

TORN IDENTITY: WORKINGWOMEN AND THEIR STRUGGLE BETWEEN  
GENDER AND CLASS, 1932-1950

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by

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## INTRODUCTION

### WOMAN OR WORKER?

Gender is a flexible cultural construction that changes with the needs of society. Throughout United States history there are many examples of this, particularly in the period from 1932 to 1950. During this time especially, contradictory messages from the government and the media blurred feminine roles and challenged female identity. The government, capitalist enterprises, and the media used female figures in propaganda, advertisements, magazines, radio, film, and television to maintain an example of ideal women, selfless beings whose actions were motivated by what was in the best interest of their families. Traditional standards of domesticity placed women in the home where they cared for their husbands and children. For many families chasing after the American Dream, women often provided a supplemental income to enhance their family's standard of living, usually in feminine or pink-collar jobs which utilized conventional skills in menial positions for low pay. Thus, many workingwomen were torn between class and gender, for women, society expected them to stay home and fulfill their duties as daughters, wives, and mothers, and traditionally only men were labeled as workers.

Under normal circumstances, workingwomen struggled to find a balance between their roles as women and workers. This tension was amplified during difficult times. Throughout the Great Depression, workingwomen were torn between working to support their families and living up to societal expectations of womanhood. Women who

continued to work in order to help feed their children or relatives faced social resentment for occupying jobs when so many men were unemployed. Those who returned home were stripped of their financial agency and encouraged to focus on caring for their families while waiting out the economic crisis.

As societal needs changed, the image of women and their gender roles also shifted. As mobilization began for World War II, many male laborers traded their hardhats for helmets, leaving the nation with a drastic labor shortage. To fill the void, empowering images of ideal women as industrial laborers encouraged women of all classes to get jobs to support their country and their loved ones fighting abroad. However, these policies were not meant to reconstruct gender but rather to fulfill necessity. Therefore, women were only welcome in the industrial workforce as long as the shortage of male labor continued. Nevertheless, this provisional development gave women financial independence and collective identity as they learned to command their new skills with the same quality and efficiency as men. As the war came to a close, government policies were enacted to give financial opportunity to veterans while images of ideal women giving up their jobs to get married, keep house, and have babies became the cultural norm produced by the media. Many women, especially those of middle-class status, retreated to the home and workingwomen juggled higher expectations of domesticity that the postwar period conceived, while readjusting to unskilled, low paying jobs. As the value of female labor declined after the war, workingwomen questioned their self-worth and experienced identity conflict as they invested themselves in pink-collar jobs and family life once again.

By analyzing the content of oral history interviews and the images of ideal women the government and media produced, such as propaganda and advertisements, this thesis will explore the tension workingwomen experienced while trying to center their identity and fulfill their roles as women and workers. I argue that throughout American history popular images of women were a reflection of middle-class norms, as a result, workingwomen struggled to balance their responsibility as workers and the societal expectation of womanhood. The identity of proper women was portrayed by the image of what I call the ideal woman. The ideal woman was feminine and her primary motivation was to serve the interests of her family. Therefore, throughout the twentieth century, images of middle-class housewives prevailed as they were often a reflection of the ideal woman. If working-class women were portrayed, they were usually confined to imagery of feminine pink-collar jobs, working for family luxuries. Seldom were images of female industrial workers widely publicized because they worked masculine and therefore, inappropriate jobs and were the opposite of ideal. Women could also lose femininity if they worked to provide necessities rather than luxuries for their families. Hence most workingwomen and their daily experiences were usually not found in representations of women in general. This thesis is composed of three chronological chapters with the goal of understanding the confusion surrounding feminine identity as a result of shifting gender roles during World War II. Therefore, I begin with the shift from the Great Depression to mobilization and then to the immediate postwar period. Throughout these chapters the images of ideal women take on very different and opposing identities, making the redefinition of women's roles contradictory and often



confusing for workingwomen trying to live up to societal standards of womanhood while also balancing a job.

Scholars have previously studied women in the Great Depression era, women in World War II, and women in postwar society; however this study is unique because it provides an arc that connects these three periods of time which were hampered by the same feminine ideal and tension that was felt by the variance of this construct. The depression, the war, and the postwar era were not three isolated contexts, but part of the larger continuum of government, capitalist, and media influences which facilitated how women interpreted their identity. Often, the image of the ideal women pulled societal expectations of womanhood in one direction, while desires, duties, and responsibilities pulled women in another. The arc of this story changed little for the day-to-day lives of workingwomen, yet there were great modifications of feminine identity occurring on the ideological level. Because women in the workforce were not universally accepted, they lacked a socially legitimate and unique identity. As a result workingwomen navigated their lives between their identity as women and workers. This is a story of struggle and empowerment toward the goal of equality for women at home and at work.

### *Historiography*

Composing a historiography for this thesis was a challenge because there is no major work which explores the identity struggle of workingwomen while focusing on the societal changes that took place during the Great Depression, World War II, and the immediate Post-War Era. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet, authors of “The Double

Helix”, state in their essay that there was “complexity and conflicts within individual women’s experiences of war. This variety in women’s wartime situation needs to be explored both at a national level and by comparative historians.”<sup>1</sup> The original intention of this thesis was to examine the wartime experiences of women from 1941-1945. However, to fully understand the magnitude of change women experienced in their roles during this period we must also consider the standards women lived up to and the roles women performed during the periods before and after the war. This work will contribute to understanding the American workingwomen’s search for social acceptance and personal identity from 1932-1950. Although there is not a work which explores this theme in depth, many scholars have skimmed the parameters of the topic.

In *Everything was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression*, David Welky establishes that mainstream print culture was driven by profits and therefore attempted “to appeal to the largest possible audience within a target demographic.”<sup>2</sup> In order to prevent seclusion, widely accepted traditional values were often displayed while “they played upon audiences fears, stroked their egos by justifying their lifestyle, and fed –or—created the myths governing the world.”<sup>3</sup> During the Depression, print culture kept the American Dream alive, sporting hard-work-does-payoff stories, while more and more Americans found themselves experiencing economic strain or even disaster. In addition, Welky claims, “It imaged a world where traditional gender norms held sway even as unprecedented of women moved into the workplace... [and] suggested that the country lacked class divisions even as striking workers raged against class inequalities.”<sup>4</sup>

The ideal woman, who, for this study, is the basis of comparison between proper ladies and workingwomen, was very much a product of the homogeneous America created, displayed, or reinforced by print culture and other forms of media, such as Hollywood films, and later on, television. As many forms of print culture and media sent the message to women that they should practice traditional domestic roles in the home, more women continued to enter the workforce.

In *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Alice Kessler-Harris argues that the evolution of women's larger role in the workforce undermined the conception of a "woman's place" further challenging the structure of gender relations in the family and at work. She also points out that the financial necessity of working-class families and the national economic need to employ women was firmly contradicted by the societal pressure on women to be feminine and adhere to traditional submissive roles.<sup>5</sup> She explains that women struggled to overcome hardships in the depression era as many women assumed roles as the primary breadwinners of their families. Readjustment during this period presented a "curious double message. While it imposed on the family pressures that pushed women into wage work, it fostered a public stance that encouraged family unity and urged women, in the interest of jobs for men, to avoid paid work themselves."<sup>6</sup> Kessler-Harris firmly rejects the notion that World War II was the first time married women entered the paid labor force and that their response to the war was a "continuity of their own historical experience."<sup>7</sup> While war workers still experienced tension balancing their "dual roles," workingwomen were viewed in a positive light because they were working for victory. Kessler-Harris concluded that the

war was “less than a milestone” for female workers who naturally responded to a call for patriotism as well as their own economic needs. However she contends that female participation in the workforce continued to grow during the postwar years as a response to the increasing economic demands of the family triggered by consumerism as “the home remained central to the aspirations of most women.”<sup>8</sup>

In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May argues that the Depression and World War II offered women the opportunity to enter new roles in the workforce and alter their roles in the family, however, traditional gender roles were reinforced by federal policy, the economy, and popular culture. May explains, “The prevailing familial ideology was gravely threatened during the thirties, when women and men adapted to hard times by shifting their household responsibilities.”<sup>9</sup> However, many young people noted that the tension surrounding marriages where roles were reversed “often wrecked havoc.”<sup>10</sup> When the war began and unemployment became a thing of the past, men and women rushed into marriage and parenthood despite the disruption of domestic life. When families reunited and men went back to work in the postwar world, under threat of nuclear attack and communist infiltration, the Cold War drove men and women to seek the security of traditional families and loving home environments. Policy, both foreign and domestic, focused on the concept of containment, as such, for women the home was to be a sanctuary and for men a refuge. These ideas began to spread in the immediate postwar era and magnified into the popular domesticity of the 1950s.

The images that arose through cultural mediums in the postwar era, reflected the tension surrounding changing gender roles for the past two decades. In Joanne Meyerowitz's work, *Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958*, she questions Betty Friedan's findings in the *Feminine Mystique* that magazines pushed women to embrace domesticity. Through her research, Meyerowitz found that articles were mostly written by and represented middle-class interests, however, these interests were broad and diverse. In fact, she concludes that magazines portrayed domestic and nondomestic ideas. Meyerowitz writes, "In this literature, domestic ideals coexisted in ongoing tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated nondomestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success."<sup>11</sup> Her findings agree with Friedan's thesis that for women to find personal identity they must fulfill the need to grow as demonstrated by the tension which ensued between domestic traditionalists and progressive activists. While this study uses images and advertisements as well as magazines, film, and television to demonstrate popular trends in mass culture, I also use oral history testimony to analyze how women experienced this tension themselves.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

In *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs writes, "General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up."<sup>12</sup> The majority of the oral histories selected for this thesis were conducted in the early 1990s and early 2000s. Several of the participants are now deceased and others will soon

celebrate their ninetieth birthdays. Oral histories remain the most effective way to preserve the experiences of individuals, yet they are very complex to analyze because they deal with memory. According to Halbwachs, each person who shared their story contributed to two memories: individual and collective. The individual memory is derived from personal experience, while the collective memory encompasses the individual memories which “are transformed within a totality having no personal conscious.”<sup>13</sup> The men and women who helped achieve victory against great odds, contributed their stories to the collective memory surrounding the national World War II narrative and have been labeled as “The Greatest Generation.” However, when adding their voices to the chorus of American history, their story fades among the others becoming part of the whole rather than unique in itself. Pierre Nora, author of *Rethinking France: Les Lieux De Memorie*, adds “the ‘national memory’ is nothing other than the transformation of historic memory, which has been invaded, subverted, and flooded by group memories.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the national collective memory of “The Greatest Generation” is a generalized narrative of the most common memories and themes uniting this history into a single positive reflection of the past. The objective of this thesis is to reconsider the individual memories and unveil the contradictions of the national memory pertaining to workingwomen during World War II.

While “The Greatest Generation” labeled all who participated in the war effort, Rosie the Riveter, a popular image of industrial workingwomen during the war, was memorialized in honor of the female citizens who worked for victory. In *The “Good War” in American Memory*, John Bodnar explains that in an effort to draw middle-class

housewives into the wartime workforce the Office of War Information popularized “‘Rosie the Riveter,’ an image that made women appear tough, independent, and patriotic”, as the ideal woman of wartime.<sup>15</sup> The vast majority of women who answered the nation’s call were from the working-class and held jobs long before the attack on Pearl Harbor and remained in the workforce after the war’s end. Despite this, the middle-class image of Rosie stuck, and regardless of their normal working status, it was presumed that women would return to their responsibilities in the home during the postwar era. After the war, as workingwomen returned to their subordinate status as pink-collar workers, independent Rosie vanished as a symbol of womanhood.

When the second wave Feminist Movement rose in the 1960s, women began to question their gender labels of homemaker, housewife, and mother, in search of their individual identity. Many middle-class women, who stayed at home to care for their homes, husbands, and children, wanted the chance to focus on themselves and pursue their own interests, while workingwomen in menial, low paying jobs, wanted to be recognized as workers and desired the opportunity to obtain jobs based on their skills rather than their sex. These women reflected on the injustices done to Rosies who were purged out of the industrial workforce in 1945. This reconsideration of wartime workingwomen rejuvenated the discussion about women’s roles and abilities. Bodnar confirms,

a check of citations in the *New York Times* showed that “Rosie” was mentioned only about twenty times in the period of 1946 to 1959. In a similar thirteen-year period from 1968-1981- a period when there was rising interest in civil rights and women’s rights- there were three times as many references to Rosie.<sup>16</sup>

Revisiting the past for an example of empowered women and their tragic removal from skilled, high paying jobs, may have caused former Rosies to reconsider their experiences in a different light. Pierre Nora suggests that, “The manner in which history and memory are connected was radically revised...when a new perception of the past has brought about a totally new way of understanding the past.”<sup>17</sup> The influence of the Feminist and Civil Rights movements and the narrative of “The Greatest Generation” are necessary considerations to make when analyzing these oral histories. Although these events may alter the way an individual remembers the past, period of time which lapses between 1950 and the date of the oral history interview, allows for a fuller analysis of the individual, which is the goal of this qualitative cultural history.

Although workingwomen often aspired to images of ideal women, which reflected middle-class values, they did so in an effort to achieve the American Dream rather than to adopt middle-class culture. According to Robert Bruno, author of *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown*, the middle and working classes were separated by a deep division rooted in different financial circumstances. This divide gave the working-class a distinct and unique culture that was grounded in community relations rather than prosperity because the lifestyle of workers was so strongly connected to fluctuations in the economic environment. Blue-collar workers were highly susceptible to layoffs and overtime during economic slumps and booms. As a result, this financial instability shifted the working-class’s focus of daily life from material culture to a highly communal culture based on a network of friends and family. Bruno claims that “there were few ambiguous signs that workers aspired to hold middle-class values.”<sup>18</sup>



All women in the working-class did not encounter the same circumstances because the conditions for female employment were strongly tied to the circumstances of their male relatives. For example, the industrial labor force was divided into unskilled, skilled, and management positions, all having different levels of income. The wife of an unskilled laborer may have had to hold a full-time job to make ends meet, while the wife of a skilled laborer may have worked seasonally or part-time to increase the family's standard of living. If a laborer was promoted to a management position, his income may have increased to a level of sustenance equal to middle-class standards of living, making it unnecessary for his wife to work, although there were women from the working and middle classes who chose to work out of personal desire.<sup>19</sup>

The objective of this study is to analyze the experience of workingwomen. I define workingwomen as any women who were paid to perform a job. While I personally consider the household tasks and volunteer jobs women completed as work, the majority of society at the time did not and therefore for the purpose of this study, I refer to a paid job as work. This study is composed around the interaction of two classes. The ideology surrounding the proper place of women, as well as popular images of women and families in society were based off of utopian middle-class ideals. These images created an American Dream for the working-class and were presented to society through cultural mediums, such as advertisements, magazines, and television. Even if working-class women were not the targets of these mediums, the messages transmitted to society created an ideal perception of womanhood and placed pressure on all women to

achieve its status. This pressure caused conflict around the desires, responsibilities, and obligations women had.

Although they may choose to become workingwomen, middle-class wives did not have to work for necessities. Some working-class women shared this luxury in having the choice whether to work, although most working-class women had to work to put children through college, to purchase a family car, to make ends meet and pay bills, or to ensure their family had the bare necessities. Although, my definition of working-class consists of more than just an economic condition, it was mentality fostered by personal roots to a work environment and its immediate community. Breadwinners and workers in the family created a distinct culture from their blue or pink-collar work experience. However, since the working status of women was intertwined with the financial circumstance of a male relative, women also received a great deal of their culture through their fathers and husbands. As such, the majority of women presented in this study were married. This imbalance is justified statistically. From 1932 to 1945, there was a dramatic increase in the number of married women entering the workforce and by the end of the depression nearly 15.5 percent of married women in the U.S. were employed.<sup>20</sup> The war period saw an even larger increase in the number of married women entering the workforce. In 1940, around eleven million women held jobs, by 1945 this statistic increased to nineteen million. Of the eight million new workers, six million were married.

In addition, while women of different races, ethnicities, religions, and regions are incorporated into this thesis, their testimony is only analyzed from their perspective as women. Although their individual experiences vary according to background, the complexity of their diverse struggles will not be analyzed here. My hope is that others will continue to breakdown the category of workingwomen in to subgroups, so that historians may one day have a better understanding of how the different backgrounds of individuals complicated and affected their identity struggle as workers.<sup>21</sup>

Workingwomen struggled to convert images of ideal women into a more manageable form of working-womanhood. This task became more difficult as the image of the ideal woman shifted with gender norms to accommodate societal needs. In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan W. Scott breaks with biological determinism to argue that gender is an unfixed cultural construction, a “social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for men and women.” Feminine and masculine identities are subjective and born exclusively of social origins.<sup>22</sup> In this thesis, the perfect feminine identity is portrayed through the image of the ideal woman. This may be a reflection of societal values or an image generated and popularized by the government or media to influence public perceptions of women. Nevertheless, the proper role of the ideal woman changes with the needs of society.

Scott demonstrates that women are defined by what they do, and what they do is feminine. In “The Double Helix”, Margaret and Patrice Higonnet add that “the actual nature of the social activity is not as critical as the cultural perception of its relative value

in a gender-linked structure of subordination.”<sup>23</sup> During World War II, women were encouraged to obtain formerly masculine industrial jobs. Through a massive propaganda campaign, the government redefined industrial labor, thus temporarily altering the cultural perception of industrial work relating it to feminine tasks and thereby making it appropriate for women. For example, in a propaganda film, *The March of Time*, the narrator proclaims,

Instead of cutting out dresses, this woman stamps out the patterns of airplane parts. They are taking to welding as though the welding rod were a needle and the metal a length of cloth to be sewn. After a short apprenticeship, a woman can operate this press as easily as a juice extractor in her own kitchen.<sup>24</sup>

Scott suggests that the words used to describe women change the way society views them. In this case, traditional tasks, which were constructed as feminine, were applied to work formerly seen as masculine and only remained as long as women were present.<sup>25</sup>

Margaret and Patrice Higonnet question why women’s wartime contributions did not improve their long term economic, social, or political status, and answer that the relationship between men and women is intertwined much like the formation of strands on a double helix. Neither strand can exist in isolation without the other, but the female strand is both opposite and subordinate to the male strand. Because men had exchanged their masculine identity as industrial laborers for hyper-masculine roles as soldiers, the boundaries of femininity were expanded to the masculine industrial workplace left vacant by men. Here, war altered the proper place of ideal women and expanded their opportunities from the home to the home front, allowing women to achieve economic independence and possibly familial authority. The Higonnetts claim, “In this social

dance, the woman appears to have taken a step forward as the partners change places—but in fact he is still leading her.”<sup>26</sup> They explain that although gender roles may shift, in reality they maintain a constant hierarchy of male dominance over the subordinate female. In fact, the advancing social status of women during war is an illusion, based on “the temporary nature of the industries involved.”<sup>27</sup> Women were used to fulfill the shortage of manpower in war industries producing war crafts, weapons, and ammunition. When peace was finally won, the need for war materials and female labor was no longer necessary and because the Great Depression had largely silenced the feminist movement, women did not have the organization or political influence to safeguard the financial gains of industrial employment and therefore had little choice other than to return to their homes and pink-collar jobs.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Chapter Breakdown***

This thesis explores tension workingwomen experienced while maintaining their identity as workers and trying to live up to shifting societal expectations of womanhood. Chapter one examines the conflicted roles of workingwomen during the Great Depression, when society pressured women to vacate the workforce for unemployed men. Ideal women stayed at home and cared for their children, while practicing patience and understanding with husbands concerned about financial turmoil. Many women had no choice but to work to feed their families and critics labeled them as selfish threats to societal and familial stability. Unable to provide adequate standards of living, unemployed men felt emasculated while women humbly did what was necessary to

survive. Many women took on a masculine identity as they became the providers and at times held masculine jobs. In 1933, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration began New Deal programs which helped communities boost their economies providing men and women in traditional roles with the opportunity to work on internal development projects. As the circumstances of working men slowly improved, the government gained the trust of Americans.

