "I was only trying to help you, honest. I never dreamed they'd offer me a contract" (33:36). Ricky is clearly beaten. He sits, slouched, avoids eye contact, and speaks quietly; he is the weak husband with a more talented wife given the opportunity to be more famous. He asks, "What are you going to do about it?" assuming Lucy does not seek and will not abide his advice. While Lucy's appearance forwards a claim to housewife through her apron and broom, in order for her performance to be believable, her attitude and actions must mirror her appearance. As the husband is the head of the housewife, Lucy must place the final decision as to what should be done in Ricky's hands in order to accept any pretense to the role of housewife. Therefore, instead of telling Ricky she refused the contract, or will refuse the contract, she asks, "What do you want me to do, Ricky?" (33:46), even though she knows the answer. Lucy's unconvincing claim to housewife in the original pilot problematizes the ending of the episode, as the audience cannot believe Lucy's claim to accept a socially prescribed gender role. Even Ricky, representative of a larger social audience, is seemingly surprised when Lucy chooses the lifestyle he set out for her

at the end of the episode. The subversive Lucy as a partying young wife of a famous bandleader at the beginning of the episode overwhelms the about-face her character performs at the end of the episode; her eventual acceptance of the role of housewife is unbelievable and leaves her audience to question why she chooses her husband over her career. Alternatively, in “The Audition,” Lucy is a competent housewife who values her husband and her familial role. For this character, even when she oversteps, Ricky and the audience both understand Lucy will choose her family in the end.

However, portraying Lucy’s competence outside of the home through the offer of a television contract calls attention to the problems of the social imaginary and allows an audience of housewives to question its role and function. In recognizing Lucy’s talent, the episodes both argue women can participate and even thrive in the workforce. Ricky, and the social imaginary he defines and espouses, cannot allow Lucy to find her voice and use her talents. In forcing Lucy to choose between Ricky and her career, the episodes underscore the unfairness of this social imaginary, as it silences talented female voices and contributions by manipulating them into choosing family over career. Ball’s move to create a character with which an audience of housewives can relate thus encourages this audience to see the unfairness of the imaginary and identify with Lucy’s decision to choose her husband over her career. Lucy’s portrayal of a housewife torn between her family and her career aspirations demonstrates the illusion of the housewife as a representative portrayal of women’s social position is deteriorating, as portraying a woman unhappy with social dictates as to her gender performance allows an audience of housewives to see her discontent is warranted, and shared.

Important to the ability for women in the audience to identify Lucy’s problems accepting her position as housewife is in portraying the voice mandating and defining the performance of

housewife as masculine. The original pilot and “The Audition” use Ricky to define the imaginary of housewife as a (successful) constraint on Lucy’s actions. Likewise, the plot of “Be a Pal” (Oppenheimer et al., 1951, production #3) revolves around Lucy’s inability to either perform housewife correctly or to interpret the advice in books and magazines so important to the construction of the housewife type. Frustration at a lack of attention from Ricky incentivizes Lucy to turn to a marital advice book. Importantly, the author is male. As the social imaginary is a public representation, it is created by those who participate in public discussion: in this instance, men. A male author, then, is instructing Lucy as to how to correctly perform the confines of the gender role established within the social imaginary. As Lucy attempts to follow the author’s advice, her audience can identify the problem of trying to perform a role as defined by someone unfamiliar with said role.

Lucy’s inability to correctly interpret the masculine expectations of the advice parodies the housewife of the social imaginary as well as advice manuals which purport to aid in fulfilling this imaginary’s expectations. The book’s first advice to address an inattentive husband is to “look her best” at the breakfast table. While the audience understands the book’s mandate as one in which the woman should serve breakfast dressed for her day in the home, with her makeup and hair done for the day, Lucy interprets “look her best” as evening wear. She therefore serves Ricky breakfast in an evening gown, with heavy makeup appropriate for a nightclub, hair curled and styled, heels, and her best pearl necklace and jewel earrings. Ricky continues to ignore Lucy in favor of the morning paper, and the audience’s laughter is judgment of Lucy’s inability to correctly interpret the book’s advice.

However, parodying the advice is also a subversive move which exposes the absurdity of the advice itself. Lucy’s low cut, backless dress epitomizes Fifties sexual appeal, yet Ricky

continues to read the paper instead of admire his wife's assets. The humor in Lucy's exaggerated response to the advice, and Ricky's continued obliviousness to Lucy's presence, is in mocking the assumption that a woman is to blame for her husband's inattention. Parody exposes the expectations of the social imaginary as ridiculous by using exaggeration to point a finger at contradictions and absurdities. Similarly, Ricky's insistence that Lucy meet his specific demands of housewife in the original pilot, and "The Audition," when confronted with her talent, ability, and opportunity to televise each, ridicules the assumption that women should stay at home while their husbands' earn a living. While Ricky struggles to establish himself as a band leader, and fails to secure a television contract, Lucy is able to do what he cannot. Lucy chooses her husband over her career to save her marriage, a decision with which women in her audience may be able to relate. However, in portraying Lucy as more talented than Ricky, as she secures a contract when he cannot, the audience can question the merits of her decision, and therefore the social imaginary that defines and prescribes the role of housewife more broadly, as it silences women's talent.

Lucy ignores her discontent with the role of housewife because she loves her husband and, in season two, her son. However, her repeated attempts to realize her dreams of fame, wealth, and stardom reveal the struggle to ignore this discontent. In season one alone, Lucy's search for her "big break" drives the plot in eight episodes. Lucy is alternatively shown as talented and hopeless in these plot lines, depending on whether her (lack of) talent or extraneous circumstances result in predictable, and hilarious, failure. While season two portrays Lucy as nearly completely talentless at singing, dancing, and all other aptitudes necessary in her daydream profession, in season one Lucy is predominantly a friendly, funny, and talented (albeit not at singing) presenter and dancer. A competent Lucy, as in "The Audition," invites the

audience to consider why she must ignore her talent and remain at home. A talented Lucy, as in “Lucy Does a TV Commercial,” is undermined by male ignorance and incompetence; the director of the commercial insists Lucy taste Vitameatavegamin without considering the alcohol content or its implications, and Lucy’s increasing drunkenness results in her failure. Season one Lucy, then, can be viewed as rightly discontented with her role of housewife, as she possesses talent and desires to use it. However, this talent subverts the role the social imaginary assigns to women, as it encourages Lucy to continue to try to realize her dream of stardom. Therefore season two Lucy emphasizes tone-deafness and portrays the star’s two left feet to ridicule her dreams and therefore weaken the subversive potential of Lucy’s character.

