

ABSTRACT

Trapped in the Kitchen: *How Advertising Defined Women's Roles in 1950s America*

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This thesis examines the portrayal of middle-class women and their role in 1950's America. The primary evidence comes from advertisements published in four popular magazines of the decade: *Saturday Evening Post*, *LIFE*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. These advertisements primarily limited the placement of women into two overlapping molds, the wife and mother, perpetuating specific qualities that women should uphold to succeed in these roles. The ideal wife of advertising was eager, domestic, and competitive. The ideal mother then built off those qualities to become pleasing, nourishing, and thrifty for her family. Advertising also demonstrated the need for training young girls to prepare them for such duties. Lastly, advertising assumed that even when portrayed in different settings, a woman is never disconnected from her role as wife or mother. Lastly, an analytical comparison is made between the reality of 1950's women and their idealized, advertised roles.

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TRAPPED IN THE KITCHEN:
HOW ADVERTISING DEFINED WOMEN'S ROLES IN 1950s AMERICA

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Advertising the Domestic Life

*Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same...*

-Malvina Reynolds, "Little Boxes"

The quote above comes from one of the most accurate portrayals of the stereotyped 1950's life. This is Malvina Reynolds' 1962 song "Little Boxes." A critical satire, Reynolds sings of the rapid suburbanization that took over America post World War II. Builders began constructing little houses on small plots of land to create massive planned communities like that of Levittown, NY shown below in figure 1.1. Just looking at the aerial photographs of such developments, it becomes clear why Reynolds describes them as little boxes that all look just the same. These homes became an oasis away from the city; a place where businessmen could retire for the night away from their workplace troubles, where children could be raised among watchful mothers, where the comforts of modern American could be embraced. As the limited designs of the homes reflected the air of conformity that persisted in the 1950s, society expected the people who inhabited the new home to conform along with them.



Figure 1.1 Levittown, NY:
Rise of Suburbia

By 1951, this mass-produced suburbia became synonymous with the most idealized role of the decade, the housewife. In media the family of four popped up everywhere, with two beautiful children, a handsome father in a suit or cardigan and perhaps carrying a pipe, and most important for this thesis, the mother with her immaculate curls and a string of pearls. While television and movies often showcased the American family on their screens, advertising of the time is where this ideal family gained its popularity. Advertising managed to create scenes in a 4" by 4" that captured more of America's values in less time than radio or television. All it took is a five second glance at an advertisement for a reader to walk away with how they should dress, act, and think in order to be a certain way. No other form of mass media provided something physical a viewer could look at over and over again. Radio advertisements were only sound and television only fleeting images, but magazine advertisements could be cut out and seen multiple times a day. One reason why advertising is so effective in today's society is because of how prominent and present it is. In the 1950s, this was no different. Every

newspaper and magazines had advertisements coating their pages. Overall, advertisements are a really effective source, because they provided a physical snapshot of the values from a time period. In the 1950s advertisers used the idea of the nuclear family and the consumer lifestyle to convey values in their advertisements. So, whether an ad for cigarettes, a new Chevy, Campbell's soup, or a new washing machine, advertising encouraged America to accept this consumerist, middle class suburban life. As American life went through significant changes in the years following World War II, stability quickly became the most important thing for society to achieve. Whether in the form of material comfort, political strength, or a tight nuclear family, stability and solidarity of the American cause became a major theme.

For most white middle-class women of the 1950's, domesticity was the main goal. Their whole life consisted of training to find Mr. Right and reigning over their own domestic castle. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how this image of women started, and it ends up reduced to the classic situation of 'which came first- the chicken or the egg?' However, it will be argued that advertising and mass media perpetuated and further stereotyped the role of middle-class women in America versus a created the gender roles and expectation. While advertising did shape culture, it also worked off the inherent social values of the time and could only sell products that realistically fit into desires the target audiences already held. It is also important to get a clear background of the 1950s to understand why society became what it was and therefore why advertising perpetuated these roles. A combination of effects from World War II and the start of the Cold War led to society to think of women only in terms of domesticity in order to create the stable

country they desired. During World War II, the highest percentage of women in the workplace occurred; however, once the war ended, and men trickled back to their lives, society herded women into the home. While it had been their civic duty to take on the workload while the number of male workers was low, now it was time to go back home and care to the needs of their men who had actually served the country. Sociologists like Willard Waller believed women had gotten out of hand during the war and society needed to reaffirm two rules: women must bear and rear children; husbands must support them. As a result, Waller claimed it was a woman's new patriotic duty to be "blissfully domestic" as she transferred to her new workplace, her home.¹

Advertising then worked off the societal values expressed in the post-war world to perpetuate the domestic ideal and predominately define women in term of two roles: the wife and mother. Then, advertising lists out certain qualities needed to succeed and uphold these roles; wives needed to be eager, domestic, and fashionable, and mothers must have both the qualities of the wife as well as pleasing, nourishing, and thrifty. Also, women cannot simply fall into these roles and just because a woman is married or with children does not mean she lives up to the roles advertising depicts. Instead, there needed to be a sense of training young girls to develop these traits so they could be future wives and mothers. Finally, advertising maintained the idea of domesticity and even when women were the exceptions to the rule and had jobs outside the home, she never disconnected from her role as wife and mother.

¹ Stephanie Coontz. *A Strange Stirring* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 49.

Using Magazines as Evidence

While television greatly influenced American culture in the mid 1950's it was still a new adoption into American homes. However, magazines have been established as early as 1741 in America with the colonial *American Magazine* and women's magazines have even been around since 1770 with *The Lady's Magazine*.² popular had long been a consistent source for the latest trends, news, and general information an American needed to know. Readerships for magazines already reached millions of subscribers by 1950, and while television's popularity gained exponentially in 1948, only 500,000 American homes owned a TV.³ The 1950s quickly became an age of experts as Americans sought advice in magazine articles like "The American Woman's Dilemma," "Make Your Mother In-Law Adore You," or "Does Your Family Have a Neurosis?." Every week or month, women waited for their new magazine that would address and answer all the problems new to their suburban life. These articles defined what it meant to be an American woman in the 1950s and how one could achieve this ideal.

Though the articles and content of a magazine influentially created trends and molding American thought, it was the advertisement on the sides and spread carefully between articles that really illustrated how men and women should act and appear in the 1950's. In Katherine Fishburn's novel *Women in Popular Culture*,

² Anthony Curtis, "A Brief History of Magazines," University of North Carolina, Internet, available from <http://www2.uncp.edu/home/acurtis/Courses/ResourcesForCourses/MagazinesHistory.html>, accessed 23 April 2014.

³ Coontz, 65.

she writes that the social purpose of advertising is to convince us to behave as the men and women depicted are behaving in the ads. So, it is no surprise that when women are, as a general rule, positioned in subordinate fashion to the men in advertisements, the majority of the population starts to believe that is how women ought to be.⁴ Fishburn writes that it is even advertising's job to reinforce and highlight the major concerns and cultural values of a society, as it offers the standard against which we measure ourselves, that which we must desire if we wish to be normal.⁵ Since magazines had established popularity at the beginning of the 1950s, advertisements within magazines already knew how to embody American culture and appeal to the needs and desires.

As a source, advertisements often give key insight into American popular culture, because they visually capture scenes of the past, and provide evidence on the expectations on how the population should ideally be. Conducting a visual analysis of magazine advertisements from the years of 1950 through 1959 provided the key evidence to support the argument that advertising primarily limited women's roles to the home. Looking at a variety of products such as cleaning products, food, automobiles, clothing, and books, gives a wide range of evidence to use. While there was a diversity of advertisements, it is also important to distinguish between women as the object of advertising and women as the subject of

⁴ Katherine Fishburn, *Women in Popular Culture: A Reference Guide*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 165.

⁵ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: advertising in women's magazines*, (London: Random House, 1975), 45.

advertising. Katherine Fishburn defines the first on the premise that is possible to sell things specifically *to* women. The second is then how women appear in advertising; how they are used to sell goods- be it to men or women, or both.⁶ Viewing advertisements critically to understand the target audience then helped to discern what products and traits are associated with the ideal 1950's woman.

To analyze and categorize the portrayed identities of women in the 1950's, four magazines will be used in this thesis. Since gender distinction and identification are a huge part of the 1950's culture, this study used two magazines that targeted male readers and two magazines that targeted female readers. It is important to take note of the portrayal of women for a male audience versus the portrayal of women to their fellow women. Advertisements in men's magazines develop women characters that *men* idealize and desire to marry, or roles they should want their wives to fill. In women's magazines, the narrative of women told is exactly what the woman reading the magazines should aspire to be. Understanding the target audience of advertising and discerning between the two gender-oriented magazines, allows for better analysis since one knows what and whom the advertisements portray. Therefore, the four magazines used in this thesis divide into two male-targeted magazines and two women's magazines.

The male and family oriented magazines are *The Saturday Evening Post* and *LIFE* Magazine. These publications deal heavily with news, adventure and fantasy short stories, and pop culture. Two of the most popular publications of the decade,

⁶ Fishburn, 162.

these magazines represent all of the men and general public magazines and their approach to defining women's roles. Both magazines also represent America from the white, middle-class, and generally suburban family point of view. This standard of living is also where the stereotyping and portrayal of women happens the most in advertising, versus their workingwomen or high-class socialite peers. Both magazines also have high amounts of advertising on a variety of products geared towards the suburban family, which allows for a great amount of analysis to take place. In order to give the advertisements used in each magazine some context and greater understanding on their overall purpose, it is also important to go into a brief history of each magazine.

