

Perpetuating Domestic Ambivalence: A Duality of Gender Role Advice in American  
Women's Prescriptive Literature, 1920-1960

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## Abstract

Ever since America's inception, prescriptive literature has been continuously used for guidance and advice relating to suitable conduct and gender roles. This type of literature points to middle-class ideals and the belief that social mobility can be achieved through propriety and adherence to socio-gender norms. While previous scholarship has focused primarily on nineteenth century etiquette and conduct literature written by religious men under edifying pretexts or popular literature in consumer driven twentieth century magazines and advertisements, this thesis examines women's prescriptive literature books between 1920 and 1960. Prescriptive literature published during this period was authored by middle-class women and was intended to be didactic in nature. However, women authors of prescriptive literature, who functioned outside of traditional gender roles and norms were not only subjective in their advice, but perpetuated a duality of roles for women, often advising against the very social mobility they had achieved.

Women authors of prescriptive literature consistently gave advice that helped to encourage and facilitate women's agency through autonomy and gender role expansion while simultaneously reinscribing women into domestic themes and redefining boundaries in their public and private lives. This thesis examines numerous prescriptive books and their authors, arguing that this literature's content, like women's lives, became diversified while maintaining ambivalence about domesticity and roles derived from the home that transferred into the public domain. Prescriptive books written between 1920 and 1960 perpetuated contradictions in gender discourse, and conflated female ideals with stereotypes and gender double standards in their education and work.

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I thank my inspiring husband, Jeremy, a shining example of perseverance, who has weathered many trials and first completed his thesis, giving me the motivation to write one. I also thank him for putting up with my infinite stacks of books and papers that have entirely consumed what was once our living room.

I thank all the women I know, who have faced gender disparity in their daily lives, who have chosen to take a stand against double standards and in the pursuit of true equality, continue to fight the good fight.

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## Prologue: Nineteenth Century Prescriptive Literature and the Beecher Legacy

In no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes and to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways that are always different.

- Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835<sup>1</sup>

During the early nineteenth century, the French historian and socio-political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville worked on compiling information about the dynamic multi-faceted changes taking place in America. Tocqueville's work was published as *Democracy in America* in two parts, the first in 1835 and the second in 1840, both containing detailed analysis of Tocqueville's visit to the United States and his observations on economic, government, social structures and gender relationships. Among Tocqueville's major remarks, he noted a relationship between the market-capitalist system and middling values: the widespread ambition for equality, individuality and materialism and the growing correlation between well-educated, literate women and their use of free speech and freedom of the press. Moreover, this foreigner examined the social-gender discourse on separate spheres and the compounding contradiction women faced with societal expectations relating to gender roles and marital obligations. In Linda Kerber's article, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," she illustrates Tocqueville's bewilderment with the tradition of American patriarchal authority and the implications it had for women's roles, because many women were educated and literate, they could self-educate and write about their own ideas. Tocqueville remarked, "Young women [had] a high degree of independence,

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9.

which encouraged a high degree of self-confidence. Yet when one of those same women married the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes her within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it.”<sup>2</sup>

Early nineteenth century prescriptive literature written by religious men promoted the ideals of what historians call “The Cult of True Womanhood” a set of virtues including domesticity, piety, purity and submissiveness. However, the rising popularity of republicanism gave women increased authority in the home, encouraged higher education in order to better teach their children civic duties and identified women as morally superior over men. Women used this moral superiority as a harness, which somewhat restricted their actions but also gave them autonomy and the right to reform various public institutions. These new American woman ideals upheld by prescriptive literature expanded and redefined boundaries for women. Many women authors, led by the sisters, Catherine and Harriet Beecher, promoted these ideals to expand their authority outside of the home using their words and moral reasoning as an invisibility cloak in order to promote social mobility and influence public perceptions. At the same time, female authors of prescriptive literature used their personal experiences and freedoms through authorship to reinforce and perpetuate confining domestic principles as ideals, consequently creating a duality of gender role advice.<sup>3</sup> Through their advice, Catherine and Harriet Beecher established a new form of prescriptive literature, a legacy of domestic ambivalence based on contrasting public and private roles, affecting gender discourse and countless women’s daily lives more than a century later.

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<sup>2</sup> Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” 9. Dona Brown, “Travel Books,” *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, edited by Robert Gross and Mary Kelley, Vol. 2 of *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2010), 452.