June Cleaver’s character can be seen in the same light as Lucy in season two. Each can be viewed as a response to discontent with the role of housewife, as strict gender roles attempting to silence discontent. However, the severity of June’s gender performance reveals social acknowledgement that the imaginary of housewife is imaginary, and the illusion shattering.

#### **4.2 Leave It to June?: A Fraying Imaginary**

June Cleaver first entered American living rooms October 4, 1957, serving her husband coffee at their dining room table the same day the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. Her fictional character epitomizes public memory of the 1950s and its associative gender performance. Stephanie Coontz (2000) argued against the presence of June’s actualized human counterparts in the American suburbs by meticulously articulating each aspect of Fifties society that differed from the Cleavers’ existence, from the prominence of divorce to the populations excluded from the series. Coontz’s work is primarily a response to those media and women’s history students and scholars attempting to recreate their own, or their family, connections to that type epitomized

by June.<sup>4</sup> Coontz's argument that *Leave It to Beaver* was unrepresentative of its own time ignores the significance of the show, and the reason behind its renewed popularity in syndication.<sup>5</sup> The question of the existence of June's real-life counterpart is beside the point. Whether or not women who watched June Cleaver's immaculate housekeeping could emulate it, society believed that they should, and that they tried to; women who read *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal* saw the representations within those magazines come to life in June Cleaver, and believed they should replicate that performance as well.

*Leave It to Beaver* is more a response to anxieties of the age than a reflection of the lived experience of its audience. Stephanie Coontz (2000) argued the show was nostalgic in its own time as it encouraged audiences to remember an imaginary shared idyllic childhood, as adults in the audience are encouraged to identify not with the adults of the show, but the children. In encouraging an adult audience to relate with child characters, the show creates a nostalgic tone as audiences relate with the plots and characters not as a representation of their current life, but their memories. Doing so allows adult audience to escape the anxieties of adulthood and revel for twenty-eight minutes in the memories of childhood.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthews (1980) defended the value of being "just a housewife"; Douglas (1994) used her own experiences growing up, as well as her mother's experiences as a housewife in the Fifties, to document problematic gender constructs in the mass media. Harvey (1994) collected women's oral histories to contextualize the options available to women in a climate of fear; Lopata (1971) documented her own move to the suburbs and attempts at embracing type. Coontz even seemingly argues against herself in her (2011) examination of American women who embraced and embodied the *Feminine Mystique*.

<sup>5</sup> *Leave It to Beaver* was never among the 30 most popular television shows in the Nielson ratings during its tenure, and even changed networks after its first season because CBS, its original network, decided its ratings didn't warrant continuation of the series. The show gained renewed popularity in the 1980s as it aired in syndication on *Nick at Night*, resulting in additional movies and television shows. *Beaver* as nostalgia trap assumes the show was more popular at the time than it was; the population for whom it was popular, young school children, gave the show renewed interest and popularity by bringing it back when they controlled what aired. See their respective discussions in the Columbia History of American Television, 2007.

Its opening credits establish the nostalgic tone of the show by encouraging its audience to reflect upon their own childhood. It first does so by discussing plot points of the forthcoming episode as if they mirror common childhood occurrences: breaking a window, finding a lost dog, trouble with teachers. This discussion is a call to memory. The narrator encourages the audience to remember similar situations from their own childhood by discussing these instances as common to most children. The credits are portrayed on a driveway to establish the tone of the show; a “wet paint” sign establishing shot before the stick figure drawings, animal footprints, and the show title and star credits demonstrates natural childhood inclinations to play in, and write names in, wet paint and cement. The problems of the show are good natured, and easily solved in twenty-eight minute episodes, which lends to the show’s nostalgic tone. Childhood memories are typically fond, as life through the eyes of a child can ignore, or not fully comprehend, the problems of their parents. The show in encouraging its audience to adopt the mindset of their childhood urges the audience to forget the problems of the world for those twenty-eight minutes. The context of the pilot episode airing while Sputnik first flew its orbit around the Earth establishes the problems the audience wanted to forget.

The show additionally creates this identification between adult audience and child character through attempts at realism and character depth and development. The show’s attention to character depth and development, and realistic dialogue, is on the part of the children’s characters. Mathers (1998) explained the show’s creators, Mosher and Connelly, followed their children and child actors with notebooks to record conversations and activities, and eavesdropped on conversations to learn childhood slang and speech patterns. He also described the creators deriving plot lines from real-life situations. Applebaum (1998), likewise, explained one of Connelly’s young son’s habit of dropping the first syllable of words inspired Beaver’s

character to do the same. These attempts at dialogic realism are attempts at representing real life on the small screen. The more realistic the dialogue, the more likely audiences are to identify and relate with the representations, as it reminds them of their own lived experience. In emphasizing dialogic realism on the part of their child characters, the show's creators attempt to establish realistic characters which allow an audience to relate to the show, as they can recognize similarities between their own lives and experiences and the characters. However, focusing attempts at realism on the part of the children means an adult audience is relating to the children's characters and not the adults. Therefore this recognition and identification is nostalgic, in that it encourages audiences to remember their own childhoods through relating to the show's characters, and is a step removed from their own lived experiences as adults.

Likewise, character depth and development enables an audience to accept show representations as recognizable and relatable to their own experiences. Well-developed characters allow audiences to accept them as realistic portrayals of lived experience, as the more about background, personal character, emotional responses, and impulses a show portrays, the more likely an audience can predict and understand a character's responses and actions. *Leave It to Beaver's* first season focuses this character development on the primary characters of the children, which establishes Wally and Beaver as relatable and realistic characters. First and foremost to this character depth and development is in screen time; the children of the family dominate the screen, as they are the primary focus of episodes. The show follows the boys to school, yet never Ward to work and rarely June during the school day. In some of the first episodes to air, June is shown at home while the boys are at school twice, for a total screen time of less than a minute; once, in "Captain Jack," she counts eggs: in "Beaver Gets 'Spelled'" she takes a telephone call which asks her to come to the school for a teacher conference.



Alternatively, Beaver's classroom is a primary set of the first season, and his teacher, Miss Canfield, and principal, Miss Landers, both are "supporting cast," along with several of Beaver's classmates and Wally's friend Eddie Haskell. The show maintains its focus on the experience of childhood by following the boys to school and into the classroom. Likewise, when the boys are off screen, they are the focus of their parents' dialogue. As the focus and primary characters of the show, the audience views the world of *Leave It to Beaver* through the eyes of its child characters and not the adults.