Established in 1883, *LIFE* Magazine began as a humor and general-interest magazine and quickly gained prominence in American as an entertaining weekly publication for all audiences. In a 1936 buyout, the premise of the magazine changed from its lighthearted entertainment to focusing on the world's news with a strong emphasis in photojournalism. Throughout the 1950's, *LIFE* was one of the most successful and well-known news magazines. Readership was high especially coming off all of the in-depth, graphic coverage of World War II giving the readers back home a sense of what exactly was going on with their boys abroad. In a 1950 study that spanned over a 13-week period it was found that around half of Americans above the ages of ten had seen one or more copies of *LIFE* magazine.⁷

⁷ James L. Baughman, "Who Read Life? The Circulation of America's Favorite Magazine," *Looking at LIFE Magazine*, eds Erika Boss, 41-48, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 44

This means that roughly 75 million Americans of the entire 150 million population had at least seen, if not read through, a copy of *LIFE* magazine.⁸ That is an extremely high potential of people to be influenced by the world created by *LIFE*'s editor and staff. Like most magazines of the time period, *LIFE* geared its magazine towards both urban and suburban dwellers that were white and middle-class. More so, *LIFE* targeted male readers with their political and economic world news. Select issues targeted women with exclusive coverage on celebrities and other pop culture references making *LIFE* not exclusively a male magazine. However, in general, the prime targets of *LIFE* included wealthier, college-educated demographics and within that most of the readers were men thirty to thirty four years old, married, and made up the professional and skilled labor classes.⁹ In addition to *LIFE*, one of the other most popular news and general-interest magazines of the 1950's was *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Mostly known for their famous Norman Rockwell cover art, *The Saturday Evening Post* was another popular weekly magazine of the 50's. Founded in 1821, the magazine focused on short literature and general-interest articles. Since the magazine did focus on humor, general-interest articles, and short stories published by such well-known authors as Jack London and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the audience was a more diverse range with a consistent female readership. However, like *LIFE*, *The Post* had a male voice primarily seeking a male audience. In addition to male

⁸ "Section 1. Population," U.S.A. Census Bureau, internet, available from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/02statab/pop.pdf>, accessed 10 November 2014, 101.

⁹ Baughman, 43.

readership, *The Saturday Evening Post* also had strong roots in conservative values and political opinions, dating back to the magazine's critical portrayal of FDR's New Deal and his supposed socialist agenda. Partnering with its conservative politics, *The Post* supported big business as well, and its pages were filled with short stories and articles that romanticized the business world and glorified the successful businessman. Due to their business emphasis, the magazine greatly encouraged the consumerism of all the new materialistic goods saturating the market, tying into the identity of the consumerist woman that so many magazines embraced heavily in the 50's. The combination of *The Post's* conservative values, male readership, and pro-business attitude resulted in their continual portrayal of women as primarily consumerist housewives.

However, male readership magazines were not the only ones who limited the portrayal of American women to the domestic sphere. In fact, women's magazines also fell into stereotyping women strictly as housewives. Of the mass collection of women's magazines circulated in the 1950's, only a handful have to deal with subjects beyond the limits of the household. There are a small number of publications in the 1950s that portrayed women as more than just the housewife, such as the *Glamour* and *Vogue* that focused more on high fashion and beauty supplies on the streets of New York or Paris. The overall theme of women's magazines was the home and what a woman can and should do with it. This theme can be seen in names of popular women's magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The American Home*, *House Beautiful*,

and many more. The difference between these women's magazine and those for the general public and men is the fact that they were more sympathetic to the woman's struggle to become the perfect wife and mother. Their advertisements were less degrading or chauvinistic; instead, they are supposed to aid and suggest what will make their housework or their beauty regiments easier and more effective.

However, these women's magazines still identified women with one main venue: the home, whether it be their own, their neighborhood friend's, or their extended families'. By studying two women's magazines in addition to two general public magazines, offers a more encompassing perspective, capable of analyzing how society thinks of women on a whole versus the very direct presentation of women *to* women through magazines. The magazines chosen to represent the female audience are *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal*.

These two women's magazines both deal with women's interest, home economics, and lifestyle. Both magazines had a tremendous presence in American women's lives, since each had a circulation of nearly 15 million American women between the ages of 18 and 49, meaning almost half of the 37 million total women in that demographic subscribed to *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal*.¹⁰ Both magazines also cover all things women of the 1950's should know, and do so in a way that shows the magazines are on the side of women. However, despite being a *women's* magazine, it's no coincidence that both publications had male editors in the 1950's; in fact *Good Housekeeping* only recently hired the first female editor-in-chief,

¹⁰ Coontz, 65.

Ellen Levine, in 1994.¹¹ While the writers of both magazines consisted primarily of a female staff, men had the final say of what is written and how it is written. This is important to note for all the advertisements chosen as well as what overall message each magazine sends out to the women of the 1950's. While both magazines have very similar structure, there are some important differences that make both magazines a unique and effective source.¹²

Founded in 1885, *Good Housekeeping* magazine's ownership constantly changed until its buyout by the Hearst Corporation in 1911. Hearst also published several other women's magazines like *Redbook*, *Women's day*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, alongside the very masculine magazine of *Esquire* whose editorial mission aimed to become the common denominator of masculine interests—to be all things to all men.¹³ Hearst Corporation made it very clear to discern between its male and female audiences in the 1950's by publishing magazines that apply exclusively to either women or their male counterparts. *Good Housekeeping* was one of the most popular women's magazines and had an impressive circulation of 3.5 million readers by the mid-1950s; this number skyrocketed as the decade continued ending up with nearly 15 million total readers.¹⁴ The mission of the magazine was to

¹¹ "Ellen Levine," *Magazines Management*, The Hearst Corporation, internet, available from <http://www.hearst.com/about/bios/ellen-levine>, accessed 19 October 2013.

¹² *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, ed. by Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995).

¹³ Adrienne Crezo and Bryan Dugan, "The Very First Issues of 19 Famous Magazines," internet, available from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/50299/very-first-issues-19-famous-magazines>, accessed 19 October 2013.

¹⁴ Luther Mott. *A History of American Magazines*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 141.

discuss "about equal portions of public duty and private enterprise... [And] to produce and perpetuate perfection as may be obtained in the household."¹⁵ This mission is also, not ironically, the definition of advertised women's roles in the 1950's: to be an upstanding citizen and homemaker who strived for perfection. One of the most notable legacies of *Good Housekeeping* was the 1909 introduction of their *Good Housekeeping* Seal of Approval on products like kitchen appliances, cosmetics, and grocery items. This Seal was put on things that the magazine would guarantee a refund or replacement for if the reader were dissatisfied with the quality of the product.¹⁶ This made *Good Housekeeping* the go-to source for many housewives, and created a huge influence of what products women desired or thought were a necessity to become the best homemaker. *Good Housekeeping* is unique in the fact that nearly the whole magazine is an advertisement to women to choose a certain lifestyle, making it a great source for analyzing the portrayal of women's roles in society.

While *Good Housekeeping* nearly exclusively covered home economics and advertising to women the newest cosmetics and fashion, as well as kitchen appliances and foods for her family to try, *Ladies Home Journal* or often referred to as *LHJ* had an extended reach that dealt more with the everyday lifestyle of women. Founded in 1883 and owned by the Meredith Corporation, *LHJ* is self-credited as the

¹⁵ "The History of the *Good Housekeeping* Seal of Approval," *Good Housekeeping* online magazine, internet, available from http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/product-reviews/history/good-housekeeping-seal-history?click=main_sr, accessed 19 October 2013, 1.

¹⁶ Ibid, 2.

first magazine to break the 1 million mark in circulation numbers. While it still deals with women in the home, the tone of how the magazine approaches the role of women is a little more progressive than that of *Good Housekeeping*. In 1946 they debuted the magazine's slogan "Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman," revealing their opinion that women held an important role in American society, especially in respect to the years of WWII where women stepped up to take on the traditional duties saved for men.¹⁷ Where *Good Housekeeping* is famous for their Seal of Approval, *LHJ* is known for the 1953 breakthrough in women's journalism that came in the form of "Can this marriage be saved?" which was a recurring column that deals with a readers predicament answered by the marriage counselor under the pseudonym Dorothy Cameron Disney.¹⁸ This column highlighted the dirty little secrets hiding beneath each perfect marriage in each perfect American home. *LHJ* was one of the first women's magazines to deal with the messy side of the American household, sympathizing with women that it was okay to struggle in the fight for perfection. Although *LHJ* was more progressive with their content, they still stuck with the concept that women were primarily homemakers and child-bearers. Instead of discussing women in the workplace or other alternatives to the woes of domesticity, the magazine attempted to alleviate the stress of women in the home and make their work easier. The advertising in *Ladies Home Journal* still largely

¹⁷ "125 Years of Ladies' Home Journal," *Ladies Home Journal* online, internet, available from <http://www.lhj.com/style/covers/125-years-of-ladies-home-journal/>, accessed 19 October 2013.

¹⁸ Bruce Weber, "Dorothy D. MacKaye Dies at 88; Ladies' Home Journal Columnist," *New York Times*, internet, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/08/nyregion/dorothy-d-mackaye-dies-at-88-ladies-home-journal-columnist.html>, accessed 19 October 2013.

consisted of home goods and products that perpetuated the idea that the 1950's woman was the All-American middle-class housewife.

While some may retort that magazines must have also stereotyped men of the 50's as well, this study seeks to show that women had a much more limited societal role portrayed by magazines than their male counterparts who could be any profession they desired and have as much, or as little, responsibility in the home as they wanted. The chapters are categorized into the two identities that the women were expected to achieve in order to be the All-American housewife. The first identity is The Adoring, Obedient Wife; this woman is subservient to her husband in nearly all aspects and must be a combination of domestic, eager, and fashionably competitive with her neighbors. The second is The Moral Mother; this woman is expected to give up all selfish desires of a career and social life while existing solely to give birth and raise successful American children. Her qualities are pleasing, nourishing and thrifty, which subsequently build off the traits needed to be a wife. Once she combined these two identities, advertising told the 1950's woman that she could then live in her suburban castle where "she basks in the warmth of a good mans love...glories in the laughter of healthy children...[and] glows with pride in every new acquisition that adds color or comfort pleasure or leisure to her family's life."¹⁹

¹⁹ Sally Edelstein, "Real Housewives of the Cold War," *Envisioning The American Dream*, internet, available from <http://envisioningtheamericandream.com/2013/03/07/the-real-housewives-of-the-cold-war/>, accessed 10 November 2013.