On December 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. As a result, the United States entered the Second World War. As the government mobilized the nation for war, they built off the foundational trust acquired during the depression which made Americans highly receptive to government propaganda that spoke for the nations needs. The image of ideal women evolved into the identity of Rosie the Riveter, a strong, independent woman who went to work for victory as an industrial laborer. As workingwomen entered masculine jobs they were conflicted by their new wartime priority as workers and their traditional duties as women. Placing their tasks as mothers and homemakers second to their responsibility as production workers caused great turmoil and tension for women accommodating the changing needs of the nation.

Chapter two explores the contradictions to unity and camaraderie between women in the workforce, as dramatic tension between feminine female office workers and masculine female industrial laborers occurred. Their common identity as workers was divided by the gendered affiliation of their jobs and their relationships with men varied as a result. Female office workers dealt with forceful sexual advances by men.

Occasionally, minor flirtations at work turned into affairs between men and women workers and society deemed women in traditional male environments as threats to familial and societal stability. Divided by gender, relationships between men and women were conflicted by traditional perceptions of gender roles which caused sexual tension.

The third and final chapter explores the conflict of workingwomen after the postwar return to traditional gender values. At the war's end, workingwomen were laid off from their industrial jobs to vacate the workforce for returning veterans. With little political agency and bills to pay, working-class women had to return to their old, menial, low paying, pink-collar jobs, which caused women to question their value and talent as workers. Experiencing little satisfaction and personal gratification from work, women refocused their attention on their families. With their personal identity in question, their womanhood as wives, mothers and homemakers was reinforced by government policy and media portrayals. Portrayals of women in popular culture showed societal tension over the proper place for women. While traditionalist advocated for domestic careers in the home, feminist pushed for women's independence through work.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1932-1941

In *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, Studs Terkel shares the heart wrenching story of Eileen Barth, who worked as a county case worker during the depression. She recalled,

I'll never forget one of the first families I visited. The father was a railroad man who had lost his job. I was told by my supervisor that I really had to *see* the poverty. If the family needed clothing, I was to investigate how much clothing they had at hand. So I looked into this man's closet – (pauses, it becomes difficult) – he was a tall, gray haired man, though not terribly old. He let me look in the closet- he was so insulted. (She weeps angrily.) He said, "Why are you doing this?" I remember his feeling of humiliation . . . this terrible humiliation. (She can't continue. After a pause, she resumes.) He said, "I really haven't anything to hide, but if you really must look into it . . ." I could see he was very proud. He was so deeply humiliated. And I was too. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Great Depression, unemployment never fell below fourteen percent and reached a high of twenty-five percent during the worst time.<sup>2</sup> Men who went without work and could not provide for their families felt emasculated. Many families depended on the wages of wives, mothers, and daughters just to get by. For women like Eileen, this role reversal was difficult to bear, when so many men were out of work and society looked down upon their presence in the workforce. Historian Kenneth Bindas argues in *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South* that "Women needed to find work, to support their families, and to take care of themselves all within the confines of a society that viewed them as threats to 'breadwinners' and the family structure."<sup>3</sup> As a



result of economic strain, the past achievements of the women's liberation movement faded and women's family roles were accentuated.<sup>4</sup> As such, many workingwomen personally justified their depression roles as workers in familial terms. For example, daughters worked to help their parents, wives worked to take pressure off of their husbands, and mothers worked to ensure their children had enough to eat. Although their mission was noble, society did not accept women, especially married women, as appropriate providers for the family.

During the Great Depression, the ideal woman was a reflection of a middle-class housewife, who cared for her home and children while providing moral support for her husband during troubled times. However, women who were obligated to work in order to support their families did not fit this ideal perception because their motivation to work out of financial necessity gave them a masculine identity. Workingwomen could fit the image of the ideal woman, but only if their work was for optional expenditures. The small percentage of workingwomen, who held masculine jobs, for example on farms or in industry, also failed to meet societal expectations of womanhood because they did not perform pink-collar jobs that utilized their conventional skills and were seen as appropriate for women.<sup>5</sup> This chapter is divided into two sections. The first explains how society consumed the image of the ideal woman, while the second explores how workingwomen were different from this image. This chapter will answer the following questions: Who was the ideal woman of the Great Depression and how did workingwomen contrast society's perception of her?

### *Consuming Images of the Ideal Woman*

In *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, Elizabeth Cohen argues that the spread of mass culture depended how it was “produced, distributed, and consumed.”<sup>6</sup> Statistics from the end of the 1920s showed that working-class people spent \$22.56 per year, double that of middle-class professionals, on going to the movies. At that time, the movie-going experience in Chicago for working-class people took place in neighborhood theaters, limiting their exposure to other cultures. Cohen states,

when people viewed movies in the familiar world of the neighborhood theater, identification with their local community was bolstered, and the subversive impact of the picture often constrained.<sup>7</sup>

During the mid 1920s, fifty million, half of the U.S population, attended the movies each week, by 1930 the figure doubled, not only widening the audience but also changing the way the movie industry functioned. The end of the 1920s saw the integration of the movie industry creating chain theaters, which had access to the most desirable films and helped to standardize the American theatrical experience by the early 1930s. The introduction of talking films provided an extra cost that many neighborhood theaters could not afford, forcing them to lose business to chain theaters.<sup>8</sup> Talking movies also promoted silent audiences, therefore instead of having a social experience with friends at the movies, the transmission became one way from the screen/sound to the viewer/listener. The transformation of the movie industry brought individuals from the working and middle classes, with a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and interests, together to experience American culture.

Cohen's example of expanding mass culture demonstrates that businesses attempted to overcome all forms of obstacles to increase consumption and profit. Therefore, Americans of all different backgrounds experienced a similar standard of entertainment by consuming the same material and the same messages. Regardless of class or gender, individuals experienced mass culture, which often portrayed a uniform example of familial norms to please diverse audiences. In relation to the ideal woman, although a middle-class representation of womanhood, all classes and both genders received a similar message that the proper place for women was in the home and men's business was in providing for their dependents.

According to David Welky, author of *Everything was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression*, the *Ladies Home Journal* projected traditional roles for women, giving them pride about their place in the home and status within the family. Although fostered to the tastes of middle-class women, the magazine ignored the differentiated lives of workingwomen, circulating three million copies per month, it was still "the most influential member of the 'most powerful group of periodicals in America.'"<sup>9</sup> Each month the *Journal* paid tribute to homemakers, mothers, and wives giving them the advice of a well "trusted friend." The ideal woman was fashionable, kept a well ordered home decorated to suit her husband's tastes, made educated buying decisions to accommodate the needs of her family, made healthy, nutritional meals with home grown ingredients from her garden, and always made her children and husband her first priority. The *Ladies Home Journal* dedicated their pages with advice to help women obtain or maintain their potential as ideal women.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to attract young readers in 1935, the *Ladies Home Journal* took a new direction. The magazine began to incorporate women who were not quite ideal, “It showed women working while placing housewives on pedestals, and mentioned divorce while celebrating marriage.”<sup>11</sup> Taking notice that women were not a homogeneous group, the *Journal* wanted to appeal to women of all different education levels and ambitions. This new strategy was successful with the readership reaching four million subscribers by 1941.

The *Ladies Home Journal* specialized in fictional stories that usually began with an unstable couple experiencing problems within their relationship. The themes encouraged women to be selfless and sacrifice their own ambitions and stubbornness for the sake of a healthy marital relationship. For example, Welky introduced the story, “The Second Marriage” where remarried widow, Lillian, and her new husband, Warren, experience trouble making adjustments to their new life together. Lillian “objects to new furniture in her house, the new dog in her yard, and the new man in her bed.”<sup>12</sup> After finally losing his tolerance, Warren storms out, threatening divorce because Lillian has made him a slave in her house. When Warren leaves, Lillian understands that her stubbornness and inflexibility drove Warren away and the couple reunites when she demonstrates that she is willing to compromise and is ready to “live his life and not her own.” This story was one of many that demonstrated to women that their role was to put aside their personal preferences to please their husbands. Marriage was a woman’s natural state and to be an ideal woman was to be an ideal wife.

An ideal woman in the depression era not only understood how to satisfy her husband, she also knew how to consume intelligently. The *Ladies Home Journal* was full of advertisements which informed women about the scientific and economic benefits of products while playing on women's desires to meet societal perceptions of ideal women. A 1933 advertisement for Ivory Soap (**Figure 1**<sup>13</sup>), a product of Proctor and Gamble, appeared in the *Journal* to attract their primary consumers: women. The ad's main catch phrase was "Ivory Soap at the lowest prices in 17 years." Smart, economical women would choose Ivory to get the most out of their husband's hard earned money. The ad displayed ten images of women doing feminine tasks each with a quote about the product from a different woman. For example, Mrs. R. D. S. from Chevy Chase, Maryland said,

I use Ivory to wash my most cherished possession- my lovely baby son. Today I used Ivory for the first time for a shampoo and my blonde hair looks so glossy and bright that even my unobservant husband noticed its improvement.

Accompanied by an illustration of a slender blonde nurturing her young infant, this quote sent the message that Ivory soap was safe and gentle enough to be used on babies making it a trustworthy brand. In addition other images showed women washing their hair and noticing an improvement in skin complexion from using Ivory soap. An elegantly dressed woman adjusting her husband's suit claimed, "With all the washing I have to do, Ivory leaves my hands in perfect condition." Women could achieve beauty and attract attention from their "unobservant" husbands by using the product for personal care. However the most efficient women also used Ivory to clean their homes. Images showed women polishing furniture and hanging linens. Mrs. M. D. of Wayland, New York was quoted,

I love to tumble into fresh downy blankets that have been washed with Ivory soap. All of my woollens washed with Ivory are fluffy as new - my silk underwear, sheer stockings and silk dresses are soft and unfaded.

Ivory soap was a product that ideal women used to provide a clean and comfortable environment for their loved ones and could be used to help women look their best. Ivory soap could be used for all personal and home cleaning needs. The powerful imagery of this advertisement captures the intelligence, as well as the beauty and desire of an ideal woman to please her husband and keep a comforting, orderly home. Advertisements like this created an image for all women to aspire to.

Figure 1

**NICE COTTONS AND LINENS** - "When I bought gay colored linens for our cottage, the salesgirl told me to wash them in Ivory. Now that the price of Ivory is reduced, I am using it for even household cleaning." Mrs. W. I. R., Oakland, Calif.

**COMPLEXION** - "My complexion has cleared up—thanks to Ivory. Since the new low prices, I've started using Ivory Flakes for clothes and dishes. I'm thrilled to have such grand soap for so little money." Miss M. S., Rockford, Ill.

**TO SAVE HANDS** - "With all the washing I have to do, Ivory leaves my hands in perfect condition," says Mrs. E. S., Toronto, Canada, who is using Ivory now for cleaning, shampooing, bathing her baby and washing his clothes.

**BATH** - "My husband's a big man and likes a man-sized piece of soap. Besides, Ivory floats!" Mrs. A. C. W., W. Warwick, R. I., tells us. She says now she also finds Ivory "the best soap for white woodwork, linoleum and painted walls, because it takes off the dirt, but not the paint."

**BABY'S SKIN** - "I use Ivory to bathe my most cherished possession—my lovely baby son," Mrs. R. D. S., Chevy Chase, Md., writes. "Today," she continues, "I used Ivory for the first time for a shampoo and my blond hair looks so glossy and bright that even my unobservant husband noticed its improvement."

**SHAMPOO** - In addition to using Ivory now for floors and woodwork, dishes and "to keep our awnings like new" Mrs. K. M., Rutherford, N. J., says, "We love Ivory for shampoo—it rinses out so easily."

**WOOLENS AND SILKS** - "I love to tumble into fresh, downy bed blankets that have been washed in Ivory Soap," says Mrs. M. D., Wayland, N. Y., and now, she adds, "all my woollens, washed with Ivory are fluffy as new—my silk underwear, sheer stockings and silk dresses are soft and unfaded."

**DISHES** - "The new low prices have inspired me to stock up on Ivory," writes Mrs. R. T. G., Melrose, Mass. "We use it now for bathing—for the laundry—for dishwashing, suds. Perhaps the dishes don't fully appreciate the difference between Ivory and inferior soaps, but my hands do."

**IVORY SOAP** does much to stretch our dollar now. For cleaning furniture, it is unequalled. I sponge my nicest rugs with Ivory suds. Ivory Soap is substituted for shaving cream and I even found my daughter using it as a dentifrice." Mrs. H. B., Romeo, Mich.

**IVORY SOAP** at the lowest prices in 17 years. Millions are using IVORY for everything . . . for face · bath · dishes · fine fabrics · nice cottons and linens

IVORY SOAP · IVORY FLAKES · IVORY SNOW · 99 <sup>44</sup>/<sub>100</sub> % PURE

Advertising was the main way magazines introduced goods and in order to make brand names marketable to women they had to link consumption to personal life. As a result advertisements displayed images of happy, ideal women using their products to make them appealing. Women consumed products to enhance their beauty, clean their homes, to better care for their children and to please their husbands, all in the quest to achieve or maintain ideal womanhood. Although obtaining the status of an ideal woman was desirable it was not a reality for many working-class women, nevertheless many aspired to societal perceptions of ideal women and sought to balance their womanhood with their obligation to work. This task became much more difficult during the hard times of the Great Depression when societal, familial, and economic security was rare. More than ever society would pressure workingwomen to stay home and vacate jobs for men. However, this was an impossible reality for many families which relied on a woman's income for survival.

### *Contrasting the Ideal Woman and the Workingwomen*

As the nation plunged into the Great Depression the public perception of women's roles gradually changed to meet societal needs. In the winter of 1933, unemployment reached an all time high of twenty-five percent.<sup>14</sup> That same year the federal government passed into law the National Economy Act, which prohibited more than one federal salary per married couple. As a result, women, who usually earned less than their male partners, were forced to resign their positions to vacate their jobs so that unemployed men could reclaim their traditional place as breadwinners.<sup>15</sup> Businesses

across the nation followed suit, releasing women from the workforce, to employ jobless men. The reasoning behind this strategy was to alleviate suffering and spread the burden of the depression era. Policy and public perception assumed that if a woman was working, it meant that she was providing her family with a supplementary income in addition to her husband's, and it was possible for her to return to the home and live within smaller means, while vacating her job for a man so he would have the opportunity to provide for his family. In 1936, just three years after the National Economy Act was passed, when asked if a woman should work if her husband was employed, eighty-two percent of the people participating in the poll answered "no."<sup>16</sup> This is an example of the constant negotiation occurring between government policy and public opinion. At times, the government drove policy from the top down and other times public opinion encouraged the government to create policy that reflected social ideals. Although difficult to determine who did the driving, the negotiation between the government and the public was a constant factor in policy initiatives throughout the era.<sup>17</sup>

Luckily, the union participation of female industrial workers had been slowly growing since the 1920s. In *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Alice Kessler Harris notes that in 1930 less than 9 percent of the members in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) were women and less than 3 percent of working women joined the union.<sup>18</sup> Further breaking down these statistics, trades such as building, "transportation, communication, mining and quarrying, machinery, metal, and shipbuilding"<sup>19</sup> had few female workers, but accounted for two-thirds of total AFL union



membership, whereas in female dominated industries such as “textiles, leather, and clothing-manufacturing” only accounted for 6 percent of total union membership.<sup>20</sup>

As workers, the value of female labor was less than the cost of male labor and when the Depression caused industrial management to seek ways to cut costs, men felt threatened that women, as a cheaper source of labor, would replace them. Therefore in 1934, AFL President William Green announced that the union sought to increase female membership and stop discrimination against women in the workplace. Sheltering women as union members eliminated them as a threat to male employment. From 1936 to 1939, vast numbers of workingwomen from the “automobile, rubber, metal trades, glassware, and leather industries”<sup>21</sup> enthusiastically joined the union and were protected by its benefits.

Nevertheless, the idea of women occupying industrial jobs when so many men were unemployed did not sit well with many Americans. According to Harris, on November 15, 1939, a newspaper from United Auto Workers Local 2 published a response to the wife of a union member demanding to know why the union did not “eliminate the working wife from the Murray Corporation and why aren’t others laid off upon getting married?”<sup>22</sup> Vice President of local Mike Mannini replied,

. . . I do not condone husband and wife working. . . . When our union began to function in 1937, many women were employed by the Murray Corporation, consequently these same women are protected (regardless of their working husbands) by our seniority clause, a clause as a ranking officer of Local 2, I am pledged to enforce at the very best of my ability. Then, too, in order for the Murray Corporation to survive in the automobile industry, women must be employed on certain highly competitive work. I reiterate that the working wife, whose husband is employed should be barred from industry. This isn’t possible

for the following reasons: The union must protect their seniority; many women must work to support large families because their husband's income is inadequate – many pose as single girls. . . . Someday, Dear Sister, I hope we will reach that economic ideal where the married women will find her place in the home caring for children, which is God's greatest gift to women and her natural birthright. Hoping you understand my futile position in this dilemma. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Many unions were able to protect female workers against public hostility to their presence in the workforce. On the contrary, Lizabeth Cohen adds that Western Electric of Chicago tried to balance the burden of the depression by keeping workers who solely supported families; as a result married women often lost their jobs despite seniority. However, in this rare case, they received termination allowances and help finding another job.<sup>24</sup> Although seniority was protected by some unions, many Americans did not support the presence of married women in the workforce. Nevertheless, women of the working-class had little choice other than to work. Therefore they sacrificed their femininity and experienced ridicule in order to earn wages and provide for the needs of their families.

From 1932-1950, the status of a woman was often determined by her closest male relative. Unmarried women often lived in their father's household and worked at least until marriage, when their husband's financial position then determined their working status. Therefore, marriage played a fundamental role in defining the lives women. According to S. J. Kleinberg, author of *Women in the United States: 1830-1945*, the 1920s coined the term "companionate marriage," which "implied a union of equals that met both partners' sexual, emotional, and personal needs based upon mutual affection and sexual attraction, rather than economic need or religious dogma."<sup>25</sup> Economic needs

during the depression were undeniable and often created instability, tension, and conflict in marriages. By the mid to late 1930s, the marriage rate in the United States reached an all time low and society regressed back to promoting traditional marriage relationships (male-breadwinner/female-housewife) to save the sacred declining value.