This viewpoint also means that the audience sees the adults as children see adults, which is often an idealized view of our own parents. To portray children as children, and not miniature adults, the show represents children's perspective on life as distinct from adults. In doing so, the show's point of view is a child's. Therefore the perspective on adulthood, and parenthood, is through the lens of the children of the family. In analyzing the way children perceive their parents' actions, and in calling those action into question, *Leave It to Beaver* reveals the illusion of the representativeness of the housewife as an ideal representation of gender in the Fifties social imaginary is fraying.

As an audience, we only have a vague understanding of Ward's job, as children often do not understand what their fathers' do all day; equally, we have an idealized notion of June's character, as children believe their parents' faultless. Children have little idea of what their parents' do when they are "off-screen," as the children are at school. As children would be familiar with the social imaginary, it substitutes for knowledge, and children assume their parents' adhere to that established narrative unless otherwise proven. The lack of June Cleaver's character development reveals the social imaginary at work defining the role of the mother on

the show. The first episode of the series to air was in fact the third episode produced;<sup>6</sup> the episode intended to air first had problems passing the censor because it showed a toilet.<sup>7</sup> In order to examine how June's character was established, we must look to both these episodes to see how audiences are introduced to June in "Beaver Gets 'Spelled'" (Tokar, 1957) as well as how she was meant to be introduced to audiences in "Captain Jack" (Tokar, 1957). We as the audience are first introduced to Mrs. Ward Cleaver at the dining room table as she serves her husband coffee.

The first episode establishes the wardrobe familiar to anyone familiar with June Cleaver. Her short hair is curled and styled with a left parting swooping into a small bouffant; her makeup is unassuming, and she wears a single strand pearl necklace and large gold earrings along with her wedding ring, a watch on her left wrist, and multiple bracelets on her right. Her wardrobe consists of patterned shirtwaist dresses with large collars, worn under half aprons, with stockings and plain heels. Her nails are always immaculate and polished. Three times in the first episode is she shown seeing her sons out the door to school; each time, she wears a dress, jewelry, and heels, with hair styled and makeup done. When she leaves the house, she dons a hat and overcoat and ties a silk scarf around her neck. "Beaver Gets 'Spelled'" establishes June's tidy appearance she will become known for.<sup>8</sup> This appearance immaculately follows the appearance of housewife

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<sup>6</sup> The original pilot for the series aired in April of 1957 and starred a different cast; all analysis herein focuses on episodes starring the series cast and therefore does not examine this pilot episode.

<sup>7</sup> Leave It to Beaver holds the record as first television show to show a toilet on air for its second episode, "Captain Jack"

<sup>8</sup> Women who turn to the web to defend June Cleaver (of whom there are surprisingly many who feel her under attack) often cite a Barbara Billingsley interview in which she claims June Cleaver only began wearing heels in later seasons to maintain a height difference over teenage actors experiencing growth spurts. My analysis of the first season questions Billingsley's memory, as in only two occasions is June shown wearing flats, each time as she vacuums. The vast majority of times when June's shoes are shown, she is in heels.

established in advertisements of the time; an apron to keep her dress clean while doing housework: hair styled and makeup done to look her best at all times: heels to set her figure to best advantage.

As June's appearance reinforces standards of acceptability for the appearance of housewife within advertisements of the time, her priorities reinforce women's primary concerns as defined by those same advertisements. Her first lines of dialogue in the episode demonstrate her position as caregiver of her children. She begins by asking Beaver about his new teacher; her only other lines in the scene tell her sons to take a bath and remind them about said bath when they are excused from the table. In our introduction to June, we learn nothing of her individuality or personality, and see her solely as wife and mother. Primarily, her first scene establishes a relationship with her sons where her top priority is their personal hygiene and education. Likewise, in the intended premier, "Captain Jack," June's concerns are the kitchen and her personal beauty. In a scene repeated multiple times throughout the episode, we see June counting eggs, as Wally and Beaver are pilfering eggs to feed the pet alligator they purchased through mail order. When she reports to Ward that four eggs and a second bottle of beauty cream have gone missing in the space of a week, we the audience understand that the boys have collected more than those two items, and her report thus mentions those things missing important to her everyday routine. Ward is the one to notice, and express concern, about the missing brandy; while Ward monitors the bottle of brandy, June continues to count eggs. While in this episode we meet Minerva, who June explains comes three times a week to help with cleaning and laundry, her absence in the rest of the first season implies she is solely present to provide a plausible suspect for the missing eggs, beauty cream, and brandy.

June's setting changes only twice in this episode; while in the first and last scenes we see her in her living room and visiting Captain Jack, respectively, every other scene shows June in her kitchen. June's priorities are established through the lens of the housewife of the social imaginary; her beauty and her kitchen are her primary concerns. Crucially, in neither her appearance nor her character development do we learn about June's hobbies, interests, or priorities outside of her familial role. While her children are fully developed in the first aired episode, which establishes Wally's past problems with his former teacher, now principal, Beaver's tendency towards trouble in school, the relationship between the two boys, and Beaver's trust and admiration of Wally, June's sole concern in the first aired episode, as well as the intended premier, is her children. As her character is underdeveloped, in direct opposition to the realistic portrayals of childhood in the child characters on the show, the audience is encouraged to relate with child characters and not the adults. Portraying June through the lens of childhood memories creates a character defined by the nostalgic ideal of motherhood, instead of a realistic portrayal.

This nostalgic tone creates a sense of disbelief around June's portrayal of housewife. Eddie Haskell, whose compliments are often backhanded while feigning flattery, more than once remarks at the cleanliness of June's kitchen, claiming in "Voodoo Magic" that his mother contends June must never cook or use the kitchen to keep it as clean as she does (Tokar, 1958). Portraying other, unseen, characters' in the Cleaver universe incredulity at June's perfection undermines the realism of her performance as the audience can chuckle and think that, no, June never would cook in that kitchen. The audience can relate with Mrs. Haskell, who they have never met, through shared disbelief over the status of June Cleaver's housekeeping, more than June's representation of perfect housewife.

June's strict adherence to the gender expectations created by the social imaginary exposes the problem of the imaginary of housewife. While Lucy's housewife has the freedom to explore a life outside of the role of housewife, June does not. June does not even have the freedom to explore her character outside of the role of housewife, as we the audience learn little of her background and childhood in the first season of the show. By the time of the show's premier in 1957, Betty Friedan has already begun to research and write her *Feminine Mystique*. The illusion that the housewife is representative of suburban white women's lived experience is becoming salient. June's character can be seen as a response to the problem of representativeness. When a discourse becomes particularly insistent, it is a sign of weakness rather than strength. Cleaver in her sweet and demure housewife is an insistent portrayal of housewife that reveals social anxieties over the role of housewife.