After this analysis, the final chapter examines and explores the reality of 1950's women in comparison to their idealized, advertised roles. This final chapter analyzes the influence of advertising on women's lives in order to see how close women stayed to the idealized roles. By doing so, this thesis proves that while women of the 1950s did work outside the home and certainly did not all find satisfaction in the limited role of homemaking, the majority of women strived to obtain the ideals set forth by advertising and society so much so that a second feminist movement established out of their awakening.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GOOD WIVES CLUB

Advertising the Ideal Wife

If asked to identify one stereotype of the 1950's woman, the answer would overwhelmingly be that every woman was a perfect housewife. The stereotype cultivated primarily out of media depictions of women. On almost every TV show whether its genre was western, science fiction, or just comedy, wives like Harriet Nelson of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, June Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver*, or perpetuated the idea of domesticity. They are characterized as safe, warm, and practically flawless. Domesticity is their profession and their wardrobe includes a perfectly fitted dress, a polished string of pearls, and their favorite pair of high heels. The 1950's woman was almost exclusively tied to her role as a wife, and all of these glamorous actresses had manly co-stars there to take care of them, no matter how independent the woman seemed. Popular culture therefore played heavily on both the perfect housewives of June Cleaver and other well-known wives. Working alongside this media typecasting, advertising perpetuated the ideal wife as a role all women should strive to have. In advertisements, this ideal wife stayed at home, served her husband eagerly, loved her duties, looked beautiful all of the time, and kept herself and husband in check with the neighbors.

This chapter will first explore why the housewife became so important to American culture and then it will prove that there are three specific traits women should have in order to become one of these ideal wives: eager, domestic, and competitive. Young girls learned these traits in a form of training so they could become an idealized housewife. Then, while women may be shown outside of the home or in roles not directly tied to being a wife, advertising perpetuates the societal goal of the 1950s that all women should eventually be wives.

The Rise of Domesticity

To understand why advertising so intensely pushed women to become a housewife it is helpful to first understand the context of the period. The obsession with marriage and conformity in the 1950s is a multi-sided debate, however a strong case can be made that it is the direct result of the previous decades of hardship and instability. From the stock market crash of 1929 to the end of World War II, America experienced nearly two decades of unsettled life. During the Great Depression, life went on autopilot for many Americans. Instead of the luxe and ritz promoted by the roaring twenties, survival and recovery were quickly the overwhelming themes of 1930's America. Next up in the 1940's was World War II, which resulted in an upheaval of family life, high number of fatalities, and a disruption of traditional roles in the home and workplace as men went off to war. Though fortunately with the chaos came the emergence of America from the depression and onto the world stage as a powerhouse. No longer the victim, life did

not just simply resume, but boomed in the post war world. Soon an emergence of the modern middle class took place in partnership with a sense of conformity and consumerism to uphold. Refusing to go back to their economic dark place and struggles, Americans largely embraced the new lifestyle of the late 1940's and they began moving out to the rapidly expanding suburbs and buying their own homes. Once men returned home from war, a part of a woman's civic duty meant giving back her wartime jobs to a returning soldier and marry so America could resume to normalcy. The government even established a tax law that gave a special bonus to families with a male breadwinner, hoping it would encourage women to turn to domesticity.²⁰ This idea carried over to the next decade and so the ideal situation became that of a working husband and the stay at home wife.

In the post war world, America quickly went on the defense in order to maintain their new power status. To the conservative American there seemed to be enemies everywhere anxiously waiting to take the country down. This sense of paranoia was the result from one main threat in particular: communism. America's major competition coming out of World War II, the Soviet Union soon became a dangerous one with the introduction of nuclear weapons on the world stage. Major anxieties developed over whether this seemingly cold war could turn hot at any second.²¹ So, culture developed from these factors and to cope with the problems of the world came the idea of the perfect, normal, and preoccupied family. Popular

²⁰ Stephanie Coontz. *A Strange Stirring* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 60.

²¹ Kristin Cellelo, *Making Marriage Work*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 76.

culture pushed the idea that to keep normalcy in America one must conform to certain safe ideals and take part in America's prosperity by practicing consumerism. One of the founding pillars of this culture was inevitably marriage, and so the expectation became that everyone should to seek a partner and settle down. Consumerism became the new lifestyle and advertising and media constantly told Americans to buy the latest products. Even William J. Levitt, who developed the now famous Levittown, linked patriotism to consumerism when he said, "no man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist..."²² When Americans bought their ranch-style home and filled it with the essential products such as televisions, dishwasher, laundry machines, new cars, they blended into the other little boxes of Levittown and avoided scrutiny on their political alliances. In 1959 Richard Nixon, Vice President at the time, presented the ideal American home over in Moscow and described how it was affordable by all average Americans, even the steel workers on strike at the time. In her novel *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May discusses this event known as the Kitchen Debate and she equates that for Nixon, and other politicians combating communism, home ownership and buying the products to fill the home validated the free enterprise system that was the heart of America's economy.²³ As a result of political motivation, as well as personal preference to settle down after World War II, the American way became domestic and the media and advertising further perpetuated this ideal.

²² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 162.

²³ Ibid, 163.

The media quickly embraced this ideal in shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* that emphasized the new American way, complete with one very important character: the housewife. The image of the happy family was everywhere in American popular culture. From the TV to magazines and literature, the end goal for every young woman was to marry and raise a family. While marriage has always been considered an important goal for every woman, the 1950's perpetuated this idea to a whole new extent.

In fact, in the 1950's marriage was considered so important by the media that its antithesis, divorce, was described by Paul Popenoe as the greatest danger to the American home and community.²⁴ In order to save marriage and the American people, the media began running divorce talk shows and divorce columns in order to educate the population about divorce so they could combat it. Shows like 1958's *Divorce Hearing* used couples petitioning for divorce to aid others to avoid the utter tragedy they were in.²⁵ Unfortunately, the couples of the show had let themselves get too deep in their problems and therefore unable to save their marriage. However, they served as a reminder to all young housewives about their duty make their marriage as stress-free as possible.

Similarly, *Ladies Home Journal* became known for having the popular "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" column in which both parts of a couple wrote their side of a conflict and the resident marriage counselor would then suggest solutions. The

²⁴ Kristin Cellelo, *Making Marriage Work*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 73.

²⁵ Ibid, 72.

difference between this column and the TV show is that LHJ actually attempted to reconcile the marriage and would also post the final outcome of the couple, whether they stayed together or not. These self-help and counseling avenues were to serve two purposes: educate the reader on how to solve marital issues, as well as to entertain housewives who were addicted to the newly televised day time dramas.

The Traits of the Wife

Basing their values off of those already existing in the media and in culture, advertising then goes on to shape and perpetuate societal stereotypes in print. In 1962, the *Saturday Evening Post* had an article that included a survey of housewives in order to depict the typical American woman. Though the article takes place outside of the time period for this essay, it is an effective way to see how the young women of the 1950's came to be housewives and how they responded to and felt about their new *profession*. It is also to be viewed as an opinion piece that was no doubt shaped and worded to create a positive light on homemaking. The *Post* showed that while critics often described housewives as "lonely, bored, lazy, sexually inept, frigid, superficial, harried, militant and overworked," many actually expressed satisfaction with their choice of picking a husband over a career.²⁶ Of the 1,800 interviews, only seven percent of the women regretted choosing marriage over their career. The rest of the women delighted in their work and one woman even declared that she was her own boss, never needing to worry about getting a

²⁶ Coontz, 2.

project turned in on time and the only deadline being when her husband would return home. The Gallup poll done on the subject then concluded, "few are as happy as housewives," Stephanie Coontz in *Strange Stirrings* relates that this surely must account for the sense of ecstasy portrayed in advertisements when a woman gets to clean.²⁷ Huge smiles and a sense of laughter always fill the pages of household advertisements relaying the mindset that women should be eager and excited in their role as housewife.



Figure 2.1

Joy's Dish Soap: *Joy in a bottle beats anything in a box!*



Figure 2.2 Frigidaire Range: *Everything to make cooking easy, accurate- fun!*

Not only did housewives inevitably love their housework, but they also very much knew their expected place was at home. This stems from the *Post's* article stating that a woman's purpose is simply to be either a good mother or wife, contrasting them to their male counterparts who have the misfortune of having to search for their life's meaning. Since society already laid out a woman's life meaning

²⁷ Coontz p. 2

and career, women supposedly lucked out with work that was to be carefree, fun, and easy as portrayed in such advertisements like figure 2.3. Therefore, instead of leaving her castle for a paying job or enduring the drudgery of making a daily commute, the wife stayed comfortably at home where she could perfect her domestic role. Finally, since the wife did not receive a paycheck or any official reward for her work, simply the happiness brought about by serving, in addition to their husband's love and praise measured her sense of worth.



Figure 2.3 Rubbermaid:
Dishwashing's a cinch!



Figure 2.4 Bell Telephone:
This is your wife, five busy people

Many magazines and advertisements emphasized the fact that although the woman may not have an outside career, homemaking is basically four jobs in one. The career of homemaking is shown in the advertisement by Bell telephone of figure 2.4. The illustration is entitled "This is Your Wife" and it pictures the same woman dressed up in multiple uniforms revealing the multitasking nature of being a

housewife. Her duties in the home are as the family chef, nurse, chauffeur, and maid. Finally, the last image is of the pretty wife all dressed up in her formal eveningwear, complete with the iconic pearls. The ad reiterates the idea of perfection these women had to live up to with the disbelieving question: "How does she do it?"

One part of the wife's job was to ensure her marriage was up to par and 'keeping up with the Joneses.' As suburban culture rapidly spread, its inhabitants became increasingly aware of societal standing. Fitting-in was key in the era of suburbia tainted with the residue of McCarthyism and it was the wife's job to ensure her family was in perfect time with their peers. Time and time again, the career of a woman was homemaking. In 1936 *Ladies Home Journal* even told their audience that the career of a woman "is to make a good marriage."²⁸ And to make a good marriage, the wife has to be constantly supervising and making an effort for her family's well being. Her family's appearance was especially important. If her husband did not have the right job, her kids the right clothes, and any other additional stress present, she could be risking a "premature death for an overworked husband, juvenile delinquency, or the dissolution of the marriage and the family."²⁹

²⁸ Cellelo, 68.

²⁹ Ibid, 75.