Despite the need for familial security, more and more young adults feared the repercussions of marriage during an economic crisis. If men could not meet the demands of a traditional marriage by providing enough income for their wives to stay home, men would defer the responsibility. As a result, young men and women of the working-class stayed at home longer and obtained jobs that enabled them to help their parents and earn their own keep. For young women, this experience was liberating but full of social backlash. Women who worked during the depression, even in “pink-collar” jobs, were considered selfish and a threat to the economic and moral stability of families. Elaine Tyler May states, “In spite of the discrimination women faced in the paid labor force, many achieved some measure of independence they were not so eager to relinquish to become dependent in someone else’s home – especially with men’s employment as precarious as it was.”<sup>26</sup> Many women were not willing to risk their financial independence as a trade off for marriage when economic disaster could be the result. Working-class women felt pressure from society to marry and have children, however the economic reality caused them to postpone such relationships and embrace their identity as workers.

The vast majority of workingwomen held pink-collar jobs and still experienced ridicule. According to Gluck, “if women dared to chart a course for themselves outside the traditional family sphere, they were either chastised or ultimately forced to surrender to their ‘natural feminine instincts.’”<sup>27</sup> These instincts laid within the parameters of low paying, menial jobs. Gluck explains that young “upwardly mobile working-class women often joined the ranks of...workers before marriage, but after marriage she usually withdrew from the labor force.”<sup>28</sup> Only in the event of economic necessity would she return to the workforce after marriage, normally in a “pink-collar” job. However, the menial repetitive tasks that these positions included, along with the low wages, did not make them desirable to many. Elaine Tyler May claims, “Therefore, when young women looked toward the future, most of them had little trouble choosing between their ill-paying jobs and the prospect of marriage to a promising provider, because institutional constraints made only one ‘choice’ viable.”<sup>29</sup> By marrying a promising provider, women had the chance to reflect the image of the ideal woman, embracing their feminine identity and adhering to societal perceptions.

According to Alice Kessler-Harris, the depression era saw a spike in the number of older-married women obtaining jobs. One in ten married women held jobs and only a third of workingwomen were married, nevertheless their presence created a controversial debate about the consequences of women in the workforce. Traditionalists believed that workingwomen were jeopardizing the family. Men who could not find jobs were humiliated when they could not provide for their families. Because women’s labor was cheaper than men’s women had an easier time finding jobs. Kessler-Harris claims, “ideas

that once had consigned women to inferior places in the labor force now preserved them for jobs that menfolk could not get.”<sup>30</sup> As a result, some workingwomen became the breadwinners of the family, while husbands completed the household chores that women no longer had time to do. This role reversal created tension among the family and confused children about the proper roles for adults. Despite criticism, Kessler-Harris states, “They could not sit by idly by watching families recede into despair while jobs, even meager jobs, existed at all.”<sup>31</sup>

Lizabeth Cohen adds to this discussion claiming that the depression hit middle aged men from the ages of 35-55 the hardest, just at the age “when their family responsibilities were greatest.”<sup>32</sup> Factories and industries laid off older men in exchange for young men with able bodies. As a result of his inability to provide, men experienced decreased authority within the family, while women took over the family’s finances when gaining jobs “in service occupations as clerks, maids, and waitresses, which survived the hard times better than manufacturing jobs.”<sup>33</sup>

Families across the nation struggled to make ends meet on very limited means and with little hope turning up for future opportunities. Unemployed men who were unable to provide for their families in the long run were emasculated and felt they had failed as men. Neil Maher, author of *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*, argued that “Physically frail and unable to put in an honest day’s work, many young men felt both emasculated and infantilized before enrolling in the CCC.” Unfortunately, the Civilian Conservation

Corps only targeted men from the ages of 18 to 22. As such, older men with families depending on them for support struggled to find work and feed their wives and children. Left with no other way to support their families, many turned to the government for relief. In *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, Studs Terkel introduced the story of Ben Isaacs, a salesman who “lost everything” during the depression because he could not find a job. He stated,

I didn’t want to go on relief. Believe me, when I was forced to go to the office of the relief, the tears were running out of my eyes. I couldn’t bear myself to take the money from anybody for nothing. If it wasn’t for those kids – I tell you the truth – many a time it came to my mind to go commit suicide. Than go ask for relief. But somebody has to take care of those kids. . . .<sup>34</sup>

Many men were mortified that the life they worked so hard for turned to nothing so quickly. Ben and his family were living off of a half a pound of baloney per day, in an apartment building which the landlord abandoned and the water had been shut off due to lack of bill payment. “I’m telling you, today a dog wouldn’t live in that type of place. Such a dirty, filthy, dark place.”<sup>35</sup> Ben claimed that his family’s condition of merely surviving continued until 1940 and things started to get a little better after the war began.

My wife found a job in a restaurant for \$20 dollars a week. Right away, I sent a letter to the relief people: I don’t think I would need their help anymore. I was disgusted with relief, so ashamed. I couldn’t face it anymore.<sup>36</sup>

As his wife worked in the restaurant, Ben was selling products on the street when his buddy got him a job working in a factory. At the age of fifty, Ben was paid sixty cents an hour while twenty year old boys were making seventy-five cents for the same job. On his way to find a higher paying job, he realized that people working in the war factories now had money to spend, so he decided to go back to his old business as a salesman. Ben

invested what money he and his wife had scrimped to save and went back into business.

“Thank goodness things changed. I came back. I came back. It was the end of 1944.”<sup>37</sup>

Believe it or not, Ben’s story of survival made him and his family some of the lucky ones who managed to live through the depression together. In *A History of Women in America*, Janet L. Coryell and Nora Faires cite that 1.5 million women were deserted by their husbands during the depression.<sup>38</sup> Unable to take the pain and disgrace of seeing their children and wives suffer and starve, some men left and a few committed suicide. Ben was not alone when he considered his family lucky that his wife found employment. According to Gluck, by the end of the decade “15.5% of all married women were gainfully employed,” of these women, one-third of their husbands made below the median income in 1939, which was the equivalent of six hundred dollars. Therefore, one-third of married workingwomen did not fit the image of the ideal woman because they worked to provide for their families. Wives of poor workers were unlikely to make more than two hundred dollars, which made all the difference between eating and starving.<sup>39</sup> From this statistic it can also be determined that two-thirds of the married women in the workforce did not work out of necessity, thereby making it possible for two-thirds of workingwomen to keep their femininity intact while holding a job because their husbands were able to provide and maintain traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, with the uncertainty of the economy even the men with stable jobs were concerned about maintaining their position.

Advice was available for wives whose husbands worried about, struggled to, or were unable to provide. According to Welky, the *Ladies Home Journal* encouraged women to help their husbands overcome the economic strain by increasing their self-confidence. A columnist for the *Journal*, Loring Schuler, told readers in a July 1932 issue “Don’t nag at him” and “Don’t blame him. Don’t scold him. Do whatever you can to cheer him up.” For “an unemployed man...was like a wounded child.”<sup>40</sup> The role reversal of jobless men and increasing numbers of employed women, meant that wives had to be more feminine and understanding towards their husbands to build up their masculinity to ease the tension in their marriage.

Elaine Tyler May discusses that through the darkest days of the depression with nowhere else to turn to Americans put aside their fear of the national government. Through fireside chats and numerous New Deal programs Americans opened their homes to government influence. Catherine Elizabeth Young of Rossville, Georgia was in favor of Roosevelt and the New Deal because many of her friends and neighbors obtained government jobs. She recalled, “at that time people was hungry and after the New Deal came in, they had a job- Roosevelt started the CC camps and the public work camps for people.”<sup>41</sup> Although Emily Adler of Chicago felt secure in her husband’s financial position as an electrical engineer, she was confident that “agencies and government would take care of what was happening in the outside world.”<sup>42</sup> It was during this time, that the people placed their confidence in Roosevelt and began to trust the government; the result made government policy during World War Two nearly undisputable. Depression era programs such as the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian



Conservation Corps, and the National Industrial Recovery Act, attempted to help working-class men regain employment and redeem their masculinity. According to May, the New Deal “failed to promote the possibility of a new family structure based on gender equality”<sup>43</sup> and discouraged married women from employment through legislation. She continues,

“The New Deal also failed to alleviate wage differentials...The state might provide employment or even take over as breadwinner for an unemployed head of household, but it would not provide well-paying jobs for women, day care facilities, or any other measures that would help alleviate women’s economic dependence on men.”<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, workingwomen endured the hardship and critics wearing on through the depression years, while the little money that they brought home in low paying positions could make all the difference in the care their family received.

In the 1937 book, *Middletown in Transition: A Study of Cultural Conflicts*, Robert and Helen Lynd laid out the perceived differences between men and women in Middletown.

Men are stronger, bolder, less pure, less refined, more logical, more reasonable, more given to seeing things in the large, but at home needing coddling and reassurance, ‘like little boys.’ Women are more delicate, stronger in sympathy, understanding, and insight, less mechanically adept, more immersed in petty details and in personalities and given to ‘getting emotional over things.’<sup>45</sup>

The Lynd’s argue that as a consequence of these traits and characteristics men and women are different kinds of people, resulting in a sexual division of everyday labors, tasks, and responsibilities. They claim,

Men get the living, i.e., earn the money to buy the living for the family; they pay for the children’s education and the family’s leisure, as well as for food, clothing,

and shelter... Women look after affairs within the household; they care for the small children, and rear and teach the children, always with male authority in the background in the form of the father who comes home at night or the male superintendent of schools.<sup>46</sup>

These societal norms created stability and order to gender norms and duties in everyday life. However, when the Great Depression made unemployment high and prosperity rare, these norms were relaxed out of necessity. Because men could not adequately provide for their dependents, the burden was placed upon women. The Lynds argue that the depression created a situation which sharply contrasted traditional gender roles. The world of men, which was so closely intertwined with moneymaking, was more affected than the world of women in the home. Therefore, the role of the male narrowed bearing the brunt of the financial shock. In many cases the roles of men and women were reversed, with men caring for the children and home, while women secured an income through work.<sup>47</sup>

Even during the depression, middle-class families adhered to traditional gender roles, outlined by the Lynds, that few working-class families were able to maintain. Emily Adler of Chicago, a volunteer at the American Medical Association, was example of an ideal woman. Emily's husband was an electrical engineer, a skilled professional whose wages maintained a high standard of living for his family. Shortly after they married, the depression began and Emily had her first child. She confessed,

I was so involved with a new family and personal life that what happened outside [such as the depression and the New Deal that it] didn't give me too much of an impression. You know, you just live through it. And politically I was evidently very unaware of what going on around me. I was so, I had just had a baby and I was very much involved with personal adjustments.<sup>48</sup>

Absorbed within the hearth, as an ideal woman was supposed to be, Emily was unable to continue her volunteer work after 1934, so she continued her philanthropy from within her home. “The struggle was the many beggars that came to our apartment and needed a hand out and we had a set of dishes ready and food ready to give it to people as they came.”<sup>49</sup> Caring for her husband, children and fellow citizens in need was considered a great act of femininity. Emily realized how fortunate her family was not to be immediately affected by the economic crisis. She recalled,

You tried to create an island of security within your own family....lived very modestly and had no great ambitions to be financially successful. I mean we had a position. My husband's position was relatively safe.<sup>50</sup>

Emily is an example of an ideal woman and she has little in common with others who shared their testimony.

Less fortunate working-class women struggled to maintain a feminine image of womanhood through an economic crisis in which the mere survival of their family usually depended on their financial contribution. For women of the rural South, although their work load during the depression was heavier, it did not change their roles because they often worked alongside men. Almedia Wray of Greensboro, Georgia, was from a farm family and claimed

I raised my chickens and we did have calves to kill. But we couldn't get no fish cause I couldn't fish... All kinds of vegetables in the garden and corn and cotton and peas, potatoes. All sorts of farm work we had to do, you know.<sup>51</sup>

Almedia described an egalitarian application of gender roles in her rural farming family. She remembered, “I used to work in the field all the time.”<sup>52</sup> Field and farm work were

masculine jobs that took great strength and stamina, but everyone had to eat; therefore everyone had to put in a hard day's work. However, on top of her daily chores, Almedia also worked for a dollar one day, once a week doing the washing, ironing, and cooking for Mrs. Moorehead. Therefore, Almedia did masculine chores at home to feed herself and her family and outsourced her feminine skills for wages once a week.<sup>53</sup>

Like Almedia, Essi Whitney from Cleburne County, Alabama, and her family also farmed, but instead of crops they raised tobacco and cotton. She claimed,

that's when the banks crashed you know- in 1929. It was beginning, we farmed for a living. I know we got five cents a pound for some of the cotton. That was the year... We pulled burrs and all... it come a early fall like this, and a freeze on some of them, and it rained a lot and we just pulled.<sup>54</sup>

Picking cotton and pulling burrs was a tiring, menial, time consuming job that did not align with perceptions of femininity, but in order to make a living working-class women, like Essi and Almedia, did what they had to survive.

Farming vegetables and cotton were both extremely difficult masculine tasks that women shared with men. Annie Young of Alabama also shared an equal burden with her husband. They both worked the 6 to 6 shift in the textile mill<sup>55</sup> and Annie recalled that she worked there “Mighty near all of my life, except when I went out to have babies.”<sup>56</sup> Some working-class women did masculine work for the majority of their lives and having children was the only time they were unable to work.

Marjorie Baston of Steubenville, Ohio explains that she was attending a business college when the depression hit and her and her husband almost lost their home. Only

after the government Home Owner's Loan Corporation took over the local bank were they able to keep their home. Marjorie stated,

I thought I had better get with it. And then I went to work with a hardware supply company that had just started up... I was the secretary, and bookkeeper. I kept the accounts receivable, and typed letters and things.<sup>57</sup>

Even without finishing her courses at the business college, Marjorie claimed that she was easily able to pick up on her new work because the men she worked for "dictated" to her.<sup>58</sup> Marjorie's job aligned with feminine conceptions of pink-collar labor, however, because she worked to provide for her family rather than to only pay for "extras" her role remained outside the image of an ideal woman. The masculine worker identities of Essi, Almedia, Annie, and Marjorie overpowered their feminine identities as women and because female farm and industrial workers did not adhere to the image of an ideal woman they were seldomly represented or portrayed as societal figures.

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During the Depression, traditional standards of femininity were presented through popular culture as a reflection of middle-class womanhood. Ideal women stayed at home to care for their children, while treating their husbands with patience and understanding in efforts to build up their masculinity during times of struggle. In an attempt to evenly distribute the financial hardships of the economic crisis, many of the New Deal programs focused on providing work for male breadwinners while the government prohibited married women from holding government jobs if their spouses were employed. Many businesses in the private sector also followed this example because of public hostility

toward workingwomen for occupying jobs when so many men were unemployed.

Regardless of their perception, many women had to work to ensure the survival of their families and because working-class women performed a masculine objective by working in order to provide for their families in both, feminine pink-collar jobs as well as masculine industrial and farm jobs, therefore the majority of workingwomen did not reflect the image of an ideal woman. In addition, when men were unable to provide for their wives and children they felt humiliated and many women became the sole supporter of their families working pink-collar jobs. Tension arose as women gained more authority in the home as the breadwinner and men resorted to performing household tasks. The Depression was a time of great struggle when women and men did what was necessary to survive. As such, the identity of workingwomen was surrounded by great tension as their womanhood was challenged while they performed their obligation as workers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WORLD WAR II, 1941-1945

In *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May discusses how popular culture was “receptive to emotional appeals to home and hearth,” among the reasons America was fighting World War II. In 1942, the Office of Facts and Figures sponsored radio segments on all major stations to rally support for the war. One “highly acclaimed” broadcast, entitled “To The Young” included the following “exhortation:”

Young Male Voice: “That’s one of the things this war’s about.”

Young Female Voice: “About us?”

Young Male Voice: “About *all* young people like us. About love and getting’ hitched, and havin’ a home and some kids, and breathin’ fresh air out in the suburbs...about livin’ an’ workin’ decent, like free people.”<sup>1</sup>

Fighting the war was about family. Men were fighting to defend their wives and children in order to preserve the dreamlike lifestyle of free people across America. Women were portrayed working in industries to bring their men home faster so their families could return to normal. Leila Rupp, author of *Mobilizing Women for War*, adds that a *Ladies Home Journal* survey including responses from soldiers, sailors, and Marines created the “blueprint for a dream girl.” Most men wanted a small, well poised woman completely dedicated to home and children, who was a good cook, enjoyed dancing, and at least one outdoor sport. They did not want their wives to work unless necessary in an emergency situation.<sup>2</sup> As men dreamed away their service time with pin-up posters of Betty Grable

and Rita Hayworth, women on the homefront were being portrayed in a new and different light.

The United States needed women to take the places of thousands of men leaving the workforce, therefore, propaganda on the homefront encouraged women to get jobs

(**Figure 2**<sup>1</sup>). William Chafe, author of the foundational

**Figure 2**



work *American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, points out that just a few years earlier during the depression, most media outlets discouraged women from working and supported policy which restricted their participation in the workforce. When the U.S. government projected that workingwomen were essential to victory, the media cooperated by portraying female workers in a positive light. Chafe

explained, “Now radio stations and periodicals glamorized war work and pleaded with women to hurry and enlist at their local employment office.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the ideal woman was classified by her motivation to work. Women were encouraged to work on the grounds that that the war would end sooner and their families would be reunited. **Figure 3**<sup>3</sup> depicts a woman holding the letters of her lover off fighting the war, the caption

**Figure 3**





stated, “Longing Won’t Bring Him Back Sooner... GET A WAR JOB!” Alice Kessler Harris, explains that employment “did not release women who worked from the pressure to adhere to old social roles.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, as expressed with the “blueprint for a dream girl” survey, men still expected women to be feminine even considering they were now encouraged to work. In this chapter, I argue that female war workers, especially those in masculine industrial jobs, experienced heightened societal expectations surrounding both their roles as women and workers. Tension resulted, as women attempted to balance their old priorities as wives, mothers, and homemakers, with their new priority as workers.

As shown in chapter one, World War II was not the first time women entered the workforce, yet during the war, propaganda images portrayed middle-class women entering the workforce for the first time, insinuating that working was a significant change for *all* women. Despite popular images, seventy-five percent of the female labor force had worked before Pearl Harbor,<sup>5</sup> proving that workingwomen were not a new development. The drastic change that the war brought was in the different kinds of jobs women held. Before the war, most women had feminine jobs as secretaries, nurses, teachers, social workers, domestic workers, and civil servants. During the war, women entered the masculine industrial workforce on a scale never before seen, occupying jobs as ship builders, welders, inspectors, mechanics, riveters, steel workers and many more. This chapter will demonstrate how propaganda drastically changed appropriate roles for women enabling them to take on masculine jobs throughout mobilization for World War II. Women were motivated to work through patriotism and the prospect of financial gain and experienced difficulty balancing their new priority as war workers over their

traditional responsibilities as mothers and homemakers. Female industrial workers especially, experienced a heightened sense of masculinity working dangerous, laborious jobs which complicated their relationships with feminine women and male co-workers.