As the tone of the show is nostalgic, its characterization of nostalgia can be read as commentary of its own content. In the season one episode "Beaver's Short Pants" (Tokar, 1957), June is absent for the majority of the episode. June visits her sister Peggy to help with the arrival of Peggy's daughter and arranges for her Aunt Martha to visit to care for her "three babies." June in characterizing the men (including her husband, who had asked who would take care of the two babies she was leaving) in her life as "three babies" implies they cannot take care of themselves without a woman present, and so the presence of Aunt Martha is necessary to ensure the men eat, bathe, and change their socks, as per her admonishments to Beaver upon leaving the house. However, in representing the silly ideals of a bygone era, the portrayal of Aunt Martha in this episode can be seen as a commentary on the ideals of the era represented on the show. The show's nostalgic tone creates distance between the audience and their lived everyday experience, as in encouraging the audience to adopt the mindset of their children and childhood, the context

of the show becomes not their everyday experience, but their remembered childhood. In this light, Aunt Martha's visit reveals the nostalgic elements of the other episodes of *Leave It to Beaver*, particularly June's character, and the portrayal of gender performance on the show as equally unrealistic.

Aunt Martha's character's primary role is to emphasize that children are not miniature adults; her characterization encourages an audience response akin to "isn't it funny how we used to expect children to behave?" As Aunt Martha, who has never been married or had children of her own, is less experienced in the raising of children, specifically boys, her performance of housewife is an uninformed one and attempts to recreate an upper class ideal. June explains Aunt Martha is "old fashioned" and this establishes her aunt within the frame of nostalgia. Aunt Martha lives as if she wishes for an older, simpler time, in this case, when boys wore short pants.

In her first scene, she makes it clear that she disapproved of Ward's position in society when he married her niece by commenting that he must be doing well... now... in order to have such a nice house. She promotes the importance of an "east coast college" for her great-nephews, addresses them with their full names of Wallace and Theodore, and compliments "Wallace" by remarking on his clearly being "a Bronson." When considered alongside June's educational background at a boarding school, her Bronson family connection appears to be an upper-class (or at least upper-middle) one. This class distinction creates the primary conflict in the episode; while she despairs of the chance to rid Wally of blue jeans since he is a teenager, she sees in Beaver (Theodore) the opportunity to recreate the "ideal" child by providing him with a new wardrobe. While Beaver hopes she will buy him a leather jacket with a large eagle on its back, she instead has a suit, complete with short pants, knee-high stockings, and a hat, tailor made for the boy. The suit represents Aunt Martha's ignorance as to the realities of a boy's life at school

and at play as well as the disparity between the imagined ideal and reality of male childhood. In this episode alone, the realities of Beaver's life include a dead goldfish saved in the pocket of his pants for a funeral service officiated by Wally and a fight with several classmates, including Whitey, Larry, and Judy, over his short pants and exposed knees. As the boys are the primary characters of the show, the audience feels Beaver's embarrassment when he must wear his new outfit to school. However, as the audience are in fact adults, their personal experience also means they know that life doesn't follow expectations. This sentiment inspires the humor in the Aunt Martha episode, as audiences can laugh at the woman's insistence that Beaver wear a hat and short pants to school, and keep his nice clothes clean and intact, as they understand through previous episodes that Beaver can do neither. Ward's actions in the episode, instead of undermining Aunt Martha, portray his approach to childhood as informed and sympathetic. Instead of judging Aunt Martha, we can laugh at her expectations and find her endearing, as she only means well, and her lack of experience means she doesn't understand what life is actually like as a child. However, this representation emphasizes the gap between Aunt Martha's ideal child and the reality of childhood. In emphasizing the gap between the ideal and reality, Aunt Martha's expectations for Beaver are problematic. This emphasis when considered alongside the ideal housewife of June Cleaver allows the audience to consider the gulf between the ideal housewife of June Cleaver and their own lived experience of housewife. Aunt Martha reveals the illusion of the ideal as representative.

June before she leaves explains Aunt Martha's views as nostalgic, telling her sons that Aunt Martha is an older person who has not been young in a long time and therefore has a distorted memory of childhood and, implicitly, distorted expectations of children. June's mothering accounts for dirty boys who must be told and reminded to change their socks and

bathe, while Aunt Martha's substitute mothering sees boys as small adults with no room for the idiosyncrasies of childhood. Comparing June's performance of housewife to her Aunt Martha's performance of the same frames June's performance as a representation of housewife in the "real world" and adapted to the struggles of real mothers, who deal with dead goldfish in little boy's pockets every day. However, the nostalgic tone of the show as a whole mirrors the nostalgic characterization of Aunt Martha. Seen in this light, the show as seen through the eyes of the protagonists Beaver and Wally is an equally uninformed view of parenthood and adulthood. An audience of adults, with knowledge as to the anxieties and pressures of adulthood, can equally laugh good-naturedly as they themselves remember their idealized view of adulthood as children. In this lens, June's gender performance is equally nostalgic and idealized, and an audience of adults would recognize her performance as idealistic and not realistic. Therefore June's portrayal reveals the illusion of the housewife as representative is beginning to fray.

In this light, the portrayal of gender in *Leave It to Beaver* is rendered old-fashioned. The show, as it continues, maintains June's strict gender performance which adheres to the housewife of the social imaginary. As June is representative of the ideal housewife, the setting of the house contributes to the creation and development of her character. "Beaver and Henry" (Tokar, 1958) establishes that only June, of all the family members, knows where things are kept in the kitchen, which is always spotless, even when June is seen cooking. In "Beaver's Guest" (Tokar, 1958), we see June reading a cookbook to maintain her cooking skills, reinforcing the importance of cooking to performing housewife. A long scene from this episode, however, reveals the impact of nostalgia on the show's portrayal of gender. When Wally asks, "You know, Dad, it's funny. Whenever we cook inside, Mom always does the cooking. And whenever we cook outside, you always do it. How come?" Ward responds: "Well, it's sort of traditional I guess. You know, they



says a woman's place is in the home. And I suppose as long as she's in the home, she may as well be in the kitchen." Wally presses Ward. "That explains about Mom. But how come you always do the outside cooking?" Ward answers: "Well I'll tell you, son. Women do all right when they have all the modern conveniences. But us men are better at this rugged type of outdoor cooking. Sort of a throwback to the caveman days." Ward here in describing "a woman's place [a]s in the home" as traditional aligns June's role with a custom or ritual that unifies women across generations; his "throwback to the caveman days" does the same for men. The humor in this encounter for its Fifties audience of canned laughter comes in the contradiction of this "caveman" identity and Ward's "asbestos gloves" which he uses to protect his hands from the heat of the grill. Wally recognizes the contradiction as well, as his raised eyebrows at his father's almost immediate reversal from the rugged outdoor type of the caveman instigates the audience laughter. Ward's performative contradiction, and the ensuing laughter, emphasizes the difference between social thought about gender and lived experience. While Ward thinks of himself as masculine, and derides "modern conveniences" as women's help, Wally, and the audience, recognize the asbestos gloves as a modern convenience that calls into question Ward's view of himself as akin to cavemen. Ward's performance of masculinity contrasts his discussion of masculinity. The immediacy of his contradiction then calls into question his discussion of femininity. His failure to recognize that he doesn't live up to his own ideals of masculine behavior means he may also fail to recognize the difference between his wife's gender experience and his own gender expectations.