<sup>3</sup> Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” 9-12.



Before the widespread renown from the moral, antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, author Harriet Beecher Stowe and her older sister, Catherine Beecher involved themselves in issues outside of traditional domestic ideology concerning politics, slavery, classical education and other public, social issues.<sup>4</sup> Although these women thought in gender progressive terms for their time they were surrounded by male-authored traditional, prescriptive literature that emphasized gender segregation and separate spheres. The Beecher sisters chose to author their own domestic manuals that focused on the home while infusing new, progressive ideas into other women's lives. However, while maintaining the home as the main subject of a woman's life and central to the growth of American society, these women's words and actions not only contradicted male-authored prescriptive literature, but spoke volumes about the advancement and expansion of women's education, opportunity for self-expression and influence on public opinion.

Catherine Beecher first published in 1841, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*. As the principal of the Hartford Female Seminary, Beecher lived as an example of a female author, school administrator and a forerunner of prescriptive literature that told women they could choose their own husband, that they did not need to have children to be considered useful and that women should not feel obligated to take a husband if they wanted to remain single.<sup>5</sup> Catherine Beecher opened her book with a dedication to uphold the values and ideals of democracy

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<sup>4</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1852); Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1841), 3.

and Christianity, concepts that taught women submission and obedience. Despite a focus on the nucleus of the family and living as a minister's daughter, Catherine's words sought to open others' minds to true legal and intellectual equality between race and sex.

Catherine and Harriet's father, the Reverend Lyman Beecher was one of the nineteenth century's greatest evangelical ministers and promoted the non-traditional advancement of women in education, public occupations, and social reform organizations. Catherine boldly declared that women deserved and had the right to the same civil, political and institutional privileges as men and that women should claim those things for themselves. Entering a predominantly male teaching profession as a principal, a school administrator, Catherine also advised that women should not trample on their "holiest duties" which of course meant roles as wife and mother, before trying to acquire additional rights or authority in or outside of the home.<sup>6</sup> This declaration may point to her personal belief that only single women should have professions outside of the home, but this view became complicated when Catherine combined her domestic knowledge and occupational experience with that of her married sister Harriet.

Together the Beecher sisters wrote the 1869 publication, *The American Woman's Home: A Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful and Christian Homes*, which not only established housework as a profession, but verbally reinforced that it was acceptable for women to pursue careers whether married or not, as long as they were respectable and remunerative. Powerfully inscribed, "To The Women of America, In Whose Hands Rest the Real Destinies of the Republic," this second publication spoke extensively about the changing perceptions of gender role assignment;

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.

women no longer belonged only in the home, nor were they relegated to the home for menial tasks but the home was glorious because of the woman's authority and power to uphold values in society and mold the ideals of future generations. While women's duties in life were branded as religious and moral, *The American Woman's Home* also inserted chapters on home decorating, clothing, manners, and even leisure, successfully merging religious values with secular subjects, making known elements of the changing and expanding middle-class.<sup>7</sup>

The Beecher sisters set the standard for prescriptive literature that departed from prior advice literature written by explicitly seminary trained men, and as women, Catherine and Harriet used their literacy to create new gender roles, and alternative perceptions of women. As residents of Connecticut and later Ohio, the Beecher sisters also proved through their writing that prescriptive literature and higher education deserved a place outside of the more class-structured antebellum South and its standards of women's education relating to upper-class gentility. *The American Woman's Home* made a valuable segue way into expanding women's gender roles from what had formerly been considered their domain through the reformation of traditional advice. While the Beecher's literature helped to encourage and precipitate gender role expansion for women, it also perpetuated gendered expectations and reinforced domestic confines within the imaginary gender separate spheres.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home or Principles of Domestic Science: A Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Co., 1869), 8-13.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Kerrison, *Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5, 18-19.