### *Rosie the Riveter*

In *Mobilizing Women for War*, Leila Rupp argues that “The ideal American woman in the prewar image was not at all prepared to participate in the war effort.”<sup>6</sup> Because ideal women were to be absorbed in familial responsibilities their ignorance of the world outside of their home was profound and therefore, they had no sense of sacrifice for the benefit of the nation. Rupp explains that aside from participating in supply drives, planting victory gardens, rationing, and buying bonds it was difficult to see how the ideal women of the 1930s would contribute to the war.<sup>7</sup>

Society portrayed industrial labor as men’s work, which was unsuitable for women due to the physical and mental abilities required to complete tasks, as well as, the dangerous work environment. During the Great Depression, women who engaged in such work lost their feminine identity. However, when the United States entered World War II, the massive numbers of men leaving the workforce to serve as soldiers created a severe labor shortage that would affect the production of war materials required for victory. Therefore the government turned to women to fill the shortage, issuing a “nondiscrimination directive” to companies that received contracts<sup>8</sup> while launching a propaganda campaign that sharply contrasted the values projected during the depression,

portraying female workers as feminine, patriotic, and righteous, to encourage their participation in industrial labor.

The role of the government had increased its influence over public perceptions throughout the depression, but wartime propaganda was one of the most successful government campaigns in altering social values in the history of the nation. The government did this by carefully presenting the image of the ideal woman who would take on a new identity as “Rosie the Riveter.” The government needed to empower women, but could not portray them too far outside their normal gender perception. If women in the industrial workforce were meant to be temporary, the government had to make the idea of Rosie as easily adaptable to returning to the home and embracing postwar domesticity, as she was to adapting to industrial labor. In 1942, J. Howard Miller, a Westinghouse artist, created a war poster to recruit women for the work force,



**Figure 4**

(Figure 4<sup>9</sup>). The piece was entitled, “We Can Do It!” named after the quote coming from the worker. In this poster a beautiful woman, with mesmerizing blue eyes, long curled eyelashes, plucked eyebrows, flushed thin cheeks, and soft luscious lips has her hair neatly pulled up into a cute red and white polka dotted kerchief. The woman pulled up the sleeve of her blue collared work shirt to show her muscle, revealing her lean feminine figure.

Similar portrayals of feminine women in propaganda posters circulated the nation; however, a later depiction of Rosie embodied a more accurate vision and coined her name.

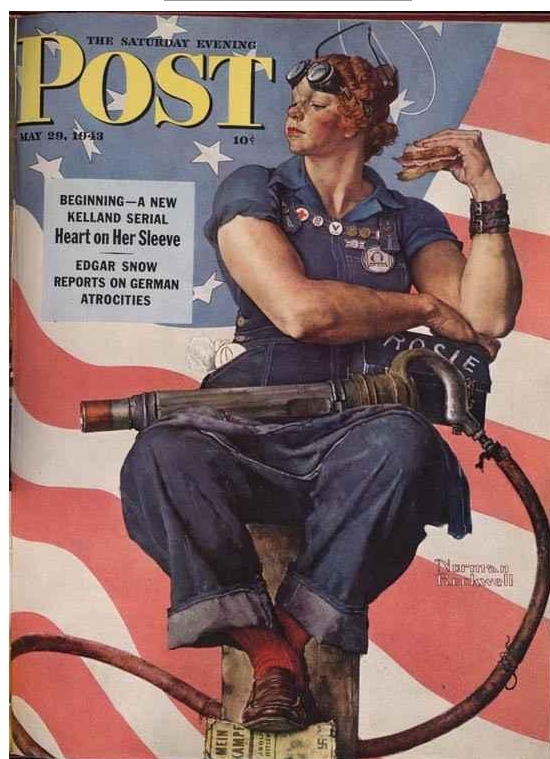
“Rosie the Riveter” (**Figure 5**<sup>10</sup>) was a Norman Rockwell painting of Mary Doyle Keefe and little did she know the pose that Rockwell captured would become iconic. The painting was first published in

the May 29, 1943 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Rosie was shown sitting in her dirty blue overalls and had her shirt sleeves rolled up, sporting her war buttons, with her dirty work coat and riveting machine lying across her lap, pausing for lunch with her muscular dirty arms leaning on her lunch tin that had Rosie written across the top in pure white, while she ate her sandwich. Rosie’s curly red hair is held

back by her face shield and goggles as she smashes a copy of Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* with her foot. Rockwell’s magic is complete with a waving American flag as a backdrop and an angel’s halo placed over Rosie’s head.

Rockwell’s painting reflected that their work was a patriot duty, due to the backdrop of the American flag, but it was also their religious and moral duty as well.

**Figure 5**



Rockwell's Rosie is captured in nearly the exact pose of Michelangelo's painting of the Prophet Isaiah in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican (**Figure 6**<sup>11</sup>). Isaiah is best known for his predictions of the virgin birth of Christ. This prophecy gave hope to the world in a time of great turmoil.

**Figure 6**



In the book of Isaiah, the world turned to sin and God could not let such “blatant” sin go unpunished. The Lord says, “Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”<sup>12</sup> In the case of World War II, Nazi ideology was seen as a force of evil taking over the earth by military might. Many believed the United States was the only hope left in defeating the “armies of darkness.” As such, Rockwell may have chosen the pose of the prophet Isaiah

and to place a halo over Rosie's head because she was the savior of the nation. Only with Rosie's full dedication to production could the U.S. produce enough arms and munitions to give the soldiers at the front the proper tools and weaponry to win victory.

*The Post* knew they would sell more copies with Rockwell's artwork on the cover, so four million copies of the edition were printed. However, the copyright restrictions on Rockwell's Rosie made it less frequently produced, playing to the government's advantage in the plot to feminize its Rosie. Although Rockwell's portrayal was more realistic, his Rosie was far too masculine and would have trouble returning

home after the war. Her only feminine traits were her red lipstick and lace handkerchief hanging out of her pocket, which were hardly visible.

The differences in the images and messages sent to viewers were profound. Miller's "We Can Do It!" showed a small beautiful woman, proclaiming confidence as if to persuade other doubtful, timid women that they could do a man's job because they had to. This woman was easily converted back into a happy housewife. According to Rupp, the public perception of a feminine Rosie "inside her coveralls, [was] the same woman who cooked, cleaned, and cared for her family."<sup>13</sup> Rockwell's "Rosie," was a thick and strong woman, doing a hard laborious job in a dirty workplace, while she personally smashed Mein Kampf, insinuating that she was the strength behind the force eliminating the fascist threat. This masculine perception eliminated the need for men in industrial work, which implied, if "Rosie" could do this job, why should she give it up when the men returned? Rockwell's image of "Rosie" was by far the most accurate, according to a description by Sybil Lewis of Los Angeles, California, a riveter for Lockheed Aircraft. She stated:

The women worked in pairs. I was the riveter and this big, strong, white girl from a cotton farm in Arkansas worked as the buckner. The riveter used a gun to shoot rivets through the metal and fasten it together. The buckner used a bucking bar on the other side of the metal to smooth out the rivets. Bucking was harder than shooting rivets; it required more muscle. Riveting required more skill.<sup>14</sup>

Big and strong, women with lots of muscle were suited for laborious jobs. If a woman didn't have much muscle going into the job, it would certainly transform her body as well as her mind. Perceptions like Rockwell's were rare; the majority of wartime propaganda

showed pretty women as girlfriends, wives, and mothers working to end the war and bring their men home.

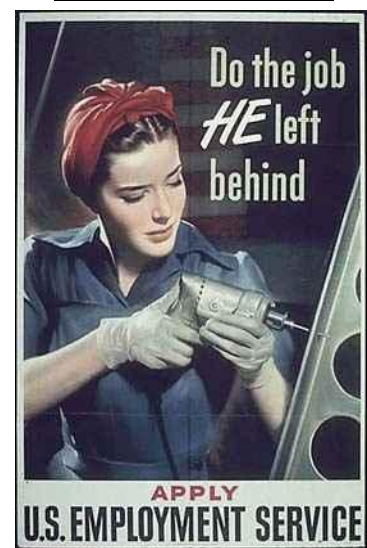
By emphasizing women's relationships to men as the primary purpose for their industrial employment, the government was able to shift a woman's place in society back to prewar norms after the war. The three propaganda posters shown imply that women would not be in their positions if their men had not left for war. All three images display beautiful women with neat hair, makeup, dressed in slimming work clothes ready to do their part. "The girl he left behind him is still behind him," (**Figure 7**<sup>15</sup>) called for women to support their men, by supporting the war, and

**Figure 7**



supporting the war meant getting a job. The poster concluded, "She's a WOW, war ordinance worker." The word "WOW" played on the feminine desire to attract men and implied that being a war ordinance worker would impress them. The woman in the poster was pausing to think of her loved one off at war, which gave her inspiration to keep working as captured by the determined look on her face. "Do the job *HE* left behind" (**Figure 8**<sup>16</sup>) stressed that the job a woman temporarily held belonged to a man off at war. It also alerted women that they had to do a job equal to a man's. The poster girl seemed aware

**Figure 8**







**Figure 9**

of this as she carefully worked. Lastly, a poster for the U.S. Employment Service (**Figure 9**<sup>17</sup>) had a husband with gray hair, dressed in a business suit, standing behind his wife with his hands on her shoulders. The husband's image was designed to show that he was no longer eligible for the draft and too old to fight. The American flag in the background showed that the nation was behind those who supported their wives in obtaining a wartime job, which made older men able to contribute even more to the war effort by allowing their wives to lend a hand. With the support of her husband, the wife stood tall and proud, dressed for work, her fists were clenched and she was ready to do her patriotic duty. The caption stated "I'm proud...My husband wants me to do my part." Rupp explained that "recruitment propaganda had to overcome the popular conceptions of sex roles in order to persuade both men and women that women should join the war effort."<sup>18</sup>

Although many men did not like the idea of having their daughters or wives working industrial jobs most understood that it was only temporary and in the best interest of the nation. Elma Beatty of Youngstown, Ohio claimed that her husband understood why she was working during the war. She remembered they made the decision together that they were going to do what they could for the effort. This decision was not a selfless act, Elma did it in the name of patriotism but also to supplement her husband's income and to financially benefit her family. In *Creating Rosie the Riveter*:



*Class, Gender, and Propaganda in World War II*, Maureen Honey argues that the public image of women “undercut the notion that women deserved and wanted a larger role in public life.”<sup>19</sup> Although courageous and determined to do their part to win the war, women were portrayed as “self-sacrificing martyrs,” dedicated to their cause, yet helpless to defend themselves and reliant on masculine men to protect them. This depiction reinforced the traditional role of women whose primary purpose was to support a husband.<sup>20</sup> The government down played the role of self-interest and capitalism as a reason for women to work, while they played up patriotism and womanly devotion to their men, families, and nation.

### ***Changing Priorities***

According to S. J. Kleinberg, author of *Women in the United States, 1830-1945*, the transition women experienced from homemakers or part-time employees to war workers presented many challenges. Women often had to convince their husbands that the nation and the family would benefit from their labor. Kleinberg states that women “persisted because they had sons at the front, needed the money to pay off debts accumulated during the Depression, or felt a patriotic duty to assist the war effort.”<sup>21</sup> Reflecting on their past, women had three motivations for entering the industrial workforce: national, communal, and personal. Women often claimed that they sought industrial jobs because the survival of the nation depended on them doing so. Others recalled a sense of duty to their neighbors who were fighting and dying abroad. Most women proclaimed that patriotism was their primary motive for working, while their

testimony was also balanced on the financial advantages they gained from higher paying industrial jobs. This reflected the pressure that workingwomen experienced to put the good of society before their own self interest. However, the motivations (patriotism or provision) that women expressed for working defined whether they identified more as women or workers.

Many women recalled great unity and national pride during their time as industrial workers. Dorinda Tabor of Youngstown declared, “It was a wartime atmosphere, is what I would call it. Like I said, it wasn’t business as usual.”<sup>22</sup> During the war, workers were expected to hustle all day. Wartime propaganda villainized those who relaxed or took a day off of work because they were helping the axis by decreasing industrial output. Elma Beatty remembered feeling motivated to give her full effort for the cause. She claimed, “Most all Americans that I know, you’ve got this desire, you’ve got to win! You just got to win! And that’s how we felt about this war situation. To think they bombed Pearl Harbor the way they did.”<sup>23</sup> Americans were mad and wanted revenge upon their enemies who attacked the nation, pushing them into war and their sons and husbands off to battle.

Many women expressed great tension when discussing their entry into the industrial workforce because of the increased physical labor and long hours, gave women less time and energy to spend on their families. Mary Zorgan of Pittsburgh was the primary caregiver and provider for her five-year-old son, elderly father and sick husband. She recalled,

I don't think I'd work there if I didn't have to, but I had to earn a living...I always had meals ready for them. When I worked daylight I cooked the day before. I managed somehow. I wouldn't want to do it over again. It was rough.<sup>24</sup>

Mary's motivation to work was primarily personal and attributed to her identity as a worker because she had to provide for her family. On the other hand, Elma placed her duty to work for victory before her personal interests to raise her children and therefore reflected the ideal woman of wartime with patriotic motives.

So many times I used to think to myself, oh my God, I should be home with my two kids, but then I'd realize, every night I'd listen to the news to see just how America was making out. And at first we weren't...[women] went out and pitched in because we thought we were going to lose a war. And we were. We didn't have the boats. We didn't have the planes.<sup>25</sup>

Women were obligated to fulfill the needs of society before fulfilling the personal needs of their families. During the war, being a worker was more important to society than being a woman. Women were torn between their maternal role to care for their loved ones, which was encouraged during the depression and, their wartime role as workers to produce for victory. To ease this tension, communities banded together like extended families to provide for personal and national labor needs. Because government, industrial, or private daycare centers were few and far between, relatives and neighbors took turns watching children, so that women were not distracted by worry and could focus solely on production while at work. As a result, neighbors shared the joys, burdens, and sorrows during the war years.

Men and women worked for the family members and neighbors who were battling enemies half a world away, but the reality of the war brought the battle into their tight knit communities. Emma Rocco of Pittsburgh remembered,

And then we heard shattering news that among the people killed [at Pearl Harbor] was a young lieutenant from Monaca [Emma's hometown, a suburb of Pittsburgh], from a more affluent family, only son who was killed on the attack in Pearl Harbor. He was there. He was the first casualty from Monaca. And I remember that, and then it hit me: this is something that is not going to go away.<sup>26</sup>

Winning the war would be a long, hard, emotional road for workers. Losing friends and family members was a reality for everyone. Dorinda Tabor made a similar recollection, "you was always waiting to hear what was going on in the other side, and different ones, who's in, who's coming home, who got hurt..."<sup>27</sup> Working-class communities were very supportive of each other, but when news came, especially bad news, it often triggered guilt for many.

Employees, even men who made a career as industrial workers, were making more money than ever before and thus reaped the monetary benefits of being wartime production workers. Emma Rocco remembered an emotional moment with her father when she returned home from school one day to find him crying. As a strong man, Emma only saw him cry twice in her life, so she eagerly asked what was wrong. She learned that a family on the next street had just lost their only son in "one of the big battles of the war." Emma's father confided his guilt in her, stating: "Well, it's the first time in my life I am making any money in the mill and I call it blood money because my neighbors are losing their sons...this is blood money, my friends are paying with their son's lives." Emma assured him that he couldn't look at the situation like that because he earned his money putting in "some pretty long hours." She told him, "You're doing something for your country and you have to honor that person that died because he did his job, you have to do your job."<sup>28</sup> Many men and women on the home front worked

harder than ever before to support the boys overseas, however, many regretted not being able to do more and felt guilty that they were profiting from the war.

Although women appreciated the chance to fulfill their patriotic duty, their motivations for obtaining an industrial job didn't end there. According to Janet Coryell and Nora Faires, authors of *A History of Women in America*, workingwomen "appreciated the pay [of industrial jobs], despite the fact that they earned less than men working the same jobs."<sup>29</sup> Coryell and Faires explained that "Women in war related heavy industries in 1944 earned on average \$31.21 a week, while men doing the same jobs earned \$54.65."<sup>30</sup> Women, like Emma, demonstrate that through war jobs they could fulfill their duty to their nation and also achieve personal gain. Emma recalled, "It was sort of a patriotic thing. They needed help. I needed to get a job and I thought why not? Feel like you are doing something half way decent and contributing to the cause."<sup>31</sup> Emma was unique for a woman of the working-class because she was attending college, and doing her patriotic duty, did not deter Emma from seeing the big picture.

I needed a job. I wanted to help pay my tuition at Duquesne University. Because my father was already was about 66, 67. The idea of burdening him with tuitions, he certainly was a big help as was my mother, but I wanted to pay for myself.<sup>32</sup>

Even though many other women were not attending college, they shared the same motivation that Emma did in holding a wartime industrial job: financial necessity. For many, Emma recalled, "It gave us the opportunity, saving a few dollars...It helped out that way."<sup>33</sup> When America entered the war, the depression was still a harsh reality. Emma claimed,

It was hard times...Nobody had a lot...Secondly; it was an opportunity to work where there was no work before. Guys had been on WPA and all these various things, so when the women really had the chance to go and help out not only for the war's sake, but for their own to make that few dollars, they did it.<sup>34</sup>

Women would not miss their chance to contribute to their country by aiding the war effort and to increase their financial means. However, in order to obtain the image of an ideal woman, women often stated these motivations as a side note or a minor benefit to fulfilling their duty.

### *Tension in the Workplace*

Most women reflected fondly on their war jobs, claiming that tasks were interesting, they learned a lot and enjoyed working with others. Workingwomen felt a strong sense of unity and empowerment during their time as industrial workers. Emma stated, "I do recall a general camaraderie, people liking each other."<sup>35</sup> Dorinda remembered the same, "There was a lot of camaraderie there."<sup>36</sup> While Sophie stopped part way through her interview to explain, "I keep saying we, I keep talking about other women that I knew."<sup>37</sup> The image of Americans working together to benefit the nation was popularized through propaganda and popular culture. Although women completing the same jobs often bonded through their similar work and new lifestyles, most women often described great tension between female pink-collar war workers and female industrial war workers, as well as between men and women in the workplace

The perception of women during the war blurred gender roles. To the public, women in the wartime industrial workforce were doing a job for the nation; however, their roles sharply contrasted established traditional gender roles for women. Despite the

government's effort to redefine industrial labor as feminine, for example, by comparing cutting out dress patterns to stamping out airplane parts, there was nothing feminine about the jobs they were completing. Female industrial workers attempted to hold onto their femininity with their make-up and curls, but by the end of the day their make-up was smudged, their hands dirty and blistered, and their clothes filthy from hard labor. Although portrayed as feminine, female industrial workers were made masculine by the labor and environment of their work. However, not all war workers had industrial jobs: many women were able to get feminine war jobs such as clerks, secretaries, and bookkeepers. Although they did not make as much money as industrial workers, women in feminine war jobs still contributed to the war effort by freeing up more men to fight or take on industrial labor, while maintaining their womanhood in positions that allowed them to utilize their conventional skills.