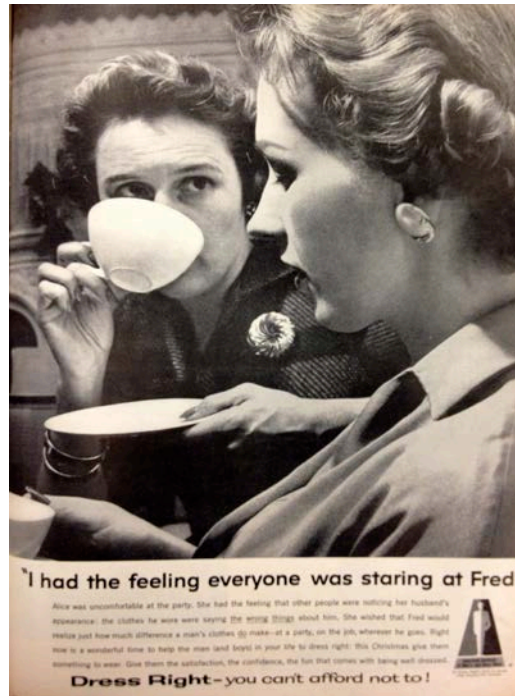


Figure 2.5
American Institute of Men and Boys wear:
Dress Right

It was so important to have the right appearance that even the presence and influence of the American Institute of Men's and Boy's Wear gained momentum. The Institute released public service announcements in the form of dramatic advertisements, in which there is usually a man as the subject of unwanted attention all because of his appearance. Figure 2.5 is one of the Institutes' advertisements that take place at a dinner party. The scene is of a paranoid wife that is obviously embarrassed by her husband for wearing an outfit that evidently sends the wrong message to their peers. Therefore, the Institute suggests that if a woman does not ensure her man leaves the house looking respectable and normal, she condemns him and herself to wrong judgments and impressions that leave lasting effects.

[illegible]

While McCarthyism and the Cold War emphasized normalcy and fitting in, a wife must also excel in all that she did, whether choosing the right drapes, entertaining company, or simply having the cleanest laundry. The wife strived for perfection and anything less needed to be practiced and refined until it finally reached a level of excellence. In the fifties, veering from the norm was un-American and unpredictable, both going against the standard of the decade.



phasized normalcy and fitting in,
er choosing the right drapes,
est laundry. The wife strived for
ed and refined until it finally
g from the norm was un-American
rd of the decade.



Figure 2.8
Rubberoid Company:
Let them envy YOU!

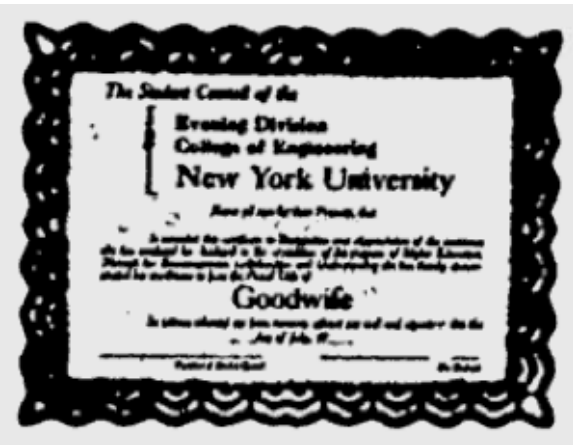


Figure 2.9
New York University:
The Good Wife Certificate

Companies selling goods were not the only ones using ads pushing for wives to be subordinate to their husbands. Universities also jumped on the bandwagon using advertisements to portray what it takes to be a good wife. New York University's School of Engineering created a system to get wives on board with their husbands seeking a college education. This came in the form of the Good Wife Certificate. The document recognized wives who encouraged and supported their husbands to help them obtain their degree. The university defined that a good wife ensured that her husband is the boss in their home, shares and pursues his goals, was quiet when she is supposed to be, and never spoke up about her husbands failings or flaws whether they come in the form of appearance or friends or behavior.³⁰ New York University implemented such a system, so that men would not be diverted from the education system, especially a program as demanding as engineering, because they know that there is a solid system in place back home that

³⁰ Coontz, 16.

will take care of everything while they are gone. So when a wife made the home a stable place, she supported her husband's desire for an education while supporting a better future for the whole family. Like other advertisements portrayed, the wife is to completely understand and support of every decision made by her husband especially if it means economic advancement for the family. More importantly, the certification implied the wife worked outside the home to support her husband's schooling. However, this was *only* until he finished school. As soon as he graduated and secured a job, the wife was to go back home and leave the bread-winning job to her husband.

A Comparison of the Husband's Role

As advertising defined women's roles in the home, it also created an image of who the husband should be. Like their wives, the husbands of the 1950s had a certain uniform they should wear. Although, instead of heels, pearls, and a dress like their wives, the men usually wore business attire or casual clothing on the weekend, smoked a pipe or held a briefcase, and had slick, clean-cut appearances. Advertising created two starkly different images for the wife and husband that embodied total femininity and masculinity.

Advertisements often times showed men in western inspired apparel to show off their tough, but gentlemanly qualities. Below is an advertisement for Old Hickory Bourbon that defined manhood in terms of the alcohol one drank. "Welcome, brother, *if* you're a Bourbon Man," was the catchphrase for the advertisement and it implied a man was only a part of the elite Men's club if he drank bourbon. Other advertisements highlighted the

incapability of the husband to do simple household chores his wife usually did. In the Motorola Television advertisement below, the husband sits distracted and engaged in the television set as his wife looked on in disapproval as she is in the middle of sweeping. Not only did the new, alluring television set distract the husband, but also the young delivery boys carrying a rug. Reiterating that it was in general a trait of men to be distracted easily by something impressive. This came about because the home was the woman's workplace and the husband's oasis, so he was to relax as his wife continued her duties cleaning, cooking, and taking care of them both.



Figure 2.10 Old Hickory Bourbon
Welcome, brother



Figure 2.11 Motorola:
The Picture tells the story



Figure 2.12 NuSoft Fabric Softener
Luxury Soft Wash



Figure 2.13 Arrow Textiles
First in Fashion

Men often times were not shown in advertising unless it was for luxury goods or expensive purchases, like alcohol, tobacco, or automobiles, The wife was then in charge of the everyday household items like cleaning supplies, clothing, and food. In fact, the husband seems more present in advertising as an authoritarian figure the woman seeks to please. Advertising puts the husband behind the wife, smiling or kissing her for a job well done, as the wife smirks with satisfaction. If the wife chose the right product she may even have been rewarded with jewelry or other goods. Satisfaction seemed to be the husband's most important role in advertising so as to convince the wife to buy products. While the wife of the 1950s was to be domestic, eager to please, and in charge of her family's appearance and well-being, the husband was to exist primarily outside the home, eager to be pleased, and almost childlike in his need for the wife to take care of him. By

examining the husband's defined roles, advertising's theme that a woman's career is homemaking is further reinforced.

Housewives in Training

While many advertisements are geared towards women who were already housewives, there are many that are there to train the future housewives of America. These advertisements are successful in illustrating what qualities make a wife. For one, Colgate Dental Cream does an exceptional job highlighting one reason why a girl is unsuccessful at landing a husband or a date at least. They have a series of ads that focus on pretty young women who unfortunately suffer from bad breath and therefore deemed undesirable. All of the ads follow a similar recipe, there is a single, attractive young woman and someone points out her fault of bad breath. The girl then uses Colgate after a consultation with a dentist and instantly has a plethora of dates or becomes a "Mrs." as if finding a mate is her sole goal.



Figure 2.14 Colgate:
*I'm going to get married when
I grow up!*



Figure 2.15 Colgate:
She's a Calendar girl with no dates!

Such advertisements take a proactive stance of domesticity and tell young girls that they must perfect themselves in order to be a candidate for marriage.

It is not only the contents of a magazine that give detail into the roles women should pursue, the cover art also gave great examples of the roles. There are two specific magazine covers from Saturday Evening Post that really emphasize a young girl's preparation for a domestic future. Featured below, the first is the cover from February 1957, which features a pretty, young American girl. In the scene she is at

home working on some homework as she chats on the home telephone. On the other end of the line is expectedly a crush of hers as she smiles into the phone and twirls her hair. Artist, George Hughes, illustrated the cover and wrote this description to give his reasoning behind the scene:

It is the duty of every girl to talk to boys on the telephone, kindle romantic sentiments, round-up potential husbands and thus help *perpetuate the race* by assuring that by and by she will become a homemaker. Therefore it is comforting to see Sister applying herself earnestly to homework. Of course she should get in some bookwork, too; math for instance, is useful in budgeting, so that two can live as cheaply as-er-possible. Well, she'll do all right, for American girls are pretty wonderful at getting good grades in both education and romance.

Within this description, the illustrator points out four key thoughts that a female in this period should be keeping in mind. First, weighing heavily on a young girl is the goal of finding a suitable husband. Secondly, she should be doing all this while keeping in mind that her career will be a homemaker. Thirdly, it is every girl's duty to her *race* to get married, having children, and support the family by becoming a homemaker. And lastly, she should view schoolwork as a part of being a better housewife, not only as a means to furthering her education to get a career outside the home. Hughes' statement about understanding math is more for the benefit of how the girl should learn to budget in her home, versus using that knowledge to get into college to pursue a possible career. In fact, adolescence seems geared simply as a preparation for a woman's married life. From perfecting proper manners, attending school, learning how to dress and make-up herself, and attending extra-

curriculum activities, media of the 1950's made it seem like the idealistic young girl should do all things in pursuit of becoming an appealing wife candidate.



Figure 2.16 Saturday Evening Post:
The American Girl and Romance

Following up on how young girls should act and prepare for becoming a wife, the next cover is from the week of February 16, 1957. The illustration below in figure is of a home economics class in a clearly middle-class, white school. All the young girls are perfectly put together and concentrating diligently on their two peers who are perfecting a place setting. All around the classroom are diagrams of household goods that the girls must perfect, whether it's a scrumptious layer cake or a fashionable dress being exhibited in the background class. The description on the back of the cover from illustrator Steve Dohanos states:

Every girl should study the art of gracious homemaking, but as there is little time for this at home on account of take home schoolwork,

time is set-aside for it in school... There, a girl learns how to bake an upside down cake that doesn't turn out right side up, how to create a dress which doesn't resemble a gunny sack, and how to make a table setting fit for a king or a husband.

By setting aside a specific time in the school schedule for home economics and emphasizing that every girl should learn these skills, schools define that the future of these young girls is in the home. They are stating that it is a necessity for a girl to be able to bake, cook, entertain, and all other skills required to be a housewife. Therefore, any girl who misses this early training she is behind in the game and will have to make up for it in order to be the best wife that she could be.



Figure 2.17 Saturday Evening Post:
Home Economics in Schools

Any Exceptions?