Additionally, the nostalgic tone of the show positions Ward's social views as old fashioned, as the audience views Ward through the eyes of his sons. In laughing at Ward's anti-rugged performance of masculinity, the audience is also laughing at Ward's outdated notions of a

woman's place. In the episode with Aunt Martha, Ward's primary concern is that June is leaving him, and asks who will care for her "babies" as she aids her sister with a newborn. June's response that Aunt Martha will care for her "three babies" and Ward's reaction are understandable laugh lines, as in-law visits are often unwelcome and uncomfortable. However, the premise that Ward cannot care for himself or his own children, implied in June's description of all three as "babies," and needs a woman in the house to care for him, is problematic. While June may seem to exceed even Ward's expectations of perfection, on closer inspection, the show uses its nostalgic tone to call the realism of her performance into question. Viewed through the eyes of her children, June is the perfect mother. However, viewing adulthood through the eyes of childhood necessarily idealizes motherhood, as children don't understand adult concerns and problems. Childhood remembrance uses nostalgia to create an idealized image and memory of parents. As such, the show positions the gendered expectations of the social imaginary as a nostalgic, and unrealistic, memory of an earlier time, and provides a space in which women can begin to question the representative nature of the imaginary of housewife.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

Early situation comedies presented suburban family life as representative of their television audience. June Cleaver is retroactively considered representative of a cultural ideal, and through her televised portrayal, history scholars have used her to demonstrate the housewife as either an ubiquitous or inauthentic representation of the Fifties woman. However, when analyzed through the lens of the social imaginary, television provides a space in which audiences can identify and relate with characters who question the representativeness of the social imaginary. The housewife is an imaginary which isolates the population it replaces in the public

sphere, prohibiting women's ability to call its representation of gender performance into question by isolating them both from the public sphere and from each other in individual suburban homes.

Television in its attempts to reach and encourage identification with an audience portrays problems audiences understand and experience, whether it be Lucy's overspending, Ricky's messiness, Wally and Beaver's rambunctiousness, or Ward's unrealistic expectations of gender performance. Situation comedies encourage audiences to recognize the humor in their everyday lives by exaggerating realistic storylines to emphasize humor; in doing so, they expose those aspects of the everyday which are ridiculous and absurd. Portrayals of the suburban and familial every day, whether it be Lucy and Ricky's New York apartment or Ward and June's unspecified suburban neighborhood, finds humor in the gap between social expectations of gender performance and lived experience. While Hollywood attempts to hide this gap, television capitalizes upon it to create memorable and beloved characters like Lucy and Ricky. In doing so, television both reveals and justifies the discontent of women with the role of housewife. The nostalgic tone of *Leave It to Beaver* defines June's gender performance as idealized, unrealistic, and old fashioned. A talented Lucy Ricardo's attempts to silence her aspirations and fulfill Ricky's gender expectations exposes and critiques the waste of talent in keeping women in the home. Parody and humor in television reveals an audience's growing dissatisfaction with the social imaginary of housewife.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Examining the Fifties housewife through the lens of the social imaginary explains how the housewife silences alternative gender performances to become the dominant representation of gender within popular culture. While feminist scholarship uses the concept of imaginary to understand individual women's relationship to societal pressures of conformity, the housewife as a part of the Fifties social imaginary exposes both how those pressures contribute to the creation of imaginary as well as the complexities of the housewife as both individual and collective imaginaries. As an individual imaginary, women expect housewife to reflect their lived experience, and use the housewife to understand how their gender should be performed. The problem with the housewife in the collective imaginary, for women, is that they failed to find it representative; they didn't see themselves reflected back. The social imaginary, in replacing minority voices in the public sphere, also provides inroads for these minority populations by providing them a public representation to refute and protest against. Television begins to provide a space in which women can form a community to protest the social imaginary by using the discontent of housewives, and the unrepresentativeness of the social imaginary, as the foundation of its humor. The imaginary offers a bridge to women silenced and oppressed by social constraints by giving them something public to fight against. As such, when women begin to find this imaginary unrepresentative, they can begin to protest its position in the public sphere.

However, as a collective imaginary, women are not the sole audience of housewife. The housewife as a part of the collective imaginary defines women's place in society, and as such reaches the larger, social, public audience. Therefore the collective imaginary defines gender in the minds of both men and women. While the individual imaginary can bring isolated women together through a shared frustration with gender expectations, the collective imaginary is the

force which women must fight against. Therefore the larger problem of the social imaginary is in convincing society that it isn't representative of that population. Asen's (2003) discussion of the roots of the social imaginary of "welfare queen" exposed the fallacy of the narrative while exploring the reasons the story continues to resonate in certain political circles. While the problem of the housewife of the social imaginary is that women didn't find it representative, as women couldn't contribute to the creation, circulation, or acceptance of the social imaginary, changing the mind of the patriarchal society which created the imaginary, and its white male audience, is a challenge.

The power of the social imaginary is difficult to overcome. Even through protest, women have not been able to completely eliminate the presence of the housewife in the social imaginary, or even disprove its representativeness. Histories continue to be written in which women use the social imaginary to frame women's lives in the suburbs, and feminist theory continues to argue against the housewife and its implications for views on women and women's work. Claiming to be "post-feminists," a movement of women embrace the title of "hockey mom" or "soccer mom" or "housewife," as if being allowed to have a job and raise children at the same time demonstrates the housewife is dead and buried in the social imaginary. The important tenets of the social imaginary, primarily in regards to women's reproductive capacity, continues to define the unpaid domestic labor of housework and childcare as primarily woman's responsibilities. While not true for every relationship, the man who seeks paternity leave, or who accepts the position of primary parent, is the exception.