Much like other middle-class and some marginalized, scholarly aspiring women of the nineteenth century, the Beecher sisters belonged to a reading circle where they discussed varying social and intellectual topics. What set apart their Semi-Colon Club of Cincinnati from others, related to their membership of men and women, as well as their written and active responses to gender role conversations. Over several decades, members from the Semi-Colon Club published material on women's roles and between Catherine and Harriet, some of their opinions conflicted between defense of traditional domestic roles toward a looser interpretation of those roles and their implications for themselves and others. The Beecher sisters acquiesced to practical suggestions for additional activities with domestic roles, but their actions spoke much louder than their words, speaking in favor of careers and relative financial independence.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Beecher sisters and other prescriptive literature authors of the nineteenth century verbalized to some extent that women were best suited to do certain traditional roles because of their nature and personality characteristics, a lot of the religious ideology about gendered work appeared in the pages of prescriptive literature as a regurgitation of Sunday sermons. Women's prescriptive literature books were nicknamed "domestic bibles" because of their religious and moral tone but also because almost every middle-class woman had one of some sort and considered their instruction daily. One common misconception of the nineteenth century that dovetailed with the religious interpretation about woman's proper duties and place in society, were the notions about women's weakness, poor health and frailty. Early prescriptive literature told women that their physical capabilities were limited by their bodily design and that

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Hobbs, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 158-59.

doing men's roles or tasks could ruin their reproductive functioning, a belief that was mostly inaccurate due to poor medical knowledge and also used as manipulation to maintain the predominantly male control and influence in society. "The tending of children, the house-work...duly combined with its sedentary pursuits, all tend to strengthen and develop those central muscles of the body that hold its most important organs in their place," said by even the medically ignorant yet intelligent Catherine Beecher. Physical weakness and frailty, even as a partial misconception would prove irrelevant with the entry of industrial revolution work for women outside of the home and appliances and small machinery for housework.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of women's frailty, physical inferiority and limited capabilities continued to be espoused especially by the mentality of the upper-class southerners and the emphasis on gentility. An example of this belief was that women who rode horseback would have child-bearing complications or become infertile because their bodies could not handle rigorous exercise, it was also believed that women's brains were incapable of as much learning as their male counterparts due to their smaller bone structure. Gentility established that manners and having a respectable status required women to be submissive, passive, remain in the home and follow traditional prescriptive literature with unwavering obedience. Southern use of prescriptive literature represents an illustration of religious, male-authored prescriptive literature used for social constraint, but the tone and subject matter changed drastically before and after the Civil War. Although women in the South have been commonly portrayed as more receptive to a life of traditional roles, housework and social propriety, female authored prescriptive literature shows that

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<sup>10</sup> Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), xv.

southern women advanced from their domestic confines due to the widespread access to receive a higher education and desire to overcome sex, class and racial barriers.<sup>11</sup>

During the antebellum and postbellum periods women's literacy was common but still trailed men in levels of classical studies and advanced writing. Many Southern families could afford to send their daughters to receive a higher education at the collegiate level but viewed higher education for women as a symbol of status and a sign of elite wealth, not as critical in achieving self-fulfillment. However, in educating themselves women began to see past a full education; there existed opportunities for writing in the public sphere, opportunities in power, authority, autonomy and a changing self-perception. However, many women authors still sent mixed messages about what to pursue and what gave women fulfillment, one such example is in the dedication of *The Business Girl in Every Phase of Her Life*, published by Ruth Ashmore in 1898, "I dedicate this book to the business girl...I wish for her the greatest happiness that can come to a woman- a loving husband, a happy home, and a group of affectionate children." Even this book, aimed at a working woman audience perpetuates the idea of women finding their utmost or only fulfillment and happiness in the home.<sup>12</sup>

In viewing themselves and their gender in new ways, women saw writing for other women as a means to an end; a chance to better others as well as themselves by experiencing more than what traditional gender roles offered for them. Conduct, etiquette and other social prescriptive literature gradually reshaped the nineteenth century

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<sup>11</sup> Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1-6, 13-15.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011), 25.

mold of women's domain and becoming authors of women's advice literature established a lasting role in print culture. Despite women's prescriptive literature's content being narrowly circumscribed around ideas believed to be inherently domestic, the manuals propelled women not only into education that had formerly been considered as male territory, but also new roles and professions traditionally occupied by men.<sup>13</sup>

While nineteenth century women viewed their duties as moral and aimed at reform, these traits instinctively carried over into the public. Women appropriately called their increased involvement in writing, social, political and educational issues "public housekeeping." Author and leading women's literary historian, Mary Kelley, states "Women took the home into the world," while claiming already widely perceived moral superiority, and newly acclaimed intellectual equality, women created new self identities. Not only did middle-class women participate in readings circles, literary clubs and other social institutions, but also acted as teachers, authors, editors and advocates of public welfare.<sup>14</sup>