While most advertisements portray women as the ideal wife that is wholesome in her manners of domesticity, eagerness, and trendiness, there is a difference between the portrayal of the wife in male-oriented magazines and women magazines. These primarily sum up to the amount of sex appeal given to the woman in the advertisement. In the male-oriented magazines like *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life*, the wife is often portrayed more outside of the home and in a more informal, younger light. Usually they are ads for cigarettes or soda or cars, and so the wife usually donned evening attire or a flattering bathing suit, something more sexually appealing than the pearl, cardigan-wearing wife of women's magazines. When the wife is shown in the home or kitchen she is usually all dolled up and glamorous. The wife herself is an accessory and something to be desired in male magazines and not viewed as dominant and in control as she is in the other magazines. She appears to dance around the home, looking pretty though not very intentional.



Fig. 2.18 Pepsi-Cola:
Light Refreshment and Lovely Figure



Fig. 2.19 Frigidaire Refrigerator:
Sheer Look Glamor

In the women's magazines *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal*, while still always attractive and well dressed, the wife is far less sexy and more professional in her role. She is always slightly older, looking more like mid to late thirties, and almost always a child or two at her side. A typical portrayal of a women's magazines housewife is shown below in a Hotpoint refrigerator ad.



Figure 2.20 Hotpoint Refrigerator:
Serves you best!

The wife in this ad fits all the traditional molds. She is delighted in her purchase, well dressed with her heels, a modest dress, and perfectly coifed hair, and has a child almost as put together as she is and certainly well-behaved. The woman is also older and so clearly knows what she is doing and knowledgeable on all the best products for her home. Wives portrayed in women magazines are seen as professionals, the home is their workplace and they are their bosses. They are constantly shown as being put together and organized, because is that not how a

man dresses for work? So, for young girls, this is the ideal image that they are expected to desire: married with children and a lifestyle that can fund purchasing all the newest, most efficient appliances and products for her workplace: the home.

While women are typically shown in the house, there are of course some exceptions. A limited number of advertisements depicted career women. Most notably, these women are either actresses or some kind of performer, though there are occasionally shown as a more common workingwoman. However, each ad plays on the subject's femininity more so than her financial independence. One ad depicted several behind-the-scenes images of an actress at work. In the ad she carried a plank of wood, dangled from a window, and even rode 150 miles on a rollercoaster. All things depicted are not too strenuous or dangerous, yet the ad made it seem like she performed grueling manual labor. The whole point is to sell women lotion, because if a working actress' hands can be treated with Jergen's surely a housewives can too!



Figure 2.21 Jergens Lotion's:
I rode 150 miles on a rollercoaster!



Figure 2.22 Noxzema Lotion:
Makes Hands Lovelier

A more rare ad is of a working fashion designer from N.J. who works hard drafting by day, while needing to look beautiful by night for premiers and suitors. It is not usual for a woman to be shown in a work place, especially as a designer, and it definitely shows an exception to the housewife rule. While these ads are important for showing the option of working outside the home, they cater to the needs of all women versus encouraging others to live like them. In the ads, both claim work to be the cause of such ugly, destroyed hands, and what woman would want to be the victim of that? While wives are occasionally shown working outside of the home, advertising's portrayal of them was often trivial as workingwomen were dainty and feminine, still fitting all of the traits necessary for being a wife. Also, no

advertisement showed working and a career as an alternative lifestyle work, but as a temporary placeholder until marriage and children. Therefore even the exceptions of advertising support the argument that the ideal woman should be a wife.

Conclusion

Overall, the portrayal of women in 1950's magazines had a very limited scope. Though women may be more sexualized and portrayed in roles of subordination within magazines with high male readership, versus seen in a more dominant, queen of the castle light in women's magazines, the definition of the woman came to be determined by her success as a wife. At the very least, a successful wife should be happy and satisfied in her work at home, making sure her husband was on track at work and in his personal life, and prove herself to be the envy of the neighborhood. Any woman who desired a career over a husband was seen as a man-hater and someone to be fixed like in the Colgate advertisements. Also, those women unfortunate enough to have to work still needed to be feminine and have a desire to marry one day. Simply by not advertising any significant amount of alternative lifestyles, advertisements of the 1950s encouraged women to seek a domestic life and marry a good man with a career. Once the wife managed to achieve this she was to take on an even bigger identity: the mother.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORK IS NEVER OVER

The Ideal Image of the Mother

The Mother...must subordinate her need for sleep, for recreation, for getting the housework done or for pursuing non-domestic interests at all times. Moreover, she is expected to do so with a sense of deep satisfaction and happiness.

-Sibylle Escalona,
"A Commentary upon Some Recent Changes in Child
Rearing Practices," 1953

The previous chapter explored advertising's definition of women as the wives of America; they kept a clean house, cooked the best meals, took joy in their daily tasks and serving their husband, and ensured her household was the envy of the neighborhood. However, advertising deemed the role of the wife a temporary placeholder and a necessary step before entering the more important and all-encompassing role of the mother. Once American housewives took the next step and obtained the role of the mother she reached her end goal.³¹ As Sibylle Escalona wrote in her analysis on motherhood in the early 1950s, women were to drop all other ambitions or personal needs so she could raise a family to the best of her ability. Selflessness was key for a successful mother, and according to critics like Peter Biskind, society branded any woman who sought out her own career or alone time or even sleep with a giant Scarlet Letter A for

³¹ The dissatisfaction and lack of any real direction in a mother's life is discussed further in chapter four in addition to the influence of the Feminine Mystique.

Ambition.³² In order to prevent becoming this negatively viewed selfish and ethnocentric image, advertising laid out ways for women to become the perfect mother as long as she followed their instructions perfectly.

First, that advertising built off the image and qualities of the wife to isolate women into the other role: the mother. Then, advertising portrays a pleasing, nourishing, and thrifty woman to fit the standard and ideal role of the mother. Young girls must also complete an informal apprenticeship to their mothers in order to obtain at an early age these necessary qualities to become successful future mothers. Finally, advertising provides no real exceptions to the mother role, only adaptations of motherhood.

Traits of the Mother



Figure 3.1 Shell Oil:
M is for Mother

³² Stephanie Coontz. *A Strange Stirring* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 67.

In an advertising campaign, Shell Oil went through the alphabet listing all the good things brought about by oil. Not surprisingly, Shell chose Mother as the main word chosen to represent the letter M. The advertisement shows the busy life of the mother as a housewife, cook, chauffeur, hostess, teacher, and glamour girl. The point of the ad is that oil, specifically from Shell, makes all these jobs easier and less time consuming. However, just because oil based products made a mother's job easier, she got more things done and worked just as hard as mothers in the past. This advertisement is a perfect compilation of the jobs and qualities of motherhood depicted in magazines. From the moment she wakes up until falling asleep reading her childcare books, the mother was on the go and serving her family. From cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her children and husband, the mother was the *domestic* queen. Domestic is emphasized, because the environment is especially important when analyzing advertising's interpretation of a woman's role as mother. A minority of advertising shows women outside of the domestic sphere, and even less show a mother working out of her home. By primarily showing mothers in the house, advertising sets the workplace of the woman. Then, the actions of the mother in the advertisement above reveal her work hours, which is 24 hours, 7 days a week. Nowhere above is the mother seen relaxing or socializing with her peers, in fact it is rare in general for a mother to be relaxing or socializing in a situation where she is not at a play date or coveting her neighbors' new appliances. Lastly, this image is a great illustration of the traits and qualities a mother should have according to advertising. A mother should be eager to serve, a competent chef, professional cleaner, a nurse, a wife, and overall knowledgeable on her family's needs and preferences. These traits can be

summed up simply in a Campbell's Soup ad that describes its soup as being delicious, nourishing, and thrifty. Like Campbell's Soup, a mother is to make things delicious to please her family, provide nourishment, and care for her family's health and well-being, and be responsible and managing of her family's assets.



Figure 3.2
Campbell's Soup:
Delicious... Nourishing... Thrifty!

The Pleasing Mother

A career in homemaking meant a woman missed out on the rewards of good work given to businessmen and women, such as promotions, extra vacation time, and pay raise. In her book discussing the changing view of mothers, Maxine Margolis argues that advertisements started playing on the mother's need for recognition and emphasized buying certain products as a means to pleasing her family and giving her the positive feedback and response she was looking for.³³ Since advertising is a psychological game, select images portrayed the emotional response of the family in order to convince a

³³ Maxine L. Margolis, *Mothers and Such*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1984), 173.

mother to purchase a product. As in figure 3.3, the family is clearly pleased over the 7-UP their mother presents them, and the satisfaction of obtaining her family's happiness reflects in her accomplished smile. Ads like this one are so effective, because it continuously reinforced that one of the mother's prime objectives is to ensure her family's approval. This advertisement is also noteworthy, because it referenced the 1952 presidential campaign slogan of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was president of the United States from 1953 to 1960. By using the quote "You like it- it likes you," 7-UP makes the mother seem like she is running a campaign to win her family's votes of approval. Once again, this encouraged women to view motherhood as a full time career with the goal of pleasing her family. Margolis argues that approval was so important for the mother that she developed the fear that although she never had enough time, her family might think she did not do her *job* well enough and think that housework is not even real work.³⁴ An unappetizing or, worse, burnt meal only added to the distraught, anxious mother's fear while seeking to please her family. To settle such worries, companies began guaranteeing the family's approval with money back promises like Betty Crocker's Chocolate Macaroon mix shown in figure 3.4.

³⁴ Margolis, 173.



Figure 3.3 7UP:
You like it- It likes you!



Figure 3.4 Betty Crocker:
Guaranteed Perfect Macaroons

Along the lines of pleasing a family's taste buds, it was not enough for a house to just be clean and taken care of. Instead responsibility fell on the mother to also make it beautiful and full of everything a family could ever want. The mother's endless work and dedication ensured the beauty and style of the house. In her novel on the evolution of the American home and the mother's role in it, Jane Davison wrote that the business of American housewives was busyness.³⁵ Though not considered a normal 9-5 job or defined by such time restraints, being a homemaker and mother did not mean there was ever a moment of leisure in the mother's day. In fact, the mother portrayed in advertising has her own workday and even rush hour to beat. From crocheting doilies and sewing the latest fashions for her children and self, to baking perfect cakes and using professional grade cleaners to maintain her home, the mother was always busy for the sake of her family. A mother who could lounge and have down time for herself was not a mother

³⁵ Margolis, 166.

fully taking advantage of all the hours in the day; and definitely not how the average housewife wanted to be portrayed.