The presence of both masculine female industrial workers and feminine female office workers often caused friction between the two groups. For example, Peggy Katrincsak, a wartime office worker at Homestead Works in Pittsburgh, reflected on her confrontations with the women who did "men's work." Peggy described that on Fridays the office "girls" would go out after work. "We'd get dressed up and you know in those days, you wore white gloves and a hat and the whole bit, high heels."<sup>38</sup> The group would have to walk from the offices to the gate of the mill in their fashionable apparel and "the girls who worked the brick gang would say, 'oh here come the debutants.' And they were nasty, they'd just boo us, and everything, but they worked hard."<sup>39</sup> The relationship

that Peggy described was a clear distinction of cliques that formed as a result of the gendered contrast in their war work.

The differentiation between feminine and masculine female war workers created a deep divide in their understanding and acceptance of one another. Ruby Cunningham, also a former office worker for Homestead Works, reflected on the laboring women with a sense of pity, because they were such highly expendable employees. “They worked down in the open hearths. It was tough for them though.”<sup>40</sup> Ruby and Peggy took great pride in their jobs and valued them highly because their pink-collar positions were appropriate for women according to usual norms and therefore had permanent positions after the war. Peggy felt a sense of security, knowing that her job was hers to keep, although, the females working in the “men’s jobs” made more money, it was clear that they had to relinquish their jobs as soon as the war ended. Ruby stated, “They made more money than they ever made again.”<sup>41</sup> The female industrial workers had the economic advantage at the time, but the female office workers were by appearance more feminine and submissive and therefore preserving gender roles through holding “pink-collar jobs.

When comparing wartime female industrial workers to their prewar roles, they were extremely masculine. According to Alice Kessler Harris, author of *Out to Work*, “women in good jobs found themselves facing male pressure to be feminine.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, some industrial and factory administrators emphasized the appearance of women workers. For example, according to Kessler-Harris, a plant manager stated, “We



like the girls to be neat and trim and well put together. It helps their morale. It helps our prestige too.”<sup>43</sup> The manager professed that women brought glamour into the workplace. The presence of “well put together” women in a typically male environment gave way to challenges. In a conversation with her foreman Elma recalled that “his biggest headache was trying to tell these guys, ‘Keep your mind on your work and not on these women.’ He said that was his biggest problem.”<sup>44</sup> The interaction between men and women in a highly masculine workplace often created sexual tension.

When asked about sexual harassment or sex between coworkers, most women answered similarly to Mary, who stated, “No. The men...Everything was accepted at that time. Because it was necessary.”<sup>45</sup> This statement implied that inappropriate actions took place between men and women who worked together, but most people ignored it. Many women believed that being pestered by men was normal and harmless. Emma recalled, “the only thing I had to worry about was, pardon the expression, getting too friendly and assuming I was interested in that kind of thing.”<sup>46</sup> The female industrial workers faced less forceful advances by men compared to female office workers, which may be a consequence of the overt femininity displayed by office workers compared to more masculine female industrial workers. Peggy expressed that she encountered vigorous sexual harassment, “I mean like five times a day ‘I want to get in your pants.’”<sup>47</sup> In response, Ruby claimed that she never experienced anything like that, Peggy replied, “You had a husband. That made a difference ... They did not harass you because they knew you had a husband.”<sup>48</sup> Although many men respected the status of married women, the chemistry of men and women in the workforce at times overpowered good behavior

Many women claimed that they knew nothing and were not aware of relationships developing in the workplace, while others admitted the harsh realities of men and women sharing a work space. When men went to war and women were left at home, cut off from their boyfriends, fiancées, and even husbands, some sought comfort with the new men they worked with. Dorinda admitted,

That war ruined a lot of families... So, it was a make do situation. And then you get there and of course, the loneliness, a lot of the loneliness takes over, you are working with human beings, these men and women they get together and their husbands are overseas and same as the men overseas they get lonely and a lot of marriages were broken up on account of it.<sup>49</sup>

Like Dorinda, Elma made a very similar statement when asked if she wanted to stay in the mills. She replied,

From some of the things that I seen with the women going down there with the men? Nut uh! Let the men have their place, women didn't need to be there... There was a lot of homes ruined because of women being there... their husbands was away and they would get cozy maybe with a foreman. First thing you know there'd be a divorce. It was worse during the war years because the fellas was gone.<sup>50</sup>

These comments drastically contradict the image of ideal women performing industrial work to bring their men home sooner. However, the image of the ideal women did not exhibit that the long war caused some men and women to change and lose sight of their loved ones. As such, the presence of women in the workplace was seen as a threat to the family and stability of society as a whole. While some men became too friendly with their new female co-workers, other men were despised working with women.

Oras Vines, a worker at Youngstown Sheet and Tube during the war, was insulted when the women entered the mill and were given inspecting jobs. He professed,

what made it really bad was they got a lot of, not a lot of 'em, maybe about five or six women and they'd give 'em inspecting jobs. So, here I had 18 years experience as a chipper, and they bring in these women that didn't know nothing about the steel. And so I went to the general foreman and I told him, 'look, I got 18 years experience here and you bring these ladies in here to inspect *my* steel and they don't even know, they go mark, mark where ever they want to and we gotta take it out', and I says 'a lot of it they didn't scrap.'

Like other men, Oras was territorial over his place in the mill and felt threatened and undervalued when inexperienced women occupied the jobs men worked years to earn.

However, Oras was not alone when he showed concern about the lack of experience women had and the vast responsibility they were given. From a different view, Elma Beatty was a wartime inspector for Republic Steel in Youngstown. Sometimes the men argued with her about stopping progress she explained,

At first they took advantage of the women because women really didn't know much about it, and because we didn't really have that much training. And you thought it looked alright, but the weld would have never held out, and then the older ones started helping the women.<sup>51</sup>

These comments showed great tension between the roles of men and women in the workplace. Although women had good intentions, they did not always have enough experience to understand their tasks and it was even more difficult when their male co-workers refused to teach them the ropes.

For the most part, women were welcome in the industrial workforce as long as they maintained their submissive position as women and listened to their male superiors. Dorinda often downplayed her great skills as a crane operator by claiming that "I just simply did what I was told to do."<sup>52</sup> By giving her boss credit as the brain behind her operations, Dorinda played the traditional role of an ideal woman which was to build up

the masculinity of the men around her. When women in the industrial workforce gained confidence and began to think for themselves problems arose. Lola Weixel, a wartime welder from Brooklyn explained that she sought the help of the union to gain wages equal to her male co-workers. She stated, “We had to earn a living and we were not doing so.”<sup>53</sup> Immediately her boss’s attitude towards her changed when he found out her motives. “He didn’t like us anymore. We were no longer his girls.”<sup>54</sup> A few weeks into joining the union, Lola and her female coworkers went to work one day and they had been locked out. Left to decide their fate was the National Labor Relations Board. During the hearing, her boss claimed in his defense that the women were unskilled and “‘were only good’, as he said, ‘for being married and having babies.’”<sup>55</sup> In the end the Board ruled in favor of the union women and as a result they received an eighty percent raise. When women began to show authority and knowledge of their skill many men felt threatened and insulted the women’s intelligence and capabilities reverting to their traditional and “menial” labors as wives, mothers and homemakers.

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Throughout the war, women felt challenged by their changing identity. Traditional values had promoted their roles as housewives and caregivers encouraging them to stay home with children instead of working. Then when the war began, propaganda pushed women to join the workforce and idealized women laboring hard for victory in industrial jobs so that their men could return sooner. Workingwomen were conflicted between caring for their families and making war work their first priority.

Although evidence proves that women had patriotic motives for obtaining jobs, they had ulterior motives for financial gain. The majority of women in the wartime workforce held jobs prior to Pearl Harbor; therefore when skilled high paying positions in industry opened up, working-class women were often the first to embrace the opportunity.

Although propaganda and industries attempted to feminize the labor and female industrial workers, the hard jobs and dangerous environment made them masculine.

Women who held industrial positions bonded with one another through their common experience. However, tension arose between them and the feminine female office workers as well as masculine male industrial workers. Because their identity as women was divided by the femininity or masculinity of their work they completed during the war, female war workers formed cliques as well as prejudices against each other. For example, industrial workers referred to the office workers as “debutants,” while the office workers pitied the industrial laborers because they would lose their jobs after the war. These women were also divided by their relationships with men in the workplace. Both groups experienced sexual advances and inappropriate behavior by men, but office workers seemed to experience more forceful advances possibly because they were occupying more feminine roles. Nevertheless, women explained that innocent flirtations and sexual tension at work at times advanced into full blown affairs which broke up families and caused divorces. While some men became too friendly with their new female co-workers, others were hesitant to welcome women into the workforce. When inexperienced women obtained jobs to fill vacancies, at times they oversaw men as inspectors. Experienced men often felt their knowledge was undervalued and were

threatened, thereby refusing to help new female workers. When women maintained a submissive attitude toward male authority at work, they adhered to the traditional role of women to enhance the masculinity of men. Women who gained confidence and began to think for themselves were seen as subversive and a threat to traditional values.

Despite the ideal image of a united wartime workforce, female laborers experienced stress between their roles as women and workers. As a result, these women experienced internal struggle over their new priority to work versus their traditional priority as caregivers. Women in the industrial workforce remained outside traditional conceptions of womanhood, therefore despite government propaganda their femininity as women and skill as workers was questioned resulting in great tension between different groups of workers.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POST-WAR YEARS, 1945-1950

The image of an ideal family riding cheerfully together in a white convertible with red leather interior (**Figure 10**<sup>1</sup>) was a cherished memory from the 1950s printed on the cover of *American Heritage* magazine in 1998. Driving the car and in control of the family's ultimate destination was the happy father and husband. By his side in the passenger seat was his

wife, dressed in a lovely red checkered dress with cascading down her back husband smiling seat was their young son and little daughter hand upon her father's typical image of a family caption stated, "Paradise

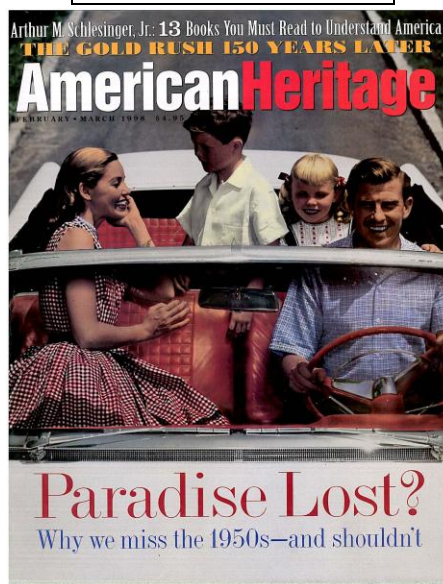


Figure 10  
wife, dressed in a lovely her blonde curls turned towards her admiringly. In the back looking at his mother smiling with her small shoulder. This was a in the 1950s. The Lost? Why we miss the

1950s – and shouldn't." Inside, the article was an interview by Fredric Smoler with Michael Elliot author of *The Day Before Yesterday*. Due to the wide readership of the magazine I refer to the article rather than Elliot's book because *American Heritage* felt that the nostalgia their readers had for the happy days of the postwar era was a topic hot enough to place on the front cover.

In the article, Elliot, a British native, first visited the United States the early 1970s and “was deeply struck from the generosity, optimism, and confidence he found.”<sup>2</sup>

Twelve years later, Elliot returned to a very different America, in which people spoke of decline and longing for a return to the “normalcy” that surrounded the postwar years. He argued that “post-war decades were not so much a lost Eden as a historical anomaly.”<sup>3</sup>

The myth formed when Americans believed that the 1950s was the normal state of social relations, when in fact, the prosperity and social cohesion which dominated the period was not normal for the nation. American history is full of economic turmoil, labor struggle, war, and social unrest. In the 1950s, the image of white, middle-class Americans raising families and moving to the suburbs became a prominent and desired norm displayed in cultural mediums. Many believe that the beginning of the cold war should have been very tumultuous, but Americans were united against a common enemy and still felt pride and righteousness as the victors of World War II. Also, economic prosperity created social cohesion which provided even greater stability.<sup>4</sup>

Elliot argues that although the 1950s were not a normal time period for America they were a pleasing time to live in. Perceptions of perfect suburban homes, with up-and-coming career oriented husbands, a carload full of children and a perfect housewife as the center of the family were plentiful in the 1950s and are still projected today.<sup>5</sup> However, were all women able to live up to the perception of the ideal woman? Were women, as the center of the home and family, truly happy with their position?

This chapter focuses on the social tensions and the pressure on women to fit the mold of their “proper” postwar role as ideal women. The war had blurred gender roles



and gave women an opportunity to make decent money for important skills. Women had proven that the quality of their work was equal to men's, yet they were no longer welcome in the industrial labor force. Some women retreated to their homes and others took low paying pink-collar jobs.<sup>6</sup> Nearly all women claimed that they were happy to return to their prewar places in society and looked forward to a future with their husbands and babies. How did it make women feel to be pushed out of the workforce? Why is it that women usually answer as Marie Madar did, "We were glad... We didn't care!"<sup>7</sup> but then continue on to rush through a summary of all the menial, low paying jobs they held to make ends meet, before focusing the rest of their postwar commentary on their families. What happened when the war ended that caused women to quietly give up the loved camaraderie of their skilled industrial jobs and "happily" march into the seclusion of their homes?

In this chapter, I argue that postwar rhetoric, popular culture, and consumerism, all focused on the advancement of family life and pressured women to ignore their personal ambitions and focus on their loved ones and home life. Although workingwomen often held pink-collar jobs in the postwar era, the majority of their attention and oral history commentary focused on their families. Historiographically, I will explore the forces that shaped and influenced the public perception of a woman's proper role during the postwar period, which caused women to accept and embrace their place as wives, mothers and homemakers.

### *When the War was Over...*

For many women who were hired at the time of mobilization, the postwar era was a transition. Ruby Cunningham, a steel mill office worker from Pittsburgh, recalled that when the men returned home from the war not all of the women were ready to relinquish their industrial jobs. “But they had to. They had no choice. They were just laid off and the men came back.”<sup>8</sup> Emma Rocco, a machine mechanic also from Pittsburgh, professed that the servicemen certainly had claim to their jobs. She stated,

That’s where the difficulty came in. Women had learned that they really could do these jobs. And they were bringing in money and supporting the families. It was hard for them to give up and go back home into the kitchen, so to speak. So, I think there was a little bit of difficulty, but as the soldiers and sailors came back, they had first priority, so they got the jobs back. And so women went in other directions and most of them never went back to just being housewives anymore.<sup>9</sup>

The level of complexity involving wartime industrial jobs was new and exciting for many women. They paid better and provided feelings of accomplishment and unity with other workers. Despite the level of success women made during the war, returning veterans expected their jobs back. Emma was happy to be finished working in the mills and did not want to keep her job because she had her heart set on getting an education, but for most of the other women working was a necessity and they had to find employment. Sophie Estock, an interior mill clerk from Youngstown remembers “It was up to the company to decide what to do with us.”<sup>10</sup> She was transferred over to the benefit association working with hospitalization and insurance claims. Women like Sophie and Ruby, who had feminine jobs working in the steel mill offices during the war, were able to keep their jobs because there was no male competition for their low paying, menial

desk jobs. Mary Zorgan of Pittsburgh had a similar situation. She was employed as a tester before the war and ran the hot metal buggy while the men were gone; then, upon their return she resumed her former job as a tester.<sup>11</sup> Her steel mill job was performed by a woman before the war and remained a woman's job after the war. In an age of prosperity such as the postwar era, few men volunteered for a job that belonged to a woman in normal times.

Other women quit their jobs toward the end of the war. Dorinda Tabor, a crane operator of Youngstown, quit the mill because she was pregnant with her first child. She proudly stated, "I worked until going on four months of pregnancy."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Elma Beatty, a pipe inspector in Youngstown, quit working in 1945

and the only reason I stopped then, was I was pregnant! So that was a good reason and then I called it quits anyway, the boys were already starting to come home and taking over jobs again, and that was the end of that.<sup>13</sup>

When the men came home, women who worked in industry during the war had to vacate their jobs for returning soldiers and move on with their lives. Marie Madar a straightening mechanic also from Pittsburgh claimed, "I worked until the end, until the war ended. And then we were told our service was no longer needed because the boys would be coming home and that was it."<sup>14</sup> When asked how she felt about losing her war job she claimed, "We were glad that the war ended, we didn't care!"<sup>15</sup>

Wartime workers had many different situations at the war's end. Women in feminine positions such as testers, clerks, and other office workers kept their jobs because men did not want them. Others left for education or to have children. Some were laid off

and found themselves again working in pink-collar jobs. Regardless of the situation, the atmosphere surrounding the large layoff of female industrial workers across the United States was inconsistent. For example, Emma Beatty claimed, “I think there were some difficulties in transition. The women didn’t want to go back home so to speak...”<sup>16</sup> while Dorinda Tabor professed of her fellow female crane operators, “when the war was over, the majority of them went back home and that’s where they wanted to be.”<sup>17</sup> Most of the financially able returned to the home while many others remained employed. Nevertheless, because the image of ideal women reflected middle-class values, Rosie the Riveter disappeared and was replaced by the happy housewife.

### ***The Return of the Domestic Ideal Woman***

In the 1988 book, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May argues that the depression and World War II presented women the opportunity to drastically change their gender roles and break through to have a significant presence in the workplace, however, economic necessity and public policy after the war reinforced traditional gender norms causing women to retreat into their homes and embrace the popular domesticity of the 1950s. Government officials believed the key to avoiding another widely feared depression was for women to vacate their jobs to the traditional male breadwinners and devote their energy and creativity to applying the ideals of pragmatism, functionalism, and family enrichment to their increasingly important role as consumers. Men and women sought refuge in the security of their homes and personal lives to escape the tension and present danger of the atomic Cold War era. Veteran’s Mortgages and Social Security took pressure off Americans to save

for the future and enabled them to spend in the present. Making purchases, often on credit, to improve the standard of their personal life was an investment that fostered the traditional values of preserving the family. A home in the suburbs filled with appliances and decorative furnishings, a hard working father, a mother caring at home for the needs of her husband and children, all reflected middle-class family values. Through an analysis of popular culture, magazines, film, literature, and surveys, May shows that American culture encouraged women to welcome their roles as wives, mothers and consumers, however, in interviews and surveys, beneath a veil of happiness, women revealed growing emotions of discontent with their containment in the home and lack of personal growth and identity.<sup>18</sup>

Middle-class values were projected into all aspects of American life, yet the financial situation of all American families did not enable women to stay at home, many had to work. The majority of the women in this study fall into this category, yet their commentary about postwar life were dominated by their personal family lives, instead of their “pink collar” jobs, whereas, when remembering the war years they often were excited to discuss their work. I argue that this shift in the focus of women’s memories is a product of postwar rhetoric, popular culture, and consumerism, which all focused on the advancement of family life.