It was only a matter of time until women bridged the gap between the already open professions of writing and editing in a rapidly expanding print market to other predominantly male fields. This new concept of social mobility precipitated by women authors of prescriptive literature complemented the simultaneous transformation of domestic roles into school curricula and professional occupations open to women who were willing to learn what would later be called domestic science and home economics. As many women advanced into higher education, new careers and positions as authors,

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<sup>13</sup> Kerrison, *Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South*, 4-6, 23, 51, 154-56.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 49-55.

their progress often went two steps forward and one step back, reading and writing themselves into new roles and gendered boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 66, 73, 76, 87; Amy Beth Aronson, *Taking Liberties: Early American Women's Magazines and Their Readers* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 117.



## Introduction to Prescriptive Literature: The Advice Expert and Woman Exception

In so far as a woman wishes to be a woman, her independent status gives rise to an inferiority complex; on the other hand, her femininity makes her doubtful of her professional future. This is a point of great importance.

-Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*<sup>1</sup>

For many years scholars have tried to grapple with the complex and multi-faceted aspects of prescriptive literature. Prescriptive literature through the form of books, periodicals, advertisements, pamphlets and newspaper advice columns has appealed to more than middle-class men, women and children for centuries. In America, dissemination of prescribed advice have been pervasive due to high rates of literacy beginning in the nineteenth century, increased by innovations in printing press technology and the transportation revolution. Over time, with the effects of mainstreamed education and women's professionalization expanded to lower or working class people and immigrants who wanted to improve their daily lives, achieve social inclusion and financial or material security. Prescriptive literature's purpose has changed and expanded over time but can be simply defined as literature that educates, edifies and advises its reader with the goal of improving the life of the reader in a variety of ways. However, prescriptive literature reflects social discourse on norms and expectations, changing ideals and makes clear to its reader how it can increase one's social mobility.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5-9, 55.

For the purposes of time and space this thesis will focus on women's prescriptive literature in America between 1920 and 1960, in three distinct phases: interwar, wartime and post-war America. In addition to this time frame, the medium of literature examined is with books often called advice, self-help, etiquette, and domestic manuals. This thesis will generally refer to prescriptive literature books, advice literature or domestic manuals unless referring a specific example. All of the books discussed give advice and most, if not all act as a domestic manual by referencing roles or work in the home or describe how public work, education and social ideas somehow relate to the idea of domesticity. It is in the term "domestic" that the core of women's prescriptive literature exhibits contradicting and dualistic tendencies concerning women's roles and their progress in society; this term is problematic due to the fact that overtime 'domestic' manuals encapsulated much more subject matter than the private issues of the home, marriage and family.<sup>3</sup>

Women's prescriptive literature deserves a substantial marker in the written historical record where America's gender, class, labor and social histories all intersect. However, it is precisely because of this widely lacking acknowledgment that this thesis illustrates the significance and lasting impact that advice and domestic manuals have made on the social discourse, gender roles and overall lives of American women. While the existing scholarship, which is scarce, focuses on popular culture examples of prescriptive literature or early examples in colonial America, it is usually identified as a method of social control, particularly that which was written by men, or by authors who describe women as victims of its instruction or incompetent or gullible to product ads. Scholarship written by Jorge Ardit, Cas Wouters and Steven Stowe all illustrate aspects

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 83-88, 156-57.

of prescriptive literature used as social control for various reasons.<sup>4</sup> These viewpoints completely remove women's agency, especially considering that by 1880 and thereafter, women wrote almost all of women's prescriptive books and gave advice based on their own personal experiences and accomplishments.

Although early to mid-twentieth century prescriptive books exhibited some progressive characteristics that starkly contrasted with their nineteenth century predecessors, much of the advice remained a steady undercurrent of traditional gender and social norms. It is the basis of this paper's argument that while prescriptive literature books acted as catalysts of autonomy and social mobility for women they also reinforced traditional values and separate sphere gender ideology of the past; they precipitated gender role expansion for women and simultaneously reinscribed women to perpetual housework and domestic roles by describing women as moral superiors, naturally better at serving, self-sacrifice and often as mutually exclusive with wage-earning occupations, especially when married or a mother. It is this dynamic duality of advice for women's private and public lives that deserves not only acknowledgement but a scholarly work devoted to prescriptive literature books in their entirety, not just a mere mention or a few paragraphs, but a comprehensive analysis of their content and consequences.