Figure 3.5 Canco Milk:
How to handle rush-hour traffic in your kitchen

The Nourishing and Thrifty Mother

The supermarket and plethora of consumer goods entering the market are just another example of the busyness of a mother's life. Compared to the small, family owned grocery stores of the past; supermarkets of the 1950's had wide aisles stocked with new and well-advertised brands that demanded the attention of housewives. Everything promised satisfaction, instant results, and perfection and it was the mother's duty to sift through the bulk to determine the best product for her family. This brings up the next main traits of the mother: nourishing and thrifty.

While satisfaction and beauty are important parts of being a mother, making sure her family gets the right nutrients and seen as successful socially are other necessary duties set forth by advertising. Taking care of the family is part of women's most primitive nature, and advertisements of the 1950's seem to agree. In advertising, it is always the mother watching over a sick child or patching up a hurt knee. Therefore, it

becomes the mother's job to make sure she is providing the right medicine or using the right band-aids.



Figure 3.6 St. Joseph's Aspirin:
Doctor and Mother Approved



Figure 3.7 Curity Bandages:
Hospital Care at home

In addition to the family's physical health, the mother was also in charge of monitoring her family's mental well-being and success. Society encouraged mothers to use self-help books as a way to ensure children's healthy development. One of these methods was a series called the Book of Knowledge. Advertisements for it relate back to the mother's desire to please her kids, while directly fulfilling her duty to nourish as well. The ad below shows children opening gifts on Christmas surrounded by new toys; however, their biggest smiles are for their new Book of Knowledge, which will ensure them good marks in school as well as fun at home. As well as academic success, a mother is to also supervise the way her children dress to ensure they are perceived as good, successful citizens. Advertisements funded by the American Institute of Men's and Boy's Wear make a plea to mothers to dress their kids in smart clothes to guarantee their success at school, make the right impression to neighbors and even keep them out of

trouble with the law. Advertisements like these state that buying the right clothes is one of the most beneficial things and important duties a mother can provide for her sons.

Advertising goods that promise a family's health, mother's knowledge, and successful future for her children all support the idea that a 1950's mother should be nourishing in all aspects of her family's life.



Figure 3.8 The Book of Knowledge:
What they really need



Figure 3.9 American Institute of Men
and Boys Wear: *Just by the way he looks*

Unlike the popular show in the 1950's *Father Knows Best*, it was usually considered the mother's job to put a seal of approval on everything entering and leaving her house. Advertising plays on this ideal and makes mother in charge of buying new appliances, clothes, and food. This brings about the last trait necessary for being the perfect mother: thrifty.

While the 1950's were a high time of consumerism and advertising definitely wanted mothers to buy every and all new products, they realized that they had to put a positive spin on spending to encourage mothers to buy. This came in the form of thriftiness and creating seemingly good deals on products. An example of thrifty spending came in the form of Do-it-yourself projects, which became increasingly popular

in the decade and magazines frequently encouraged readers to take on home improvement projects themselves. While DIY seemed cheap and easy, the cost was still beneficial to companies since families had to buy their own paint and brushes, or steam cleaners and chemicals, etc. Nevertheless, mothers could walk away from a project happy not only for making their home beautiful, but also doing something skillful and productive all on a budget. Such benefits gave meaning and worth to the mother's labor-intensive and tedious daily routine. Overall, it was a win-win situation for both the consumer and companies.



Figure 3.10
EZ Paint: You yourself can do it!

Canned foods and the new invention of TV dinners were also favorite mother's helpers that congratulated women for spending wisely. For pennies mothers could purchase a whole meal that was both time efficient and delicious. By purchasing cheap as well as quick dinners, women could then save up in order to buy the appliances needed to create the more lavish, technical meals. Women began coveting the latest appliances, so to entice buyers to splurge advertisers then emphasized all of the time and expense saving

benefits. Soon, mother could own technology that pretty much ran itself leaving her more time to spend on her family and getting even more things done around the house.



Figure 3. 11 Crosley Oven:
Come on out of the kitchen!



Figure 3.12 Westinghouse Appliances:
BIG Sale

Once a woman perfected this triad of pleasing, nourishing, and buying thrifty for her family, she achieved the impossible and fit the ideal mother role these advertisements depicted. While the job of the mother encompasses the entire spectrum of taking care of her children and husband, these traits give a rough outline of the expectations advertisements put on mothers.

A Comparison of the Father's Role

It is important to note the father's role in the house, because quite simply, it was mother's job to fill every aspect of family life that father lacked in. And, like the lazy, aloof husbands of the last chapter, fathers had vastly different expectations thrust upon them by society than their female counterparts. Men were to have a certain emotional distance from their children and an even limited role in caretaking. Dr. Spock, a childcare expert, criticized that fathers who helped out more than the occasional Sunday diaper

change might have a little bit too much inner thigh fat.³⁶ Spock directly correlated a caring and compassionate father to being too feminine and might as well be a second mother. Therefore, when there was a questioning of men's masculinity for those who helped out a little too much around the house, it is no wonder that advertising and society perpetuated this standard. In comparison to the overeager and capable wife, advertisements only showed fathers completely incompetent at or simply those who never did the "feminine" chores like cooking, taking care of children, and cleaning.



Figure 3.13
Schrafft's Chocolate: *Want to be Popular?*

While the mother is only successful by fulfilling each of the characteristics in the last section, the father could do far less for equal or greater praise. By bringing home random gifts like chocolates and jewelry, the father instantly excites and pleases his family like in the above image. The father often fills more of the playmate and mentor roles than taking on responsibility for his children's overall well being. He is often shown playing outside with his children, whether that is in fluffy, white snow as shown in figure

³⁶ Lawrence Downes, "Dr. Spock; Time to Change the Baby Advice," *New York Times*, Internet, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/22/weekinreview/word-for-word-dr-spock-time-change-baby-advice-evolution-child-care-icon.html>, accessed 22 January 2014.

3.14 or casually throwing a baseball around in the front yard. Rarely is a mother shown playing around with her children and having impromptu fun; instead she is more likely to take a passive role supervising her family's happiness. The father is also shown as relatively more laidback than his female counterpart, who always seems quick to show her disapproval of situations. In the Jockey boxer's advertisement of figure 3.15, two young sons walk around in their father's shoes and boxer shorts. While the dad finds it amusing and typical of his young sons, the only thing fazing the mother is the mess they made in the progress. This is typical of the mother-father relationship, where the mother is high-strung and controlling and the father takes little responsibility. Using power of elimination and an analysis with contrast/comparison, advertisements that feature the father and his role in the home further refine and define the role and expectations of the mother.



Figure 3.14 American Dairy Association:
Feel young again with Milk!



Figure 3.15 Jockey's Boxers:
Boys will be boys

Mothers in Training

As discussed in the previous chapter on wives, young girls grew up in an environment conditioning them to become mothers and harness their maternal instincts

and desires early on. Advertising presents the relationship between mother and daughter in a very apprenticeship manner, where a young girl is constantly in the kitchen or grocery store alongside her mother. So, just like young girls in the previous chapter training to become wives, there was an expectation on girls to look up to their mothers for reference on how to become a mother.

Advertising portrayed little girls as sweet and modest, and as if they rarely played meanly or like boys. American girls were nearly exact copies of their perfectly put-together mothers with their perfectly pinned or curled hair, tailored dresses, and shiny shoes. They were to even share their mothers' passion and joy for cooking, cleaning, and serving others selflessly. In the advertisements below, one can almost hear the little girls begging to help their mother unload the dishwater, sweep the floor, or iron one of her own dresses. By getting a sense of pride and enjoyment out of housework from an early age, young girls could then prioritize what exactly was needed to becoming a mother.



Figure 3.16 Sylvania Light bulbs:
Mother's Little Helper



Figure 3.17 Hotpoint Appliances:
Gets dishes super clean!

From an early age, advertising taught young girls that there is a link between their happiness and the activities of her husband, or future husband.³⁷ And while money cannot buy happiness, it does buy all of the items that made 1950's life easier and more enjoyable. This is shown in an ad for a kitchen company in which a little girl decides between two young suitors. Wealth and the question of which boy could provide a suitable home for their future family are among the criteria for this little girl. This advertisement shows that it was never too early for a girl to prepare the qualifications for a suitor, as well as emphasizing the kitchen as a necessity for girls. More so, the idea that the little girl would not make enough money to buy her own dream kitchen stayed in line with the role of women first and foremost as wives and mothers.



Figure 3.18 Satina:
Graduate with Satina



Figure 3.19 Tracy Kitchens:
Which Romeo?

As the comparison of mothers and fathers helps to define their roles in the home, the treatment of young girls and boys in the house coincides with their older counterparts. Girls cleaned, helped cook, and took care of their families, while the young boys

³⁷ Marjorie Ferguson, "Imagery and Ideology: The Cover Photographs of Traditional Women's Magazines," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, eds. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96.

followed their father's lead and rarely helped around the house. Just like girls being copies of their mothers, sons dressed and acted accordingly to their fathers. By showing children from a young age limited to strict gender roles, advertising reinforces their futures in marrying and having children. Furthermore, having young girls constantly paired with their mothers perpetuates the idea that the woman's future is in the home and it is her job to learn all the tricks of the trade from her mentor.

Any Exceptions?

While advertising showed women a majority of the time in roles directly limited to being a wife and mother, some portrayals do take place outside of the home. Often, these women were actresses, secretaries, or stewardesses and usually shown as single. However, even when seemingly independent, women and the role they played in society linked back to men and their potential to be a mother.

If a woman is shown in the workplace, she is usually young, attractive, and dreaming of the day when her future husband comes to sweep her off her feet and back to a nice suburban home apart from the politics of the business world.³⁸ Just because she works outside of the home does not mean she is unmarriageable or not wanting a man, instead she is simply a woman waiting for the next step. The typewriter ad below shows a secretary and a male employee; next to them are the benefits of the typewriter according to both of their needs. Furthermore, the words chosen to list the benefits for each are "His & Hers," a phrase that usually relates to a married couple's closet or sink. This wording of

³⁸ Ferguson, 94.

this ad is very intentional and shows that women in the workplace, especially secretaries, still fill the role of the wife and mother.



Figure 3.20 Remington Rand: *His & Hers Typewriters*



Figure 3.21 American Association of Gas: *We Lead Double Lives*

Other instances of women shown working outside the home were older women that were either widows, child-less wives, or an older mother whose children were grown and off on their own. In Figure 3.21, both women are easily 50 years old or more and well-established in their careers. However, their greatest concern is not worrying about a promotion or dealing with a bad boss, but whether they can still get dinner ready in time for their husbands. The number one priority for working women still had to be their family and their roles as caretakers. Even the title of the advertisement declares this as the women claim to "lead double lives!" So, despite having a full time job outside the home, advertising makes the requirement that women must still fulfill all of their domestic and familial duties if they are going to take on an additional job.