When the peace was finally won and the men came home, couples were reunited. Married couples were ready to pick up their lives and expand their future with babies, while floods of newlyweds prepared to set up house and also thought about starting a

family. During the war nearly all production had been geared to support the war effort, therefore internal development of the nation was drastically needed. In her book, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Elizabeth Cohen states,

At the war's end, somewhere between 3.5 and 5 million new homes were required immediately to house all of the individuals and families in need, and by some estimates as many as 50 percent of existing homes needed replacement or major repairs.<sup>19</sup>

The foundations of American family life was centered on the home, and all new homes would need the all the goods and appliances Americans had been deprived of since the depression. With the booming construction and production to meet the wants and needs of hungry Americans, unemployment was a problem of the past and Americans had money to spend. While men worked to earn the cash, it was a woman's job to spend it wisely.

Elaine Tyler May explains that a woman's marital status did not guarantee her role. Many married women were not full-time housewives and homemakers. During the postwar era, the paid female workforce exceeded the number of women who worked for wages before the war. Nevertheless, many women felt their jobs were not as important as their domestic roles. May discusses,

Many employed wives considered their jobs secondary to their role as consumers and in tune with the ethic of togetherness and subordination that characterized their marital relationships. This was one legacy that depression-bred daughters inherited: women sought employment to bolster the family budget but not to disrupt domestic power relationships.<sup>20</sup>

It was clear to women of all economic classes that their role was supplementary to their husbands'. It was a wife's job to support her husband's endeavors and if necessary help him support the family. May continues,

Americans felt a great deal of ambivalence toward women's employment—a legacy of the depression and the war. On the one hand, it was unfortunate if a wife had to hold a job; on the other hand, it was considered far worse if the family was unable to purchase what were believed to be necessities for the home.<sup>21</sup>

Although it was not ideal, as long as a woman's wages were less than her husband's and she did not challenge his role as the provider and breadwinner, her employment was acceptable to the family and society.

Many workingwomen discuss their jobs as secondary priorities to their primary interests as mothers and wives. Dorinda Tabor recalled,

I was very anxious to raise a family. And at the time that my kids were born and I was raising them, I had no desire to work anywhere but with my kids. Of course I had to in the end.<sup>22</sup>

Dorinda's husband was a former Marine who was injured in the South Pacific and unable to work, therefore after their first baby was born Dorinda held a series of pink-collar jobs. She worked in several restaurants before getting her GED and finally obtained a position working at Murphy's. Dorinda retired from the workforce after fourteen years of employment at K-Mart. Looking back on her experience in the steel mills as a crane operator, Dorinda claimed, "after my kids were pretty much on their own, then yeah, I would have liked to gone back [to working in the steel mills]."<sup>23</sup> Although proud of her fourteen years of employment with K-Mart, Dorinda worked out of necessity and would

have benefited from high pay rate of a crane operator. However, after the war there were few opportunities for women in masculine skilled positions.

Like Dorinda, Sophie Estock also put her womanly duties as a wife and mother before her status as a worker. She stated, “After I got married, I was going to retire of course...so I thought.”<sup>24</sup> Sophie left her job in the benefit association of Youngstown Sheet and Tube in July of 1948 to get married. Shortly after she began working for the Real Estate Census and when the Korean War started she became “an assistant clerk on draft board [number] seventy-eight” from 1950 to 1955. She stated, “I was expecting my first child and I left.”<sup>25</sup> Sophie reasoned that back then when a woman was pregnant it was appropriate to leave work because a woman’s primary responsibility was to care for her children.

Marie also found employment in a very long series of pink-collar jobs after the war, but unlike most women, she focused her commentary on her jobs instead of her family. She worked different jobs at an appliance store, in mail departments, as a clerk, and a bookkeeper. After that she took a few months off when her last child was born. Upon returning to the workforce she was employed as a telephone operator and for a window replacement company. She concluded her plethora of experience stating,

From there [Pittsburgh] we moved here [to Ohio] and I got a job at Pickera Xray and I worked on the first MRI in Ohio. And that’s me. I retired from there. I have a list of work a mile long. But I liked to work, I loved it!<sup>26</sup>

Marie had pride and enthusiasm for her working years and when she stated, “And that’s me,” showing that she defined her personal identity through work.



Americans returned to “life as usual” after the war, most men and women sought refuge in the security of a family. May points out that governmental programs like the Veteran’s Mortgages and Social Security added to the sense of security Americans felt about their present and their future; Cohen uses a more detailed analysis of government programs like the GI Bill, the Federal Housing Administration, the Veteran’s Administration, and Income Tax policy, as well as private organizations like the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations. She argues that postwar governmental policies, like during the New Deal, “shaped the new gender norms of the Consumers’ Republic,” which Cohen defines as “economy, culture, and politics built around the promises of mass consumption, both in terms of material life and the more idealistic goals of greater freedom, democracy, and equality.”<sup>27</sup> Continuing on to show how the different programs were able to provide American men with the jobs, income, and the confidence in the future that was required for mass consumption, she argues,

the government buttressed a male-directed family economy by disproportionately giving men access to career training, property ownership, capital, and credit, as well as control over the family’s finances...limiting their wives claims to full economic and social citizenship.<sup>28</sup>

Cohen suggests the difficulty in establishing whether women’s postwar withdraw from the public arena was imposed or “chosen by them as they devoted themselves to long-neglected family needs.”<sup>29</sup> She proclaims that “Women may have made different choices in peacetime than depression and war, but there is no denying that the options they had to choose from were prevailing in the Consumers’ Republic.”<sup>30</sup> Most women found that

with the low wages their labor earned, they would also have to purchase a work wardrobe, child care, and had no tax incentive to work; most found that having a job “just didn’t pay.”<sup>31</sup> Women found drastic changes and major contradictions in their postwar reality. For the last four years, the government propaganda and industry told them their labor was essential to the survival of the nation, but the rapid devaluation of their labor in postwar society reflected their traditional status as dependents.

The government “shaped” postwar gender norms and set the parameters for the next shift in gender roles. However profound as the government’s influence may have been, it was the finance and influence of the private sector that sold reconstructed ideas about the proper roles of men and women to Americans. Magazines, television, Hollywood and cinema, were able to set an example of family structure that reinforced the traditional lifestyle ordinary Americans admired or practiced.

In her book, *Shaping Our Mother’s World: American Women’s Magazines*, Nancy A. Walker discusses the transition of women’s magazines in middle of the twentieth century. She claims that earlier magazines focused on individuality, choices and ambition as well as social mobility. By 1940s, a sense of similar purpose, conformity, and commonality was overwhelming present. By the 1950s, the content of magazines focused on the home. However, Walker argued in contrast to the 1963 proposal in the publication of Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* that magazines had abandoned the “image of the self-sufficient ‘New Woman.’”<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Walker argued that women’s magazines did not deliver a simple message of conformity about domestics and

showed that many magazines catered to women's individual interests, for example *Mademoiselle* focused on college-bound young women. Walker demonstrated that letters to the editor showed women engaging, questioning, and even at times protesting the messages magazines were sending them, demonstrating that women were not always consuming the ideas magazines presented, but intelligently engaging with the materials. Although workingwomen, such as those presented in this oral history sample, may not have been writing letters to magazines, they did not necessarily take the information and articles in magazines at face value, nevertheless, they were well aware of the popular images of ideal women.

Although magazines championed full-time homemakers, on a business level they could not afford to alienate specific groups, such as workingwomen. Domesticity was more than house and home, with many articles on health education, social relationships, raising children, community, and personality; things that all people, not just women, needed to be aware of. Magazines were a popular way to discuss and inform women about consumer products and therefore stood as a valve of capitalism. They were places to discuss scientific housekeeping and the newest psychological theories which affected family relationships. At times, even tension from civil unrest with communism and the Cold War were apparent.

Walker also claims that magazine editors were proud to introduce new readers to values, behaviors and through advertisements display ample "consumer goods that represented middle-class life."<sup>33</sup> The middle-class lifestyle represented the American

Dream for the working-class. A home in the suburbs, a new car and appliances, a successful working man and a happy housewife and children was the ideal perception. Although the working-class had a culture distinct from the middle-class lifestyle, they still wanted their share of the prosperity that surrounded the American Dream. Cohen argues that the Consumers' Republic was about the "commitment to deliver equality and democracy through mass prosperity [and] was the desire to elevate workers to middle-class status."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the interest workingwomen showed in magazines, where middle-class culture dominated, was all part of the new postwar American Dream. The fact that women regularly consumed magazines meant that they liked or got something out of the material or ads. One can infer that the American Dream presented in the magazines women continually bought was accepted as their own dream.

Aside from magazines, movies also allowed women to dream. Kay Barker remembers her cinematic experience watching *Top Hat*: "It wasn't Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire, it was me." Kay continues, "Going to the movies in the forties and fifties was akin to the high young people get now by doing drugs."<sup>35</sup> Jackie Stacey presented the above commentary in her book, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. Although her survey participants were British women, their perceptions of American-Hollywood films are still relevant to this study, because she examined the feminine fascination with stardom that was not unique to Britain alone. Hollywood movie stars and cinema gave all women a chance to escape domestic womanhood in exchange for a glamorous alternative.<sup>36</sup> Women fantasized about living the life of their favorite stars both on and off the screen. They adopted their hair styles,

make-up, and the latest fashions which the stars they admired wore in movies. Women were literally consuming products to identify with the star image they desired. In connecting their own identity to leading ladies, women felt confident, beautiful and more attractive to men, feeling that any moment could turn to romance.<sup>37</sup> Women consumed cinema and the very identity of Hollywood stars, which displays the magnitude of influence cinema had on their dreams and reality.

Hollywood had agency in the lives of Americans, especially women fascinated with the stars or the movie-going experience. In September of 1945, over a month after the end of the war, the film *Mildred Pierce* was released onto the big screen. The film was a large success. It broke records for cinema attendance, grossed five million dollars at the box office, and awarded the leading actress, June Crawford, with her only Academy Award.<sup>38</sup> In her essay, "How World War II Affected Women," June Sochen explores the message *Mildred Pierce* delivers to female audiences. The film begins with a divorce between Mildred and her first husband, Bert. With two daughters to support, Kay, a sweet tom-boy, and Veda, a spoiled teenager with expensive taste, Mildred obtains a job working as a waitress. When Veda finds out about her mother's job she is personally ashamed. Sochen points out that the strength and successful business experience that Mildred displays throughout the film was usually a trait found only in male characters. Nevertheless, Mildred eventually becomes a successful business woman and buys the restaurant where she began waitressing. One weekend, Bert takes his daughters on a getaway and Kay falls ill with pneumonia prompting their early return. The family is unable to reach Mildred because she is preoccupied with a male friend.

Mildred finally reaches Kay's side only to hear her last word, "Mommy" as she passes away.<sup>39</sup>

Sochen summarizes that over the next year, as Mildred's success grows, so does Veda's taste for luxury expenditures. Veda marries a rich young man and then immediately files for divorce falsely claiming she is pregnant to entitle her to a small fortune upon settlement. When Mildred learns of the plot, she breaks relations with her daughter and travels around the country. After her return, Mildred emotionally yearns for her only daughter's presence in her life and marries Monte, a man with a prestigious last name and a dwindling family fortune to earn her daughter's favor back. As time passes, the extravagant lifestyle of Monte and Veda breaks Mildred and she loses her business. That same night, Veda pleads Monte to divorce her mother and marry her. In a jealous rage when Monte refuses, Veda shoots and kills him. As her mother walks into witness the after math of the scene, Veda declares, "It's your fault I am the way I am."<sup>40</sup>

Sochen states that the moral of the story was for women to devote their whole attention to being mothers. In the end, Mildred's defeat, the loss of Kay, and the bad behavior of Veda were all a reminder for "ambitious women [to] beware." Mildred's failure as a mother caused her to lose everything she valued in life. Mildred should have been at home awaiting the return of her children from their weekend away instead of enjoying the company of a man. As a result, she was unable to save or comfort Kay in her last hours. In addition, Mildred's failure to discipline her daughter ended tragically

with Veda being hauled off to jail after murdering of her mother's second husband.

Sochen concludes, American women

did not question a culture that restricted their adult life to mothering, though circumstance and inclination may have led them to other pursuits. Neither did they question the overwhelming burden of motherhood. The message for American women was clear: stay in the preordained domain.<sup>41</sup>

Movies like *Mildred Pierce* made the comforts of a secure home appealing. Caring for children, a husband, and a home was the rightful place for women and desires for other pursuits was dangerous for the family.

Other popular films of postwar society were in the film noir genre. These dark films were Hollywood crime dramas which often portrayed the sexual motivation of women. In these films, "bad girls" used their sexuality as a dangerous, destructive force. In her essay, "Women in Film Noir", Jane Place argues that women in American culture were defined in relation to men while the criminal women of film noir were defined by their sexuality which played on the fantasies of men and contradicted appropriate societal norms. This genre was new to the 1940s and 1950s because women were active instead of passive agents in the films they starred. Film noir allowed viewers to explore the sexually exotic and forbidden in the cinema instead of dangerously meddling with curiosity in their own lives. Film noir women had full access to their sexuality and therefore power over the male imagination. However, these leading ladies are not seen as role models, but rather as cautionary warnings to women of how not to behave, for the story rarely had a happy ending for the seductress.<sup>42</sup>

While society used film as an escape from the daily routine, according to Mary Ann Watson in her book, *Defining Visions: Television and the American Experience Since 1945*, television became a part of Americans' daily routine and was the force which reoriented culture and shifted American values. Church, family, and government were still the largest and most influential institutions in American life at the dawn of postwar society, but by 1950 television was becoming "central" to the American identity of a modern family. Watson argued that "TV has been a reflection of the national character and the primary means by which Americans have defined themselves and each other."<sup>43</sup> This new medium often "absorbed the socializing function of parents, teachers, and clergy" and gave Americans a new common ground to identify with and talk about.<sup>44</sup>

Television set a major standard for woman and their appropriate gender roles reinforcing their choices to return to their place in the home after the war. *I Love Lucy*, for example, was a popular comedy in which the protagonist Lucy Ricardo's ambitious adventures usually left her naively disgraced and the audience in rolling laughter. In a 1958 episode of *Father Knows Best*, Jim's daughter Betty decides to work on a surveying crew to get experience as an engineer. Knowing that his daughter would not last long under the conditions of a surveyor, he lightly pokes fun at her but does not stop her from trying. After her first day of being battered by her project supervisor and college engineering student Doyle Hobbs, Betty was determined to return to work the next day. That night, Doyle showed up at her home with a box of chocolates and spoke to her father, saying that men needed pretty women to come home to not to work beside. After overhearing the conversation, Betty rushed to change into a lovely form fitting dress to



greet Doyle. Betty willingly gave up her dream for a box of chocolates and a Saturday night date. Watson claimed that on television

the modern wife who devoted herself to raising children and doing all she could to support her husband's career was glorified. Career women, on the other hand, were typically depicted as lonely and emotionally unfulfilled.<sup>45</sup>

Placing the homemaker on a pedestal was a trend that remained popular. However, in the 1960s television also began to show a different side of women. Feminist Movement protests appeared on the news and networks scripted roles and casted characters that catered to the desires of the up and coming generation of women who desired careers.

There were other forces which shaped and influenced the popular perception of women in the postwar period. The government was able to shape gender roles creating veterans' programs, benefits, and tax incentives for male breadwinners to better themselves and provide for their families. These policies tended to ignore women as income earners and allotted no support for their employment ventures. Therefore, women were given positive ideas about their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers that often suppressed the feelings of self worth and independence they had gained at work during the war. Magazines, Hollywood, cinema, and television all created a gateway to women's imaginations of what they and their lives should and could be like by embracing their roles at home and their duties as consumers. Although women did not passively accept all information presented to them, they did consume products to make their lives better, to identify with Hollywood stars, and the lessons of film noir and television shows. These mediums of mass culture sent the message to women that their rightful and respectful place was in the home. By culturally championing the role and image of full-

time housewives, women took great pride in their duty. Magazines and advertisements were able to give women the advice and information about how to scientifically and creatively use their energy and knowledge to make a better home and a stronger family without alienating groups such as workingwomen. After living through the Great Depression, a bloody war, and fearing the Cold War future, the security of the home and the family became a sacred virtue of postwar America. Men and women wanted to ensure that their children would live free of the trauma they had been subjected to, and would try their best to create a perfect world for their families; the perfect world they had fought for and earned. But after everything women had sacrificed for their perfect world, were they really happy?

In 1963, Betty Friedan attempted to answer this question by calling attention to “The Problem That Has No Name” in *The Feminine Mystique*. Women of the mid-twentieth century gave up their dreams and the “opportunities old-fashioned feminists fought for” to conform to societal demands and expectations as wife, mother, and homemaker, only to fear the unasked question of disappointment, “Is this all?”<sup>46</sup> Friedan traced the origins of the new housewife of the 1950s who held tightly to her place in the domestic realm to the feminine mystique which emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Sixteen years after the war, Friedan sparked the second wave feminist movement when she wrote to address the question of how women lost their identity as individuals and what women needed to do to address their present discontent. Friedan used examples of restless housewives across America who revealed the guilt of their dissatisfaction in the whole of their identity being labeled as a wife and mother. Women

longed for a unique identity and to embrace their interests as individuals without being ridiculed by society. Women were held back by the “feminine mystique” which “permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity.”<sup>47</sup> Women were to dedicate themselves fully in providing for the care and happiness of their families. It was the lack of identity in oneself that caused women to want more than their traditional responsibilities, but as Friedan argued, “our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings.”<sup>48</sup>

Freidan was born in 1921. Her father Harry Goldstein worked his way up to own a jewelry store and her mother, Miriam, gave up her career as a journalist to get married and have children. Dissatisfied with her own choices in life, Miriam urged her daughter, Betty, to pursue a career. Friedan went to Smith College and on for a graduate degree in psychology at the University of California at Berkley. She married Carl Friedan, who eventually became the owner of an advertising agency, in 1947 and had three children. She balanced her career with her family life, yet felt unfulfilled by her role as a wife and mother.<sup>49</sup> Firmly established in the middle-class, Freidan represented the conflict middle-class women were experiencing between the ideal image of womanhood they were supposed to uphold and pursuing their individual desires.