The concept of housewife as the ideal representation of gender in the social imaginary explains both feminists' abilities to contest and protest the image as unrepresentative, and patriarchal society's continued insistence that housewife represents all women. Dow's (2014)

analysis of media coverage of the women's liberation movement in 1970 illuminated the problem for the feminist movement in swaying popular opinion, and as such exposes the difficulty in overcoming the social imaginary as well. Dow argued:

A rhetorical perspective emphasizes the ways in which discourse is always produced with an audience in mind, and I bring this sensibility to understanding not only what feminists believed themselves to be up to when they took their issues to a public stage, but also to understanding how news workers were always already addressing an imagined viewer when they represented those issues and activities. If news addresses its viewers as citizens, to whom it presumably provides 'knowledge about the real historical world, knowledge that will lead to action *in* the world,' then the subject position of 'citizen' is generally assumed to be occupied by white males, an assumption that reverberates in specific ways when the topic is feminism. (p. 12; Thornham, 2007, p. 85, emphasis in original)

For Dow's analysis, the problem with mediated coverage of the Seventies feminist movement was that network newscasts are produced by white men and target an audience of white men. To this audience, she argued, feminists' complaints about the housewife seemed superficial and trivial when compared to the protests for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. Dow's discussion of audience for these network news broadcasts articulated two problems with audience for feminist scholars: one, audiences are assumed to be white males; two, Seventies women, as well as women of my audience in the Fifties, had difficulty in understanding themselves as audience or citizen, as they cannot have confidence their knowledge will "lead to action *in* the world." Important to women understanding their capacity for change as an audience is in creating a space for women to overcome the isolation of the suburbs. However, they must

also convince that audience of white males, who are aware of themselves of agents of change in the world, that the social imaginary is a fiction and not reality.

Dow articulated an additional layer to the problem in her discussion of the women's liberation movement itself. Its two factions, "liberal" and "radical," maintained opposing media strategies. The liberal feminist faction attempted to use its media ties to fit their issues within accepted parameters, focusing on specific goals and attempting to frame their issues to reach this audience of white men. Radical feminist factions, however, recognized the media as patriarchal, and instead focused on reaching an intended audience of women to further the cause instead of the white male network news audience. They shunned all attempts to define leadership within their movement, as they regarded hierarchy as patriarchal, and refused to identify goals. This distinction is important in understanding the persistence of the imaginary of housewife. Liberal feminism's focus on equal pay, equal representation, and equal opportunity, epitomized in the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment, was dealt a devastating blow at the inability to pass the amendment in the required time. Equally, radical feminism's mediated portrayal coined many of the detrimental caricatures of feminism still present in society today: man-hating, bra-burning lesbians. This divided coverage proved detrimental to the ability for women to enact change in a predominantly white male audience, evidenced in the continued presence of the housewife in today's social imaginary, as well as its continued influence over gender roles and performance.

An analysis of gender within political debate demonstrates the difficulty in convincing a white male audience the imaginary is, in fact, imaginary. The significance of this project is in identifying the ways representations of housewife in the social imaginary manipulates social expectations about gender to continue to define gender expectations even after housewife itself is understood as unrepresentative of women's lived experience. The housewife in the social

imaginary has changed names, and adapted with the times, in response to women's movements protests, but it still underscores socially acceptable gender performance. Women who fail to accede to the elements of housewife which remain continue to be socially judged and ridiculed.

### **5.1 John Kasich: The Real Housewives**

John Kasich described his first campaign in 1978 as “an army of people and many women who left their kitchens to go out and go door to door and to put yard signs up for me” (NBC News, 2016). Public reaction was swift and judgmental, as audiences reading his comments out of the context of his first campaign resented the notion that women spend their time in the kitchen. This social backlash forced an almost immediate non-apology apology in which Kasich argued his comments were only offensive if taken out of context. However, the assumption that taking his comments in context forgives his sexist language gets to the crux of the argument of this dissertation.

Kasich's argument for context contends audiences apply his comment to his presidential campaign, and not his first campaign for State Senate. However, arguing “the kitchen” can represent women's place in 1978 demonstrates the continued power of the social imaginary even after the Seventies Women's Liberation movement. In context, Kasich's out-of-the-kitchen reference reflects popular syntax as to how society describes stay-at-home moms; the kitchen is at the heart of women's work within the home, and therefore metonymically represents the work and life of the housewife. Describing post-war women forced “back to the kitchen” and post-Movement women coming “out of the kitchen” bolsters the kitchen as symbolic representation of the role, and oppression, of the housewife. Kasich in using the kitchen to metonymically represent women's position silences the fact that these women volunteering for his campaign had jobs as well as families, perpetuating the social imaginary by continuing to define women's most



important work in the home. Kasich argued women volunteers gathered in kitchens to strategize and coordinate efforts, hence his portrayal of the women who worked for his campaign. As such, Kasich maintains the kitchen as the center of women's work, and a feminine space. Meeting in kitchens, as opposed to other rooms in the house, reinforces the kitchen as the epicenter of a woman's world.

The kitchen is the space in the home in which the majority of a housewife's work is completed; the kitchen is the scene both of cooking and of the majority of cleaning. The two USS Steel advertisements discussed in Chapter Two emphasize the importance of the kitchen as women's work by representing two populations emulating housewife: young girls and husbands. Positioning young girls in the kitchen, performing the work of their mothers by washing dishes, reinforces the innateness of the role of housewife, as the girls perform housewife correctly without parental guidance. The husband of the second advertisement, however, cannot perform housewife even while reading a guide with step-by-step instructions, i.e. a cookbook. In portraying women at ease in the kitchen, regardless of age, and men as out of place and unable to perform in the kitchen, the social imaginary defines the kitchen as a feminine space. Likewise, Kasich's metonymic use of the kitchen to represent the place in which his campaign thrived amongst women upholds the ideal housewife of the social imaginary, even after Women's Liberation has fought publically for a decade against the housewife imaginary. Therefore Kasich's belief that his statement is, in context, inoffensive as a true representation of the role of the women who supported him demonstrates the ways the housewife as a construct continues to define and constrain socially acceptable gender performance, as accepting the kitchen as symbolic representation of women's place, in context or not and currently or in the past, sanctions arguments that the home is a woman's natural habitat.