As a single workingwoman, self-help books and leading sociologists emphasized over and over again how unfortunate it was for women to have to work. Ferguson in

Hearth and Home relates that anytime spent in working outside the home was "negative space" and had no emotional value or meaning at all.³⁹ It was not until a woman married and had children did her life have an achieved purpose, all the time before that was just preparation.

Mothers who had to work and leave her children experienced even more criticism. Society and experts in childcare pitied and even condemned them as bad mothers setting their children up for failure. In the 1946 childcare book that inspired a generation of mothers, Dr Spock listed out the definite pros and cons to a mother working once she has kids. Although, the only pro to being a working mother played off the woman's desire to care for her children, and the need for an income that can supply them with all the opportunities necessary. Dr. Spock emphasizes that while *some* turn out all right if the proper arrangement is made for their care, others would grow up neglected and maladjusted.⁴⁰ These kids are the ones that caused trouble later in life and left to the responsibility to the government. So, to save money upfront, Dr Spock put forth the idea that the government ought to give out allowances to all mothers of young children, so they would not have to leave the house and their child in order to work and support the family. Situations like this show the given importance of mothers to 1950's society; where without them or a proper replacement, society would be left helpless and damaged.

While the problem of working mothers was too complicated to fix, certain stipulations allowed for the best possible compromise. Experts proposed that if a mother

³⁹ Ferguson, 97.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Downes, "Dr. Spock; Time to Change the Baby Advice," *New York Times*, Internet, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/22/weekinreview/word-for-word-dr-spock-time-change-baby-advice-evolution-child-care-icon.html>, accessed 22 January 2014.

really needed to work, she should at least take a five or six year break in order to be at home during the fundamental stages of her child. She should obtain a part-time job over full-time, and her employment should never, under no circumstances interfere with the woman's primary responsibility as a mother.⁴¹

Conclusion

By limiting women only to their roles as wives and mothers, advertising really backed women into a corner. Young women entering marriage had the expectation upon them to drop any selfish desires and ambitions to fulfill those of her family. If a woman had the desire or need to work, there was a small possibility that she could still have a happy marriage, but only as long as she had the full approval of her husband. Although, again she had to remember and believe that her job is secondary and that her first interest always remains the home. However, soon American women discovered this was not an easy adjustment or lifestyle and many mothers felt trapped, exhausted, and bored under her expectation to perfect the characteristic traits of the advertised 1950s wife and mother. As the decade wore on, the unsettlement and dissatisfaction of their domestic lives grew until finally the idea surfaced that the identities of women did not correlate solely with those of the wife and mother.

By first proving advertising primarily portrayed women as wives and mothers, an analytical comparison can then be made between these advertised identities and the reality of women's roles. The roles of wife and mother had explicit traits advertising

⁴¹ Margolis, 78.

repeated over and over again, drilling into the psyche of middle class women. The perfect wife was obedient in her domestic, eager, and competitive role. Building off those traits, a woman then became the moral mother portrayed in advertising by pleasing, nourishing, and being thrifty for her family. The woman did not just fall into the role of wife and mother, instead advertising emphasized the importance of training young girls in these qualities in order to mold them into successful wives and mothers. As advertising saturated society with the depiction of these ideal roles and defined the qualities and training needed, the next step is to then see how far this idea penetrated into American society and what affects it had on women of the 1950's.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WAY WE REALLY WERE

The Reality of 1950's Women

Each suburban wife struggled with it alone... As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question-"Is this all?"

-Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

In 1963, Betty Friedan released her controversial research on the 1950's housewives in the form of *The Feminine Mystique*. The book is the result of a series of interviews conducted on her college classmates, fifteen years after graduation, asking them about the problems and satisfaction of their lives. She began noticing discrepancies between the reality of their lives as housewives and mothers and the image put forth by society for them to conform and strive for.⁴² These women did not get immense pleasure out of waxing a floor or baking the perfect cake or constantly keeping up with her neighbors with the right dress, car, or laundry detergent. In fact, they did not even pity the supposedly unfeminine, unhappy woman who had aspirations of being an artist or career woman.⁴³ No, instead they secretly wondered whether achieving that ideal image of perfect housewife was even worth it anymore. The opening quote reflects this mentality perfectly and reveals one major reaction women had to the domestic life and expectations set forth by advertising and media.

⁴² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), xxiii.

⁴³ Ibid, 2.

After sorting through more than forty issues of magazines and the advertisements that filled their pages, it quickly became apparent that the women Friedan interviewed really felt the influence of 1950's advertising as well as the societal pressure to be perfect, happy housewives. The most prevalent roles expected of women to fill were of the domestic variety by a large margin. In order to illustrate *exactly* how often and what percent of advertising portrayed women in a domestic setting as either a wife or mother, a sample of advertisements was taken from each of the four publications December 1955 issues. In each issue there was a count of the total number of advertisements, then out of that total, a count occurred of all advertisements featuring women. Most importantly, a final count specified the number of advertisements featuring women directly in the domestic roles of wife and mother. The result of these tallies supported the argument that advertising most prevalently portrayed women as either a wife or mother.

	<i>Saturday Evening Post</i>	<i>Life</i>	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	<i>Ladies Home Journal</i>
Total Ads	44	29	104	113
Ads Featuring Women	10	12	65	76
Ads Featuring Women, in Domestic Roles	9	11	50	64
Percent of Women in Domestic Roles	90%	91.66%	76.92%	84.21%

Figure 4.1
Percent of Ads Featuring Women in Domestic Roles

As seen in figure 4.1, when the men's magazines of *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life* featured a woman in an advertisement, 90% of the time she was shown doing or relating to something as a wife or mother. This number is astonishingly high, especially considering the small number of advertisements that actually featured women. The one advertisement in *Life* that did not directly tie a woman to a role as wife or mother was that of an old woman drinking hot tea in a rocking chair. The advertisement made no

mention as to whether she was a grandmother or wife, and therefore could not technically count despite the fact that she was in a domestic setting.

While the women's magazines had lower rates of 76% and 84%, the very fact that the names of these magazines are *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* already prove that it was a woman's, or Ladies', job to maintain and work within the domestic sphere. It is also still important that a great deal more than half of the advertisements actually showing women had them as a wife and/or mother. Taking count and comparing these advertisements illustrates and supports the argument that a majority of the time advertising limited women to the domestic roles of wives and mothers.

What was the Degree of Advertising's Influence?

When a vast amount of images are put forth showing women in such limited roles, some degree of influence must be made on the target audience. This chapter uses statistical data, individual accounts, and historical analysis to value the degree of that influence and to see how women reacted to the expectations bombarded upon them by all different media outlets. After the analysis of women's reality versus advertised roles, it will be proven that the reality of women's lives did not entirely reflect or conform to the ideal image and characteristics put forth. However, the expectation to fill the role of wife and mother did influence the lives of most American women enough to create a feminist movement that seemingly woke up a generation of disoriented housewives.

First of all, women in the 1950s simply were not all wives and mothers. Since there was a growing sector of clerical and service jobs traditionally viewed as feminine,

as well as the established trend of women working during World War II, an increasing number of women entering the workforce in the 1950's actually occurred. It was not just the amount of women in the workforce increasing, but an increase in how many women *wanted* to work. In a sample of high school girls, eighty-eight percent aspired to have a career outside of homemaking. And of the housewives working during WWII, sixty percent of them wanted to remain employed.⁴⁴ Though employment did temporarily decrease at the end of World War II, as many American men wanted women to retreat back to the home so jobs became and remained available for returning soldiers, by 1947 women's employment began steadily increasing again. Furthermore, by 1955 there were even more women in the workplace than during the war. The 1950's even saw the employment of wives triple and that of mothers quadruple; a fact that seems unconceivable considering advertising rarely showed women working outside the home.⁴⁵

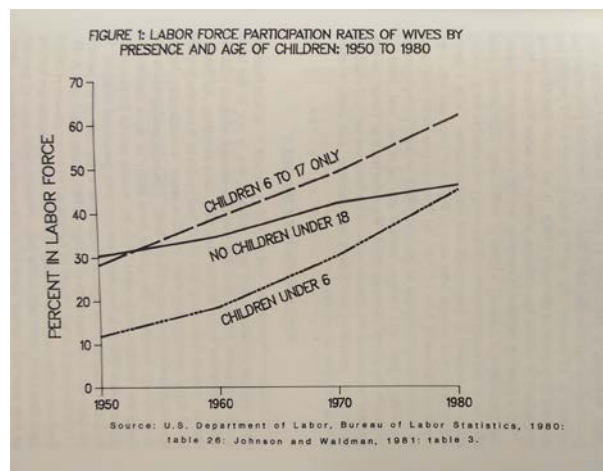


Figure 4.2

Labor Force Participation Rates of Wives by Presence and Age of Children 1950 to 1980

⁴⁴ Stephanie Coontz. *A Strange Stirring* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 47.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 59.