Freidan looked to the past to understand the lifestyle that she and many others felt trapped by. She asserted that during the war, women feared that they would grow old alone and never find love with a man. Few women would miss the opportunity to have

the family which they were forced to put on hold during the depression and the war years. The prosperity of the postwar era made it possible for Americans to satisfy the wants that they had been postponing. Women walked into the trap of the feminine mystique when they were told “that the cold dimension of loneliness which the war had added to their lives was the necessary price to pay for a career, for any interest outside the home.”<sup>50</sup> When faced with the choice of “love, home, children, or other goals and purposes in life...was it any wonder that so many American women chose love as their whole purpose?”<sup>51</sup>

In postwar society, many women were obligated to work out of financial necessity. Others resisted societal pressures and chose to work because they wanted to. Although it was not publicized, there was a place in society for workingwomen, but obstacles were set in place to ensure that women held jobs with low pay and low skill presenting no challenge to male employment. When women flooded the workforce during the World War II, sixty percent of women were over the age of thirty-five and nearly all of the older workers were married. This was a monumental change to the feminine workforce. Most of these women would be expected to return back to the home when their husbands returned to provide for them, however, according to a Women’s Bureau survey four out of five women “wished to stay in the labor force after the war.”<sup>52</sup> Friedan claims that women who wanted to work were pushed out of their jobs so women “willingly” returned to their homes, “especially when they faced “old anti-feminist prejudice” at work and while competing with thousands of returning veterans for employment.”<sup>53</sup>

According to Alice Kessler-Harris, wartime surveys reported seventy-five to eighty-five percent of wartime workingwomen “wanted to keep their jobs at the war’s end probably reflected the normal proportion of wage-earning women.”<sup>54</sup> At the end of the war, women left their jobs at rates double and sometimes triple that of which they were discharged. However, it cannot be denied that women who wanted to stay were forced out. Women were laid off at a rate double that of men, 175 per 1000. “The durable heavy goods industries” was where women voluntarily left at the highest levels, whereas in industries such as iron and steel, fired women at a faster rate than men.<sup>55</sup> Eighteen million women remained in the workforce by 1950. This number was only “a slight increase above the expected growth” which “estimated that without the war, natural factors would have yielded seventeen million wage-earning women in 1950.”<sup>56</sup> Five million of these women had not been in the labor force prior to the war and three million were above the age thirty-five. The increase in the number of workingwomen was attributed to older married women. Women over forty-five years old increased by twenty percent of what was expected, while there was little expansion of women from twenty to thirty years of age in the labor force and only a six percent increase for the next five years.<sup>57</sup> As more women entered the workforce, women at home began to question their place.

### *Conflicting Ambition*

During the postwar Era, the identity of ideal women revolved around their ambitions to be wives, mothers and homemakers. However, at this time another image

rose. Workingwomen were not the center point of attention in society, but the energy from strong, independent Rosie began to fester in the minds of feminists who spoke out that women, (especially middle-class women) should not be ridiculed for obtaining jobs out of personal ambition. These two opposing perceptions of women during the postwar era were captured in two books: Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham's *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

In 1947, Ferdinand Lundberg and Maryina F. Farnham argued in *Modern Women: The Lost Sex* that many women who felt dissatisfied with the confinement of their proper role in the home suffered from "penis-envy." Women, such as these, often had marital conflict and disturbed their children because of their own sexual unhappiness. The only way a woman could overcome her psychological disorder, which threatened the stability of the family and society, was to devote her full involvement to domesticity and motherhood. This argument concluded that women who stepped outside of their traditional roles were a danger to themselves and society.<sup>58</sup>

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex* that men oppressed women and labeled them as an oppositional force or "the other." Although, science proved differences in men and women there was no justification for the inferiority bestowed on women. Femininity was not a trait women were born with but rather taught throughout all stages of development. De Beauvoir claimed that women's passive and dependent traits were consequences of their societal subordination in which the main purposes of bourgeoisie or middle-class women was to be a good wife, mother and

entertainer. The monotonous lifestyle that resulted left women feeling incomplete, frustrated, and in search of identity.<sup>59</sup>

In her final chapter, de Beauvoir argued that even though women gained the right to vote their liberation was not guaranteed. In order to gain her freedom a woman must become independent of men and therefore make their own living through work. The downfall of this arrangement was that the societal expectations of womanhood did not release her from domestic work in the home, creating a double burden for employed women. De Beauvoir argued, “most working women do not escape the traditional feminine world; neither society nor their husbands give them the help they need to become, in concrete terms, equal with men.”<sup>60</sup> Women need to redefine their own terms of identity. To accomplish femininity a woman should not have had to renounce her humanity and become an object whose success depended on pleasing a man. Women had to free themselves from their subordination to find their own unique identity.

*The Second Sex* was one of the first pieces of feminist literature to arise from the postwar era. From the earliest origins of the feminist movement, opponents labeled women fighting for such beliefs as masculine and undesirable. One of three prize winning antisuffrage cartoons published in the *New York Times* on February 5, 1911 was called “The Three Sexes” depicting a very homely woman, dressed in a plain dress suit and hat atop her short cut hair with a her mouth wide open and hands on her hips complete with a “votes for women” sash. Next to her was a handsome well dressed man with one hand casually in his pocket the other scratching his chin as he smirked

observing the new third sex. The man was accompanied by a beautiful woman with an her hair swept back into an updo in elegant formfitting dress, jewelry, and white gloves while her head was tilted down and dainty mouth closed as she timidly watched the third sex aware of the man's reaction.<sup>61</sup> This cartoon shows the foundations of great controversy in society over a woman's proper place which continued into the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

In the 1930s, while serving as First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt was an activist for the welfare of the American citizenry and made many trips to investigate social conditions, so that she and her husband were aware of problems plaguing the American people. Catherine Gourley, author of *Rosie and Mrs. America*, stated that

“she [Eleanor] received a letter from a woman who had just visited the White House. It stated, ‘Instead of tearing around the country, I think you should stay at home and personally see that they White House is clean. I soiled my white gloves yesterday morning on the stair-railing. It is disgraceful.’”<sup>62</sup>

Gourley assesses that the author of the letter was “offended by the nontraditional role Mrs. Roosevelt had taken as the First Lady.”<sup>63</sup> After the death of President Roosevelt, the succeeding First Lady, Bess Truman was much more traditional, ending the Monday morning press conferences and the authorship of articles and columns which Eleanor Roosevelt had started.<sup>64</sup>

In *Modern Woman*, Lundberg and Farnham described the modern woman as a chimaera. They printed the definition of chimaera in the beginning of chapter one from Webster's New International Dictionary which was a monster from Greek mythology with a “lion's body and head, together with a goat's head rising from the back;...[or] an



impractical idea.”<sup>65</sup> Featuring modern women as masculine or even mythological monsters impacted the way neutral women approached the topic of feminism. This tension over the proper place of women in society continued throughout the postwar era.

Dorinda Tabor displayed the tension between negative impressions of feminists and progressive thinking in one remark:

I have always said, that when this liberation business come out, the women wanted to be liberated that I would always like to be liberated from being liberated. Because from day one, I was expected to do whatever the job was. In our family, there wasn't any men's job and women's job. I felt that I was just doing a job, and I think most of the women did too. I don't think they felt they was doing a man's job they were just doing a job that was given to them.

Dorinda suggests that liberation was not necessary for women, suggesting that a job was a job and it made no difference if a man or a woman was completing that job. However, when she claimed women were “just doing a job that was *given* to them” she fails to acknowledge that men were the authoritative figures *giving* their work to women. Her negative perception of feminists was not uncommon, although her opinions, like many other women, seemed to be rather progressive considering her disapproval. She discussed that women “weren't appreciated for the ability that they showed and for the work that they did.”<sup>66</sup> She continued,

I think they were surprised to find that they were very capable and highly underrated even at the time. I believe that women are beginning prove themselves now that they are capable of doing these jobs ... If you are able to do a job whether you are a man or a woman you should be allowed to do that job and paid the equal wage. If you're not able to do the job, I don't care if you're a man or woman, you shouldn't be given the job. And I think that's what will come down the road that they will start and recognize individual ability rather than gender

ability. Look at the men who are taking over taking care of babies today. In that day, why for a man to even hold a baby bottle was unheard of. It wasn't man's work, you know. And I think they are beginning to realize there is no such thing as man's work and woman's work.

Dorinda's hindsight was very egalitarian. Therefore, why did she insist upon being "liberated from being liberated"?

In the postwar era, the ideal woman was a happy homemaker and most women, and men for that matter, wanted families. Lola Weixel a former wartime welder from Brooklyn, New York explained,

I think that they prepare women psychologically for whatever role the society feels at that particular point they want her to play. After losing so many men, America wanted babies. And, we wanted babies. That was okay. But we gave up everything for that.<sup>67</sup>

The testimony of most women reflects that they wanted to be at home with their children, but because they had to work, many insinuate that the opportunity to work in higher skilled and higher paying jobs would have made their experience more gratifying. Looking back women do not express bitterness, for losing their industrial jobs when the men came home from war, but they do regret not getting credit for their contribution to victory. Dorinda reminisced,

I think the women found out that they were able to do more than keep house and raise kids... When I left the mill and when I look back and think of what I did, I am amazed at myself. And think I can't believe I really did all that, but evidently I had to be pretty good or I couldn't have done it. And I think a lot of the other women will probably feel the same way... There was no glory. You were doing your thing. You were doing what you were supposed to do.

Workingwomen wanted to be noticed for the skills they had mastered in so little time for the cause of winning the war. When the war was over, the government and industries were focused on pushing women out of the workforce to vacate room for homecoming soldiers so that the country would not face another unemployment crisis as they had during the depression. It was difficult to applaud women for their effort while laying them off. Therefore, few were ever recognized. Elma concluded, “It would be wonderful if they (the industries and the nation), could say thank you for all these women that worked.”<sup>68</sup>

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At the end of World War II, women left the industrial workforce on a massive scale. Some voluntarily quit their jobs to pursue an education or to have children, while others were laid off to make jobs for returning veterans. Women, who desired or had to work, resumed pink-collar jobs that required little skill and offered low pay. Although understanding that veterans were entitled to their old jobs, women felt that their wartime contribution went unnoticed and unappreciated.

At the war's end, the government quickly enacted economic policies that favored veterans and ignored the independence of women. The private sector of business, the media, and entertainment followed suit popularizing images of perfect families living in suburbs, with a prosperous man and his ideal domestic happy housewife buying home appliances and good to make life easier and more enjoyable. Television and movies reinforced women's roles in the home, portraying career women as unfulfilled and

longing for family. Nevertheless, workingwomen were becoming more and more common in society and although they did not reflect the image of the ideal woman, they absorbed the lessons from magazine stories, movies, and television episodes which taught that regardless of their working status, family came first and deserved to be the center of their attention.

As the postwar era continued many “happy housewives” questioned their “proper place” and experienced discontent with their confined role in the home. The tension that surrounded the debate was divided by traditionalists who believed that women could only experience true happiness and emotional fulfillment by embracing domesticity and their roles as wives and mothers. Feminists argued that women had a right to work out of personal ambition and had an identity beyond their maternal roles. Because traditional perceptions of women dominated popular culture feminists and even workingwomen were portrayed negatively masculine and emotionally unhappy.

As workingwomen juggled their responsibilities at home and work, they embraced the joy of family and motherhood which the depression and war eras had denied them, but also reflected on their time as war workers. They questioned the value of their labor wanting higher pay and nostalgically desired jobs with camaraderie that required skill and created an end product that gave them pride in their work. Society had labeled women as mothers and men as workers. Workingwomen struggled to create an adaptable category of their own that represented their wants and needs as both women and workers. Throughout the decades of the postwar era, women carefully maneuvered

through gendered rhetoric to balance their torn identity. In this chapter, the second wave feminist movement was just beginning and over the years, little by little, women emerged from the home to add to their numbers and slowly the popular image of women began to change to incorporate their desire to work. Women today still struggle to balance their roles as women and workers but thanks to their forbearers, workingwomen have made progress in creating their own identity.

## CONCLUSION

For as long as women have been working they have experienced a double burden balancing their duties as women and workers. Because society identified men as workers and women as homemakers, workingwomen lacked a grounded identity. To be sure, workingwomen did not have a socially constructed identity to fit their circumstances. Therefore, they attempted to blend their roles as workers and women to create a makeshift identity. As a result women experienced great tension balancing the two opposing roles. From 1932-1950 gender norms underwent a series of drastic changes in order to accommodate the needs of the nation and thereby amplified the tension for workingwomen.

Throughout the Great Depression, as unemployment rates soared, federal and state governments passed laws prohibiting the employment of married women in government jobs if their husbands were also employed. Polling surveys recorded that nearly eighty percent of Americans believed married women should not have jobs.<sup>1</sup> As a result, images of ideal women showed mothers and wives staying home to care for their families and boosting the masculinity of their husbands in a troubled time. Despite the hostility toward married workingwomen, the number of women in the workforce continued to grow because many women needed jobs to help support their families. For some working-class families, gender roles reversed completely when men could not find jobs and the wages from women's pink-collar jobs were the sole income. Men felt

emasculated because they could not provide, while women gained power from working to feed their children and pay bills. As a consequence of this role reversal, many families experienced tension and some were broken up due to its affects. If workingwomen were shown in popular culture, they always had jobs that complemented their femininity by utilizing their conventional skills, when in reality women completed many of the same jobs that men held. Women, who worked on farms or in industries often bared the same burdens as their husbands and had a masculine identity as workers which challenged their womanhood. Women in these situations were ignored by popular culture because their work was not proper. Nevertheless, workingwomen did what they had to do to ensure the survival of their families during the depression. In the eyes of society, this often meant sacrificing their femininity as women in order to work.

When World War II began, the nation needed womanpower for victory. Gender roles for women changed drastically when ideal women were shown leaving their homes to obtain war jobs. Government propaganda showed former housewives as glamorous, feminine women performing industrial work. Workingwomen often experienced tension over society's emphasis in prioritizing the nation's need for them to work over their traditional responsibilities as wives and mothers. However, statistics show that almost seventy-five percent of female war workers held a job before Pearl Harbor,<sup>2</sup> therefore the majority of women were accustomed to carrying a double burden of work and home. Nevertheless, the role of some workingwomen was complicated further because the majority of women who held pink-collar jobs during the depression were the first to take advantage of skilled high paying industrial jobs when vacancies occurred.

Although portrayed by popular culture as feminine, as a result of their masculine jobs female industrial workers took on a masculine identity, thus creating tension between them and the feminine pink-collar workers and masculine male workers they came in contact with. Women who worked in industry versus women who worked in offices were divided by the level of the feminine or masculine atmosphere of their work. As such, their relationships with men at work were also affected. When women played their gendered part and were submissive to male influence at work they were accepted as temporary workers; however, when women demonstrated authority over men they were seen as a threat to male labor. Female office workers experienced more forceful advances from male co-workers than female industrial workers, most likely because they were in a more feminine role. Regardless, some men and women who worked together had affairs and, as a result, society believed that women in the workforce were a threat to familial and societal stability.

When the war ended, so did the employment of women in masculine industrial work. Most workingwomen understood that returning veterans were entitled to their old jobs, but expressed regret that their contribution and sacrifices for victory were not recognized. As society shifted back to “normal”, the government created veterans’ programs which identified men as breadwinners and supporters of women and children. Through incentives like veterans’ mortgages, returning soldiers had the means to marry and set up house in order to reunite or begin families. Largely neglected in public policy, workingwomen resumed their pink-collar jobs and focused the majority of their attention on family. In the meantime, film, television, and magazines all reinforced the decision



middle-class women made to return to their homes after the war. Therefore, the media and popular culture emphasized domesticity, marriage, and motherhood in the immediate postwar years causing workingwomen to devote their thoughts and more energy to womanly duties in pursuit of the American Dream. However, as the war became a distant memory, the image of the ideal middle-class woman was conflicted as society struggled to suppress the unconventional desires of housewives to find their personal identity through work. While traditionalists professed that the stability of society depended on the ideal family structure with an attentive mother and wife running the home, feminists believed that women had been deprived of the opportunity to find a personal identity unique to their status as caregivers. Workingwomen wanted the opportunity to work without facing societal backlash and longed for the opportunity to work in skilled positions that offered higher pay and personal gratification. Feminists and women with progressive attitudes were portrayed negatively during the beginning of this uphill battle toward “women’s liberation”, but they continued to strive after their desire for personal identity while still balancing their roles as women and workers.

Although the Great Depression, World War II, and the Post-War years created different contexts for gender roles and ideology, they were all connected by the same pressure of feminine idealism and burdened by the tension that results from this construct. From 1932-1950, workingwomen underwent a transformation from having little control over their destiny and perception, to have growing agency in the postwar world. Although women’s roles did not expand during the postwar era, despite their massive participation in the workforce during the war, the experiences of the Rosies

ultimately changed the lives of their sons and daughters. Elaine Tyler May argues in her work, *Homeward Bound*, that after the end of World War II, at the dawn of the Cold War and the atomic age, men and women sought the comfort and security of home life. The policy of containment was encouraged in family life and foreign policy, however, domesticity in the home failed to produce the perfect lifestyle it promised. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* served as a wakeup call to the nation and formed a support group for frustrated full-time homemakers who dreamed of something more. Many women were angry with the social mentality and influence that drove them into their situation. May cites that in a letter to Friedan, one woman stated, "My feeling of betrayal is not directed at society as much as at the women who beat the drums for the "passionate journey" into darkness."<sup>3</sup> As chapter three of this study demonstrated, there were no women who beat the drums for the so called journey. Many female wartime workers had been deprived of financial security during the depression and the presence of their lovers during the war so that they readily quit the jobs, that they believed returning veterans were entitled to, in order to begin or reunite their families. Nevertheless many women yearned for the pride of production that female war workers had experienced.

As full-time homemakers and women employed in pink-collar jobs, longed for greater opportunity while devoting their energy to family life, their children dreamed of bigger and better things. The letter to Friedan continued, "My children grew up in the mystique jungle but somehow escaped it."<sup>4</sup> May explains that as the baby boomers came of age they "abandoned the containment ethos"<sup>5</sup> and began to rebel against their carefully designed identity. The working-class used their strength in numbers to fight for equality,

while middle-class men and women used their attitude, goals and identity to alter the ideal image.

Times were changing in the 1960s and the next generation disputed the policies of the former by rejecting domestic containment and protesting the cold war. May claims that many activist groups were gaining members and “out of the student movement came the anti-war movement and the new feminism.”<sup>6</sup> One of the target goals of these movements was to mobilize “against gender assumptions.”<sup>7</sup> Young middle-class men and women rebelled against their projected image. By the 1970, the majority of college women saw their future as a career woman married with children, and by the 1980s women would be as career motivated as their male classmates.<sup>8</sup> Young men revolted by altering their appearance to contradict masculine identity. They grew their hair long and traded three piece business suits for floral shirts. By resisting the draft, they refused their masculine duty to serve in the military, while protesting for peace. At this time, gender identities and roles were highly controversial and rapidly changing. Conservatives resisted this change; polls found that eighty percent of those participating supported schools who attempted to force short hair cuts for men and found that seventy-five percent of participants believed that the “nation’s morals were getting worse” as divorce and co-habitation rates increased while the marriage and birth rates dropped beginning in 1960.<sup>9</sup>

As shifting gender roles blurred the image of the ideal American, working men and women took on the challenge of equal rights at work. According to Alice Kessler-

Harris in 1954 at the White House Conference on Womanpower, keynote speaker, Roland Renne encouraged women to finish their education and formal training before marriage and children and claimed that if the “proper cultural environment” was developed more married women would be willing to work part-time. In 1955, the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor investigated “how assumptions about sex roles limited opportunity for women” by asking questions like “whether ‘fear of male resentment’ handicapped women so much that they ‘hesitate to seek job advancement.’”<sup>10</sup> Gender was a major factor in the everyday lives of workingwomen. They were denied jobs they were capable of doing because of a position’s gendered identity. Women who passed the civil service exam complained that the Post Office placed their names on a female register that would not be considered for certain appointments. The women wrote to the Women’s Bureau stating, we will “never be given the same security status that is given to the men with whom we work...Please help us to abolish this INSULT TO THE WOMANHOOD OF AMERICA!”<sup>11</sup> Despite the efforts of workers, the Women’s Bureau was powerless to provide assistance for injustices without the proper legislation to ground advancement. After decades of struggle, women slowly gained the support they required during the Kennedy Administration. In 1962, discrimination was outlawed in the civil service and in 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed. According to Kessler-Harris, in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was being drafted, Senator Howard Smith from Virginia threw the word “sex” into Title VII and when the Committee tried to omit it from the bill, Senator Margaret Chase and Representative Martha Griffiths “threatened to stall the whole bill unless it was left in.”<sup>12</sup> Against the desire of most legislators, women became

protected against discrimination. Although the battle for equality did not end there, Rosies' daughters gained a solid victory.