Responses to Kasich's statement expose the nature of the housewife imaginary. Kasich's description of the women who worked on his initial campaign exposes what he knows about their lived experiences as the best way to describe them, and what he knows of that experience is the housewife of the social imaginary. Kasich's comment categorizes (late Seventies) women in general as stay-at-home mothers and housewives who move outside of this restrictive type to participate in public elections and reflects the longevity of the role of housewife. Women in his audience self-identify as either within or without this particular gender role. As society moves away from the imaginary of housewife, fewer women identify within the gender role, and therefore he addresses a shrinking audience. Women who identify outside of this gender role are likely to take offense at the imaginary he references, as it both perpetuates patriarchal oppression in the division of labor and ignores the gains of the women's liberation movement in moving beyond the role of housewife. However, the imaginary remains in public discourse, as women must continue to fight against the perception that she belongs, or comes out of, the kitchen. A woman in his audience retorted, "I'll come to support you but I won't be coming out of the kitchen" (NBC News, 2016). Importantly, as women who support Kasich show, the fight against this imaginary is an individual one; his supporter says that *she* "won't be coming out of the kitchen," and in specifying her own position perpetuates the assumption that there are other women who will be "coming out of the kitchen." This individualized response to Kasich grants the premise that there are women who do come out of the kitchen, and as such the housewife imaginary does represent a real population, and she merely excludes herself from that population. Such responses encourage the housewife imaginary to continue to represent women by implying it does represent part of the population. In granting the premise of housewife, individualized responses which support individuals who perpetuate the imaginary, even if they

make it clear the imaginary doesn't apply to themselves, in turn contribute to the imaginary, as they support and elect men who keep the imaginary present in social discourse.

Women's response to Kasich's comments, then, demonstrates the continued problem of the role of housewife. The kitchen continues to symbolically represent a woman's place in public dialogue, which perpetuates the assumption that domestic concerns, and domestic labor, are still predominantly women's work. While domestic chores are more and more equally divided, media coverage and political campaigns continue to frame domestic labor as feminine, with implications on women's position in the workforce. Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign demonstrates the ways framing domestic labor as women's responsibility prejudices her position in the larger workforce.

## **5.2 Mitt Romney's Binder**

Romney's answer to the question, "In what new ways do you intend to rectify inequality in the workplace, specifically regarding females making only 72% of what their male counterparts earn," in the second debate of the 2012 presidential campaign almost instantly became an internet meme. His "whole binders full of women" comment sparked internet debate and mockery as women balked at the concept of women contained within a binder, as well as a popular Halloween costume. Like Kasich, he claimed the phrase is acceptable in context. However, once again the context reveals the social implications and hangover of the role of housewife.

An exploration of the context of Romney's comment exposes the continued presence of the housewife at work in the social imaginary, particularly in representations of women in the workforce. Romney's response begins: "I learned a great deal about [this topic] when I was governor" (*The Telegraph*, 2012). First of all, this implies he wasn't aware of the problem as a

prominent, wealthy, and successful businessman. This necessarily means he didn't think representation of women in the workplace a problem before he became governor, a more public position. Secondly, Romney clearly didn't know any "good" women to hire, and therefore had to request other people, in his campaign and in women's groups, go out and "find" them. Romney's argument that context establishes his position as reasonable underscores his ignorance of women in the workplace, as his own establishing context is that he didn't know any, or that a problem existed, and it had to be brought to his attention.

Romney's portrayal of the binder full of qualified women's application materials implies he noticed the problem of women's representation and sought to fix it. He portrays his recruitment effort as the reason he had any women working in his administration. As such, Romney positions himself as the generous man who reaches out to lend a helping hand to women; he had to go seek women out, as they didn't come to him. This action positions Romney as women's benevolent force welcoming them to the public workforce: Romney as women's liberator. In awarding himself the position of liberator, he perpetuates the assumption that women need help finding footing in the public sphere, and he is almost a modern knight in shining armor helping a damsel in distress find the job of her dreams. In Romney's portrayal of his search for women in his administration, then, Romney perpetuates the assumption that women need men to give them permission to have a role in the public sphere.

However, women's groups immediately argued these binders are given to all public positions of authority by women's groups like Emily's List (see Steinem, 2015), calling Romney's own context into question. These women's groups send similar binders to most governors and public servants to encourage them to increase gender diversity among their staff. As such, women are the ones who "taught" Romney "a great deal about" the lack of women

staffers in political campaigns and administrations. Romney then takes the credit for female action, silencing women's activist role and therefore accomplishments. His decision to hire a female chief of staff, instead of being perceived as a successful campaign on the part of women, for women, is instead appropriated by the man in charge.

More problematic than the "binders full of women" controversy, however, is the way in which Romney frames working women, and reveals the extent to which the imaginary of housewife continues to structure how society understands and discusses working women. Romney instead of answering the question asked begins to talk about how workplaces need to adapt to accommodate women's particular needs. As such, his answer emphasizes differences in the ability and position of men and women in the workplace. While the workplace as structured was clearly defined by patriarchal society, for patriarchal society, Romney's example actually argues women want equality within the existing structure, and not a new structure entirely. According to Romney, in hiring a woman as his chief of staff, he needed to open the position to flexible working hours. He argues his chief of staff's request to spend time with her children necessitates he accommodate a mother's schedule. However, his example undermines his own argument. As he explains it, his chief of staff explains she can't work until seven or eight o'clock at night; she asks to be able to head home at five o'clock to make dinner for her children. Romney adds that she asked to be there when her children get home from school; however, in specifying five o'clock as the end of the workday, it seems to be a misinterpretation of the request, as schools let out much before five. As Romney lays out her argument, his chief of staff asks for a normal work day, as five o'clock is a typical time at which workers go home. While this may not be typical in a governmental administration, portraying leaving work at five o'clock as a "flexible schedule" demonstrates Romney has little idea as to the work lives of the members

of his audience. His story explaining that women needs businesses to work with their schedules falters, as his example is a woman asking not for special treatment, but to the same treatment as male counterparts in the business world.

Additionally, Romney's portrayal of his chief of staff's domestic responsibilities perpetuates remnants of the ideal housewife in the social imaginary which continue to position domestic chores and childcare as women's work. In explaining that she needed to be home at the end of the school day, Romney positions women as responsible for child rearing. In extrapolating from his story to the general population of working women, he perpetuates the belief that mothers can work, as long as they are home for their children when necessary. Romney's "flexible schedule" therefore implies women can't work a "regular" schedule because they need to be open to their children's schedules and demands. Thus children remain women's primary concern, and their career must come second. Additionally, Romney's chief of staff in his story specifies that she must make dinner for her children. Romney thus manages to introduce the kitchen to his discussion without mentioning the word itself. Implying working women must continue to shoulder the responsibility of providing family meals maintains social divisions of domestic labor as defined by the housewife imaginary. As such, working women in public discourse continue to fall victim to the same gender expectations established in the housewife imaginary; they can "have it all," "to have marriage and a career, both" (*Time*, 1951), as long as they recognize they must do both. Working women are constrained by the housewife of the social imaginary in that they continue to be expected to fulfill the domestic labor of housewife even if they choose to have a career as well.