The above graph uses data taken by the U.S. Department of Labor to show the trend of women with children in the workplace, or labor force. In 1950, just a little above 10% of mothers with children younger than six held positions outside the home. Though higher than the number of younger mothers, still only 30% of mothers with children either six to seventeen or mothers whose children were older than eighteen held jobs. While only a minority of women worked, it is still important to note that they existed at all and at a higher percent than shown in advertising. In the sense that four million married women entered the work force between 1950 and 1960, women's reality in the 1950's really did differ from the ideal domestic image portrayed in advertising.⁴⁶

However, the fact that a majority of married women and mothers did not work gives more support to the domestic lifestyle proposed by advertising. Plus, many of the exceptions put forth in advertising only supported the rule stronger. The only women considered acceptable to hold a job were young, single girls and older widows or childless women. Young, single women could work, because it was a successful pathway to finding a husband if one was not lucky enough to obtain one in high school or college. Experts and society alike believed women were to enter and withdraw from her work in accordance with the stage of her family. So, a woman may work before and after she has children, but as soon as her first child appears she is to leave the workplace and dedicate her time to a more worthwhile trade with deep and rich rewards children provide. In Maxine Margolis' *Mothers and Such*, choosing to work while having children still at

⁴⁶ Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, 60.

home meant that the woman unconsciously rejected her children and should be ashamed if they tire of the house and seek the company of other adults.⁴⁷

Furthermore, sociologists of the time, like Myrdal and Klein, told women there is no way that they can perform their roles at home and work adequately, as both are so demanding. As a solution, they emphasize the fact that American women are first and foremost supposed to make parenthood their main goal and leave it to the woman to make the right choice as to which role to drop.⁴⁸ Myrdal and Klein's *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* is not the only source that guilt tripped women into staying at home with their children; instead, it seems like almost every book, magazine article, or television show directed women towards domesticity as a career. Along with playing on the emotions of women, society used a woman's femininity against her to keep her in domesticated roles. In 1947, antifeminist authors Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg cited some jobs to be feminine in nature and therefore acceptable for women to hold, like secretaries, bank tellers, and retail positions. Although, they argued that once a woman desired pursuing an actual career she instantly lost her femininity and society viewed her as a threat to men's self-respect.⁴⁹

Negative criticism and guilt-tripping women to stay in the home evidently worked enough to keep a majority of Americans out of the workplace, especially in suburbia where most young middle-class women lived. In a recent estimate, as little as 250,000 women with small children entered the workplace in the 1950's, although this number

⁴⁷ Maxine L. Margolis, *Mothers and Such*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 79.

⁴⁸ A. Myrdal and V. Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956).

⁴⁹ Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, 61.

most likely did not include minority women. In suburbia this number was also low, as only 10% of wives worked for pay.⁵⁰ While, American women were not only wives and mothers limited to the domestic sphere like advertising suggests, the majority of women followed this trend and kept their career as homemaking.

Several well-known authors and historians today take the opposite stance and believe post-World War II women were not limited to being a housewife and they were independent enough to explore careers and other roles in society. Joanne Meyerowitz is the most vocal on this issue in her novel *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. In *Not June Cleaver*, Meyerowitz argued that not all women fell into the housewife stereotype, mainly because not all women were white and middle-class. Meyerowitz warned historians not to limit women so drastically in the post war world and to understand that while there were housewives, there were also women workers, community activists, politicians, and rebels who made up the American populace.⁵¹ Although Meyerowitz is true and accurate in her argument and historians must not only view history from a middle-class perspective, this thesis had to have a limited focus and so chose that perspective. Therefore, while many white, middle class women were politicians, community activists, and workers, the majority of them fit, or at least tried to fit, the housewife and mother role.

⁵⁰ Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, 64.

⁵¹ Joanne J Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 5.

Did Women Have all of Advertising's Traits?

While advertising certainly made women out to be eager to please, satisfied, and nurturing wives and mothers that knew everything in the domestic domain, one has to wonder what the reality of women was and to what extent they lived up to this ideal. Many women across America listened to the self-proclaimed experts who taught them how to catch and keep a husband or how to raise well-adjusted children, and took to heart all the advertisements that showed them what refrigerator to buy, the latest cosmetic product to use, or how to master do-it-yourself projects. They listened, because all of these experts and advertisements guaranteed that if they lived up to these expectations they would find happiness and meaning in life. In 1955, a marriage study showed that less than 10% of Americans believed one could be happy when they were single and unmarried.⁵² That means that an overwhelming 90% of Americans thought marriage to be the primary key to happiness. Such a statistic shows that the majority of Americans, and women, felt it was necessary to marry. So, while in 1940 only 24% of girls between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four-year-olds were married, by 1950 this number reached 60%.⁵³ This number only increased through 1960 where 81% of women had been or were married.⁵⁴ Not only did women marry more often, they also married younger. By the end of the decade, half of all women married while still in their teens. This was primarily the result of the combination of men their age returning from war, and

⁵² Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 25.

⁵³ Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, 54.

⁵⁴ See Figure 4.3

the presence of advertisements already setting them up and training them for a domestic life.

Table 4
PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE POPULATION AGED 15 AND OVER BY
MARITAL STATUS

	England & Wales (1961)	U.S.A. (1960)	Sweden (1960)	France (1962)
Single	21.8	19.1	27.7	22.4
Married	64.4	65.9	65.2	59.3
Widowed	13.0	} 15.0	} 7.1	16.3
Divorced	0.9			2.0

Figure 4.3 Percentages of American Women Married, Single, or Widowed

Women fought tirelessly to first obtain a husband and then spent the rest of their lives attempting to please their husbands and families. They spent more than 56 hours a week on housework alone to keep busy in order to feel useful and fulfilled.⁵⁵ However, some women in the 1950s simply never reached a level of satisfaction or happiness in their role as wife and mother. Yet, women could not speak of their dissatisfaction to any of their competitors, or fellow housewives, for fear of being viewed as selfish or a failure, so women turned to psychologists. Doctors quickly diagnosed housewives' unhappiness and discontent as a psychological disorder and so, with the introduction of Valium, Librium, and Miltown the 1950s became the Golden Age of Tranquilizers. By 1958, Americans consumed 462,000 lbs of anti-anxiety medications, the next year that number increased at least threefold to become 1.5 *million* pounds.⁵⁶ These medications that quickly became mother's little helper also were mother's little secret, as advertising rarely, if ever, showed an advertisement for anti-anxiety medications. So, when American women took pills to find a sense of peace and joy in her life, advertising's ideal that

⁵⁵ Margolis, *Mothers and Such*, 168.

⁵⁶ Miriam Horn, *Rebels in White Gloves*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1999), 122.

women found solely in the roles of wife and mother is mostly untrue in reality. These dissatisfied, disoriented women went on to form the base of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and in the end they are the ones that supported the Second Feminist Movement that started in the early 1960s.

Conclusion

Stephanie Coontz in *Strange Stirrings* describes that while there were plenty of exceptions in real life to the limited wife and mother roles advertising of the 1950's portrayed, it was not until historians and the likes of Betty Friedan highlighted them that women fully understood that not every woman was and should be a housewife. Many women fell into believing that though they could choose to do anything they wanted, *scientific* evidence proved that if one does not devote herself to being a homemaker, she must be unhappy and probably cursed by a serious mental illness. Meaning quite simply that while a woman *could* work outside the house and do whatever she pleases, if she does so she is wrong in the head. In fact, advertising and mass media succeeded so well in keeping women limited to domestic lives, that a woman of the 1950's could not even fathom the idea that she was her own person or her own individual outside of being a wife and mother. This was not until Betty Friedan bluntly stated such as truth in her 1960 *Good Housekeeping* article "Women are People Too," and encouraged women to recognize their selves as individuals with their own social, intellectual, and creative needs in order to obtain real happiness.⁵⁷ Friedan spoke up again in her revolutionary book *The*

⁵⁷ Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, xxi.

Feminine Mystique to address why housewives were so unhappy when they should be beaming with satisfaction. Simply by writing down what women felt, yet could not explain, Friedan, as well as many less cited sources, created the spark for many American housewives to question their existence as simply mothers and demand a change. Though the establishment of the overall women's movement took place decades before, *The Feminine Mystique* awoke American women to the second feminist wave that gained momentum in the mid 1960's.

Soon dissatisfied housewives felt reassurance when Freidan revealed that sociologists misrepresented data in order to make women feel guilty if they were not happy simply being full-time housewives, and that psychologists over generalized and related having aspirations for a career to a woman being sexually maladjusted.⁵⁸ No longer were women alone in their dissatisfaction and desire for a career or intellectual pursuit, and as they began to meet to discuss their wants and desire, organizations and feminist groups took form and gained popularity. Friedan herself founded the National Organization for Women in 1966 to give women a representative body to identify and fight for their cause in a similar way that the Civil Rights movement was doing.⁵⁹

Similar to the political and social groups that advocated giving women a voice, female writers and editors responded to the unfair domestic confinement of women portrayed in advertising by creating feminist magazines. These magazines provided a platform for women's issues and the movement's agenda to be heard when most other

⁵⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), 24.

⁵⁹ "Founding," *National Organization For Women*, Internet, available from <http://now.org/about/history/founding-2/>, accessed 20 March 2014.

publications rarely or never published articles on the feminist movement. Established in 1971, many consider *Ms. Magazine* the first national magazine to vocalize feminist writers and the feminist worldview. As a direct response to the women's magazines of the 1950s and 60s that limited its main body articles to advice about saving marriages, raising babies, or using the right cosmetics, *Ms.* was also the first to unapologetically publish rather risqué topics like date rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment, abortion, as well as endorsing political candidates based on how supportive they were of women's issues.⁶⁰ Magazines of the 1950's ran advice articles on unhappy marriages and domestic abuse stating that wives must be dedicated to making marriages work no matter how bad a situation is. However, sticking true to their feminist stance of equality, *Ms.* took the opposite stance and advocated various solutions to dealing with marital problems, even including divorce or legal actions against violent husbands.⁶¹ *Ms. Magazine* became the first of a succession of feminist magazines and created the trend of women's magazines actually being run by women editors.

In an era dedicated to normalizing domesticity and the nuclear family, media and advertising created ideal images of men and women's roles in society. Advertising illustrated the ideal situation as the man leaving the home everyday for a respectable career and returning home to a couple of well-behaved children faithfully supervised by a smiling wife ready with a warm dinner and clean home. However, this ideal situation advertising perpetuated was truly just an ideal. The average woman had no chance at

⁶⁰ "HerStory: 1971-Present," *Ms. Magazine Online*, Internet, available from <http://www.msmagazine.com/about.asp>, accessed 20 March 2014.

⁶¹ Kristin Cellelo, *Making Marriage Work*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 77.

matching the "ceaseless activity, amazing energy, and ability to get along without sleep" required to be this ideal wife and mother.⁶² In the end, the failure to reach the happiness promised to them by becoming housewives and mothers led to a generation of women seeking more out of life.

While American women simply did not live up to the advertised roles one-hundred percent of the time, the idealization of domesticity and becoming the perfect wife and mother perpetuated by advertising held enough influence on American women that sociologists and journalists like Betty Friedan had to reassure women that these perfected roles were not achievable nor the only means of happiness. As an era dominated by advertising and mass media with agendas to create a traditional, gender defined society, the 1950s sparked a movement that questioned these ideal images and expectations pushed upon American women. Though advertising is still hugely successful in terms of influencing body image, gender roles, and societal expectations, because of the second feminist movement and popular criticisms, society today is more aware that the ideal images put forth are simply that, ideal.

⁶² Coontz. *A Strange Stirring*, 75.

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