This thesis demonstrated the tension workingwomen experienced throughout three distinct and challenging times in American history when gender norms changed to meet societal needs. This is a subject of great importance because during this period people were suffering or attempting to return to a “normal” lifestyle, therefore to accommodate the needs of their families and society, women altered their roles. During the depression, working-class women often supported their families and were subjected to hostile attitudes for their employment. During the war, women mastered industrial jobs while holding their families together. During the postwar years, workingwomen left their industrial jobs to vacate positions for returning soldiers and focused their attention on their families to reinforce traditional values after a time of turmoil. However, rarely did workingwomen receive recognition for their efforts and sacrifices. This thesis is a tribute to their undying service to society and devotion to their families. Although women were challenged by their many responsibilities, I think we can look back and say “They did a pretty good job.”

This work is chronologically divided into three chapters to better display the changing societal expectations of women and the strain women experienced attempting to meet this expectation. However, shifting gender roles were not abrupt changes that occurred overnight, they were adjustments that took place gradually. For example, the stock market crashed in 1929, but the country did not enter the Great Depression until the

winter of 1933 when the economy reached an all time low. When the United States entered World War II, material needs for soldiers were urgent and changes took place faster, although it still took several months for mobilization to occur. After victory was achieved in 1945, at times, it took up to six months or more for veterans to return home.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, societal images and public opinion had months and at times years undergo a steady modification for assigning women “new” roles. Aside from the differences between the highlighted time frames, there were also many continuities surrounding feminine identity. This conclusion explores the similarities of workingwomen across the Great Depression, World War II, and the Post-War Years by examining advertisements for feminine hygiene products.

From a plethora of ads ranging from 1932-1950, I used Feminine Hygiene products because they focused solely on the needs of women. As capitalist enterprises, I assumed Kotex and the Personal Products Corporation (manufactures of sanitary napkins and tampons) tried to reach as many women as possible with their advertisements, which meant they had to market their products to all women and not just the ideal type. Ads for feminine hygiene products were practical and were centered on optimum protection and everlasting comfort to suit the activities of real women. I chose the following three advertisements from hundreds of samples because they recognized workingwomen as a significant group and created a rare perception of ideal workingwomen.

A 1939 advertisement for Kotex Sanitary Napkins (**Figure 11**<sup>14</sup>) in *Motion Picture* presented “Confessions of a Private Secretary” in three images of the same worker. A young woman dressed in a conservative black and red checkered dress with, hair styled back in curls with red nails and lips, softly smiles as she holds her paper pad and pen. The caption stated: “Slave to a buzzer...that’s me! Yet I wouldn’t trade the rush and excitement of my job for anything.” The ad continues to state that as a personal secretary her day is too busy and demanding for her to worry about herself. Therefore she uses feminine protection she can trust to give her “piece-of-mind.” The second image shows her carefully applying her make-up stating: “Looks count plenty... in this job of mine. A girl must look poised and efficient and that means I must *feel* my best.” A secretary could not afford to be uncomfortable therefore she chooses the appropriate size of protection, like “every woman,” to suit her “individual needs.” The third image shows the workingwoman getting ready for an evening out dressed in a leaf green, spaghetti strapped, V-neck dress properly accessorized with a layered gold necklace and bracelet, she stands dreamy eyed and hands folded aside her chest, as the caption stated: “Lady of the Evening...still looking and feeling my best at the time so many girls are irritable.” With comfortable,

**Figure 11**



protection designed to fit her needs, a workingwoman can enjoy her time away from the office as well.

**Figure 12**



A 1942 advertisement for Kotex Sanitary Napkins (Figure 12<sup>15</sup>) in *Women's Home Companion* depicted a beautiful young woman smiling with blonde curled hair in an elegant light blue dress, her hand softly grasping the flowing lengths of her gown while her other hand slides down the banister of a curving staircase. The caption states: "Will you ever forget how proud he looked as you glided down the long staircase? As though he'd been waiting for this moment all his life!" The caption continues to explain that if it wasn't for Diana who told her about the comfort of Kotex Sanitary Napkins the young woman would have called off her date at 5 o'clock because "today's eight hours of defense work had seemed like eighty!" The bottom corner of the

advertisement was complete with two lovely women dressed in their fitted work clothes laboring on the wing of a war plane. The large caption states: "You're the fun in his furlough. You don't need a furlough! Keep going in comfort with Kotex!"



A 1947 advertisement for Meds tampons (**Figure 13**<sup>16</sup>) in *Good Housekeeping* magazine depicts the faces of three different women. The housewife at the top, smiling happily with her dark hair curled around her ears, states, “Meds mean comfort to me!” Next comes the business woman, with her blonde hair pulled neatly into a bun showing her earrings, smiling as she claims, “Meds mean convenience to me!” Finally a young college girl, also smiling with her hair neatly held in place by her headband states, “Meds mean freedom to me!” This ad sent the message to women that no matter their individual role, Meds tampons could meet their needs.

Each of these advertisements portray workingwomen, while the first has a feminine job as a secretary, the second depicts women completing masculine war work, and the third shows a pink-collar business woman and a college girl possibly with intentions for a career. Workingwomen were present in all time periods and they all appeared to be feminine and beautiful. Even the women building an airplane in a masculine environment had their hair neatly pulled back and wore form fitting clothes which complemented their feminine figures. In addition, women’s after work activities focused on social life. The secretary prepares herself for an evening out, with friends or maybe a potential suitor, while the riveter charms her soldier on furlough, and the presence of the housewife in the last advertisement implies that business women and college girls can have better relationships with men by using meds products. Each of

**Figure 13**



these ads shows women successfully balancing their feminine side in a busy work environment so that they can enjoy being women too.

According to Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, although not ideal, images and stories about career women were found in moderation throughout the period from 1932-1948. Although the postwar era encouraged women to devote their time to families, the hard push leading into the domesticity of the 1950s did not occur until 1949, when magazines were flooded with articles like, “Femininity Begins at Home,” “Should I Stop Work When We Marry?,” and “Careers at Home.”<sup>17</sup> Most forms of cultural medium sent the idea to women that being a housewife was the ideal profession. By the end of the 1950s, the average age women married dropped to 20 and more and more teens married each year, while sixty percent of women dropped out of college to marry or to prevent their education from becoming an obstacle to marriage.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time the domestic turn advanced in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was published which encouraged women break submissive trends and get jobs and achieve independence, so that women could have agency and identity equal to men’s. Over the next thirty years, workingwomen attempted to create a unique identity of their own. Further analysis of their struggle to balance societal expectations of womanhood with demanding jobs from 1950 to the present day is needed provide further understanding of the challenges workingwomen have endured on the road to equality.

Historians have had a tendency to lump women into one homogeneous group for analysis, when in reality the only thing most women had in common was that they were

women. However, because the history of men was the focus of study until around fifty years ago, the study of women was generalized. Like men, women are divided by language, region, nationality, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, and interests. This thesis analyzed American women according to class, thereby creating a category in which to analyze workingwomen in their identity struggle from 1932 to 1950. Other scholars will recognize that this study was unable to accomplish a further categorization of workingwomen. Although this study includes members of different racial, ethnic, religious, and regional groups, my goal was to analyze them only as workingwomen. My hope is that others will build off of this broad study to open up new categories of analysis by tracing the experiences of specific groups to unveil challenges unique to their identity struggle throughout the years of 1932-1950.

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Figure 5: “Rockwell’s Rosie the Riveter Painting Auctioned”, The Rosie the Riveter Trust, Accessed: January 5, 2011, <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/painting.htm>

Figure 6: “Prophet Isaiah within the Sistine Chapel Ceiling”, Lauren Mitchell Reuhring, How Stuff Works: A Discovery Company, Sistine Chapel Michelangelo Paintings, 2011, HowStuffWorks, Inc., Publications International Ltd. Accessed January 13, 2011, <http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/sistine-chapel-michelangelo-paintings10.htm>

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## NOTES

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### Introduction: *Woman or Worker?*

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<sup>19</sup> As a side note, daughters of the working-class often obtained full-time pink-collar positions until they married and their husband's financial condition determined their employment status.

<sup>20</sup> Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> My research shows that African Americans experienced racism and discrimination in the workplace which amplified the tension they experienced. While members of different ethnic groups show inconsistency in their rate of assimilation into American society during the Great Depression. During the war, for the most part, ethnic differences were put aside and their identity as Americans was strengthened in their battle against common enemies. See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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## Chapter One: *The Great Depression, 1932-1941*

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<sup>14</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 250.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, page 40.

<sup>17</sup> The negotiation between the government and the public was a constant factor in policy initiatives throughout the scope of this thesis from 1932 to 1950. In the United States, this interaction is present throughout history up to the present day.

<sup>18</sup> Kessler Harris, *Out to Work*, 268.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 269.

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<sup>13</sup> Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 153.

<sup>14</sup> Sheridan Harvey, "Rosie the Riveter: Real Woman Workers in World War II," Journeys and Crossings, Library of Congress, Accessed March 15, 2011, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/rosie-transcript.html>

<sup>15</sup> Figure 7: "The Girl He Left Behind," Vangobot's Art Machine, Accessed January 5, 2011, [http://popartmachine.com/item/pop\\_art/LOC+1173000/%22THE-GIRL-HE-LEFT-BEHIND%22-IS-STILL-BEHIND-HIM--SHE](http://popartmachine.com/item/pop_art/LOC+1173000/%22THE-GIRL-HE-LEFT-BEHIND%22-IS-STILL-BEHIND-HIM--SHE)

<sup>16</sup> Figure 8: "Do the Job HE Left Behind," On the Home front, World War II, Government Recruiting Posters Aimed at Women, Accessed January 5, 2011, <http://www.squidoo.com/vintagememories>

<sup>17</sup> Figure 9: "My Husband Wants Me To Do My Part," Library of Congress, Researchers, Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Rosie Pictures: Select Images Relating to American Women Workers during World War II, Accessed January 5, 2011, [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126\\_rosi.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126_rosi.html)

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- <sup>18</sup>Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 155.
- <sup>19</sup>Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 6.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid, 8.
- <sup>21</sup>S. J. Kleinberg, *Women in the United States, 1830-1945* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 251.
- <sup>22</sup>Dorinda Tabor, Donna Deblasio, August 19, 1991, Oral History Project, The Ohio Historical Society, The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor Archive, Youngstown, Ohio, VHS, (Hereafter YHCIL).
- <sup>23</sup>Mrs. Elma M. Jones Beatty, Donna Deblasio, August 28, 1991, Oral History Project, The Ohio Historical Society, The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor Archive, Youngstown, Ohio, VHS, (Hereafter YHCIL).
- <sup>24</sup>Mary Zorgan, Susan Lineback, November 6, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003:03:057, (Hereafter RSOH).
- <sup>25</sup>Beatty, YHCIL .
- <sup>26</sup>Emma Rocco, Julie Throckmorton-Meunier, October 17, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, audio disc: 2003:100303\_0853, (Hereafter RSOH).
- <sup>27</sup>Tabor, YHCIL.
- <sup>28</sup>Rocco, RSOH.
- <sup>29</sup>Janet L. Coryell and Nora Faires, *A History of Women in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 352.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup>Rocco, RSOH.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup>Beatty, YHCIL.
- <sup>34</sup>Beatty, YHCIL; The WPA, also known as the Works Progress Administration established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order in 1935 as a New Deal Program. In 1939, it was redesigned under the Federal Works Agency and renamed the Work Projects Administration. The WPA offered work to unemployed American men on a large scale by spending money on internal development programs. *The Works Progress Administration in Indiana*, Exhibit Webpage, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Accessed January 30, 2011, <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/wpa/wpa.html>
- <sup>35</sup>Rocco, RSOH.
- <sup>36</sup>Tabor, YHCIL.
- <sup>37</sup>Estock, YHCIL.
- <sup>38</sup>Margaret "Peggy" Katrincsak, Julie Throckmorton-Meunier and Ron Baraff, August 18, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003:03:032.1 (Hereafter RSOH).
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup>Ruby A. Cunningham, Julie Throckmorton-Meunier and Ron Baraff, August 18, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003:03:032.1 (Hereafter RSOH).
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 288.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup>Beatty, YHCIL.
- <sup>45</sup>Zorgan, RSOH.
- <sup>46</sup>Rocco, RSOH.
- <sup>47</sup>Katrincsak, RSOH.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Tabor, YHCIL.

<sup>50</sup> Beatty, YHCIL.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Tabor, RSOH.

<sup>53</sup> *Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, VHS, directed by Connie Field (1980; Los Angeles, California: Direct Cinema Limited, Clarity Educational Productions, 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Three: *The Post-War Years, 1945-1950*

<sup>1</sup>Figure 10: "Paradise Lost?," *American Heritage*, Superstock. Digital Colorization, Barry Blackman, February-March 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Smoler, "Paradise Lost?," *American Heritage*, February-March 1998, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 58-67.

<sup>5</sup> Although the era of prosperity in the 1950s enabled middle-class, white Americans the opportunity to own two automobiles and a home in the suburbs, therefore projecting the image of the perfect family which is still aspired to in culture today, not all Americans were able to achieve this projected norm. Lower-classes as well as African Americans were largely excluded from this harmonious imagined reality.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Marie Mader, Susan Lineback, September 4, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003:03:040.2 (Hereafter RSOH).

<sup>8</sup> Ruby A. Cunningham, Julie Throckmorton-Meunier, August 18, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003:03:032.1, (Hereafter RSOH).

<sup>9</sup> Emma Rocco, Julie Throckmorton-Meunier, October 17, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, audio disc: 2003:100303\_0853, (Hereafter RSOH).

<sup>10</sup> Sophie Estock, Donna Deblasio, July, 18, 1991, Oral History Project, The Ohio Historical Society, The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor Archive, Youngstown, Ohio, VHS, (Hereafter YHCIL).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Zorgan, Susan Lineback, November 6, 2003, Rivers of Steel Heritage Area Oral History Project, Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 2003, 2003:03:057, (Hereafter RSOH).

<sup>12</sup> Dorinda Tabor, Donna Deblasio, August 19, 1991, Oral History Project, The Ohio Historical Society, The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor Archive, Youngstown, Ohio, VHS, (Hereafter YHCIL).

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Elma M. Jones Beatty, Donna Deblasio, August 28, 1991, Oral History Project, The Ohio Historical Society, The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor Archive, Youngstown, Ohio, VHS, (Hereafter YHCIL).

<sup>14</sup> Madar, RSOH.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Rocco, RSOH.



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- <sup>17</sup> Tabor, YHCIL.
- <sup>18</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*.
- <sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2003), 122.
- <sup>20</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 167.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Tabor, YHCIL.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Estock, YHCIL.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Madar, RSOH.
- <sup>27</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 137.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 136.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 145.
- <sup>32</sup> Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mother's World: American Women's Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 102.
- <sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 152.
- <sup>35</sup> Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 146 & 148.
- <sup>36</sup> Elizabeth G. Traube, Review of *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, by Jackie Stacey. *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol 24, No 4, (July) 1995: 404-405.
- <sup>37</sup> Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- <sup>38</sup> June Sochen, "How World War II Affected Women" in *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts (St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993), 181.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 181-4.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid, 184-5.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, 186.
- <sup>42</sup> Jane Place, "Women in Film Noir" in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1978).
- <sup>43</sup> Mary Ann Watson, *Defining Visions: Television and the American Experience Since 1945* (United States of America: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 3.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, 5.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, 52.
- <sup>46</sup> Betty Freidan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1963, reprint 2001, 16.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid, 71.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid, 77.
- <sup>49</sup> *Betty Friedan Biography*, Encyclopedia of World Biography, (Advameg, Inc., 2011), accessed April 10, 2011, <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Fi-Gi/Friedan-Betty.html>
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid, 183.
- <sup>51</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 183.
- <sup>52</sup> William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 146.
- <sup>53</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 185.

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<sup>54</sup> Alice Kessler Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 277.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 286-287.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> Ferdinand Lundberg and Maryina F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947).

<sup>59</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949, reprint 2010).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 722.

<sup>61</sup> Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), Following page 186: Figure 4, "The Third Sex."

<sup>62</sup> Catherine Gourley, *Rosie and Mrs. America: The Perceptions of Women in the 1930s and 1940s* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008), 131.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> Lundberg and Farnham, *Modern Woman*, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Tabor, YHCIL.

<sup>67</sup> Connie Field, "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter" in *Images of Women in American Popular Culture*. Second Edition. Angela G. Dorenkamp, John F. McClymer, Mary M. Moynihan, Arlene C. Vadum, eds. (USA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1985, Reprint 1995), 300.

<sup>68</sup> Beatty, YHCIL.

## Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 276.

<sup>3</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 209-10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 221-2.

<sup>10</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 307.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

<sup>13</sup> Connie Field, *Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, VHS, (Los Angeles, CA: Direct Cinema Ltd., 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Figure 11: Advertisement from "Motion Picture" Magazine, Kotex Company, Sanitary Napkins, 1939, *Confessions of a Private Secretary*, Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, Ad\*Access, Beauty and Hygiene (1911-1956), Feminine Hygiene 1930s, Accessed March 2, 2011, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess.BH0051/>

<sup>15</sup> Figure 12: Advertisement from "Women's Home Companion" Magazine, Kotex Company, Sanitary Napkins, 1942, *You're the Fun in His Furlough*, Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, Ad\*Access, Beauty and Hygiene (1911-1956), Feminine Hygiene 1940s, Accessed March 2, 2011, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess.BH0064/>

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<sup>16</sup> Figure 13: Advertisement from “Good House Keeping” Magazine, Personal Products Corporation, Meds Tampons, 1947, *Housewife: Meds Mean Comfort to Me! Business Woman: Meds Mean Convenience to Me! College Girl: Meds Mean Freedom to Me!*, Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, Ad\*Access, Beauty and Hygiene (1911-1956), Feminine Hygiene 1940s, Accessed March 2, 2011, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess.BH0087/>

<sup>17</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 44.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 16.