### 5.3 First Lady Problems

If the highest office in the land is President, the First Lady is the highest office, and most prominent role, for women, as no women as of this writing has been elected President. The role of First Lady within the administration, and standards of acceptable performance on the part of First Lady, perpetuate the constraints of the housewife in the social imaginary. The First Lady is not only an unpaid position within the administration, but she is also legally prohibited from continuing her career, or earning a salary, while her husband is in office. Politically, the role of First Lady is primarily one of American hostess, and these women are expected to play the part of the happy White House-wife.

The housewife of the social imaginary has become a politically ideological question, evidenced in mediated discussions as to the proper role of the First Lady. The question over paying the First Lady a salary pits Michelle Obama against Laura Bush in the conservative press. Obama, while campaigning for her husband in 2012, complained “numerous times” that the First Lady is an unsalaried position. She and her husband both articulated the numerous responsibilities and hectic schedule of the First Lady as she works with the administration. The Obamas argued that Michelle’s contributions to the administration should earn her compensation. This debate mirrors the problem of domestic labor, as domestic work, understood through the lens of the housewife of the social imaginary as feminine, is unpaid, and therefore undervalued in a capitalist society which equates value and money.

In response to the Obamas, Laura Bush, when asked in a C-Span interview if the First Lady should receive a salary, answered: “I don’t think so. There are plenty of perks, believe me. A chef, that was really great. I really miss the chef” (*C-Span*, 2014). The conservative mediated response to this “feud,” in which Bush goes on to question the legitimacy of legislation which

prohibits the First Lady from earning a salary from any career, found Bush's articulation of the "perks" insufficient, and added "taxpayer funded vacations around the world, shopping sprees, private jets" to the list of benefits Obama receives as First Lady (*Political Insider*). While Bush's "perk" relieves her of a domestic obligation, as she has someone to cook for her, these additional perks emphasize Obama's "bad attitude" as she asks her contributions to the administration be recognized, and compensated, as work. Portraying diplomatic visits abroad as "vacation" undermines the importance of Obama's presence, and popularity, abroad, as she travels both alone and with her husband. Providing Obama "shopping sprees" positions Obama as the happy Fifties housewife in a prosperous home, spending her husband's money. Her ungratefulness in accepting these "perks" as compensation for the work of First Lady is in opposition to Bush's "classy" response. For the conservative media, then, Obama's attempts to define the role of First Lady as a job is tacky. Her husband makes plenty of money, and she receives numerous benefits from her husband's position, so she should be grateful for what she has. The debate between salary and perks for the First Lady thus perpetuates the ideal of the housewife in the social imaginary by assuming that women with a husband who can provide "vacations and shopping sprees" not only don't need to work, but shouldn't.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's life in the public sphere is perhaps the clearest example of the ways society continues to judge and ridicule gender malfeasance. The question as to Clinton's qualifications for the presidency, especially considering those of her opposition, reveals the extent to which those assumptions about women's ability to perform in the public sphere continue to define and critique women's suitability for public office. Clinton's experience as a First Lady who played a vital role in her husband's administration is never considered as a qualification for the presidency. The problem for Clinton is that political opposition judged her



throughout her husband's presidency for presuming to have a hand in shaping policy, particularly on health care legislation, and now presumes that, as a wife, she had no significant contribution to her husband's administration. She was therefore judged during her tenure at the White House for failing to accept the role of submissive wife that now retroactively defines her role in her husband's administration. As such, a candidate's eight years of experience dealing with a hostile Congress is silenced by her gender. Clinton's tenure at the White House demonstrates social response to women who fail to accept society's parameters as to the performance of wife. Additionally, Clinton is socially judged by those standards which she publically refused and contested, regardless of her personal performance. Therefore the role of wife silences the qualifications she earned as First Lady. Clinton thus also demonstrates how the social imaginary responds to those who publically defy it; it defines her performance regardless, and silences her protest, by eliminating her presence in public memory.

As such, the housewife continues to be the arbiter of women's acceptability. Hillary's public life, and the public judgment of her private life, provide insight into the ways society continues to use the parameters of housewife, primarily in regards to marital relations and a commitment to domestic duties, to evaluate a woman's character and integrity. Women's appearance in public debate, particularly on the Republican side, permit women's public presence so long as they continue to accept and excel at their domestic duties. Romney can accept his chief of staff's "flexible schedule" because she prioritizes her children, and accommodating women in the workforce means accepting that their family comes before their career. Does this necessarily imply that, for men, career comes before family? Kasich's army of housewives helping him earn his seat in the Ohio State Senate are permitted to leave their kitchens to go door to door campaigning for the young candidate, yet for their presence in his

campaign, the political is personal, as their role is based on reaching others “door-to-door.” As such, women’s participation in Kasich politics reaches other women, as in leaving their kitchens to go door-to-door, these women would reach other women, apparently in their own kitchens, as women are the ones who are home. Women’s outreach is acceptable, so long as their audience is other women.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: Ages of Anxieties**

The Fifties social imaginary continues to dictate societal pressure on women to accept and perform domestic tasks. Analyzing the imaginary as a response to the age of anxiety explains why these social constraints are more prominent, and more difficult to argue against, at other times of heightened social anxieties. Johnson (2005) articulated parallels between McCarthyism and the post-9/11 political climate: “The parallels between past and present raise the oldest of democratic dilemmas: how to safeguard the nation’s security without jeopardizing its liberties. They tell a terrible, and terribly familiar, story: how fear can produce abuses that damage individuals and dishonor America in the name of making both safer” (466-7). Likewise, May’s (2008) epilogue articulated the similarities in climate between Cold War anxieties of the Fifties and post-September 11<sup>th</sup> America and the War on Terror, as anxieties concerning potential attacks on American soil parallel fears of mutually assured destruction and manifest socially in more conservative and restrictive gender roles. The housewife as the representation of white, middle-class, suburban women in the social imaginary created out of and in response to Cold War anxieties thus reasserts its dominance at times of heightened social anxieties.

The housewife of the social imaginary was forced to adapt to the force of the Women’s Liberation movement of the Seventies. Undermining its representativeness weakens the individual imaginary, as women acknowledge housewife doesn’t reflect their lived experience;

however, as a gender construct in the social imaginary it continues to define the underlying principles guiding socially acceptable gender performance. Understanding the role of the housewife in the social imaginary explains the ability of the housewife as a gender performance to continue to define women's social place long after the women's movement brought its unrepresentative and oppressive nature to light.

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