As opposed to arguments made about prescriptive literature in previous scholarship, this paper will contend that prescriptive literature books were not tools of social constraint but literary guides that offered all literate women opportunity for social mobility, however great or small. Advice and domestic manuals were didactic in nature

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<sup>4</sup> Jorge Ardit, "The Feminization of Etiquette Literature: Foucault, Mechanisms of Social Change, and the Paradoxes of Empowerment," *Sociological Perspectives* 39.3 (1996): 417-434; Jan Lewis and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in The Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

and led to the transformation of limited domestic private roles into higher education degrees, occupations, professions, new roles and new lives for women. Domestic manuals for high schools and colleges helped make possible the reality of single or married working women, mother or not, higher-educated, career women, and ultimately contributed to the fruition of “Mrs. Consumer” in the 1920s and forward by branding them as the moral authority, the consumers of the household, and capable of financial independence from men. Prescriptive literature books taught females how to best complete domestic chores, cook, clean and how to purchase the best items in addition to finding jobs that correlated with these tasks after high school or even college. Courses in high school and programs at colleges convinced women, that regardless of what they pursued in their public and private lives that domestic roles were their means of survival, success and happiness.

This thesis will reveal that the 1950s ideal woman modeled by the “June Cleaver” character exhibits an uncanny likeness both to the 1920s “Mrs. Consumer” and the “Superwoman” of contemporary times. These parallels prove not only the didactic nature of the material in teaching domestic ideal examples, but also the way it functioned as a catalyst for change in women’s agency, increasing their authority through their carefully defined, domestic roles. and the lasting duality of gender discourse and social norms. Furthermore, studying prescriptive books published between 1920 and 1960 shows their practicality and relevance by correlating with education, work and gender discourse in contemporary America; topics and instruction are still relevant, vindicating their usefulness, but also the legacy for their female authors as business career women. There are also many similarities between authors such as the 1920s Christine Frederick and

post-war women authors who merged business with domestic role mastery in their lives and in their advice. Unlike their magazine, pamphlet, advertising and advice column counterparts, prescriptive books did not become quickly obsolete or serve as items reflective of periodized, popular culture. Prescriptive literature books did not become obsolete because of the duality that continued between women's public and private roles, marriage and work, domestic and consumer responsibilities, all of which authors reinforced, because of their own personal experiences, belief in nuances of domestic ideals and consequently, subjective advice.

Journalist and author Betty Friedan published the most notable public outcry applying to prescriptive roles in 1963, challenging the perceived ideals of domestic-centric gender ideals and the problems women faced in public and private life. Inspired by parts of Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 *Le Deuxieme Sexe*, Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* sent shockwaves throughout America by condemning traditionally prescribed roles shown in magazines and advertisements but also perpetuated stereotypes about women that she, like many others assumed as ideal, a social norm and a majority of the female experience based on being a middle-class, happy housewife. Friedan explored the fulfillment and satisfaction of women's lives through work, education, family and relationships, opposing the functionalist definitions of women's capabilities viewed through a narrow lens of their supposedly inferior mental and physical range. Following this literary challenge, increasing amounts of women began to question the implications of prescriptive literature and stereotyped gender roles, becoming gender and social

historians, feminists or authors in their own right.<sup>5</sup> However, Friedan's actions as one of the first authors to write secondary material on the recent post-war period showed the same ambivalence and contradictions in her private and public life as the host of female prescriptive authors before and after her. The cultural significance of this book forced thousands of women to refocus their perceptions of education, professional occupations, personal relationships and roles, to define what made them happy and what gave them worth and fulfillment. Betty Friedan was born in 1921 and lived through the entire 1920-1960 period examined in this thesis, starting out as a political leftist and by the 1950s became centered in "the problem that had no name," the *Feminine Mystique* that her book talked about caught her in what she referred to as "The Comfortable Concentration Camp," of domestic life, something that drained her of personal development and identity, suffocated her expression, but more importantly, led her to write the book that would help spark the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

In order to explain the majority of secondary literature written in recent decades, it is necessary to mention the majority of prescriptive literature that scholars have discussed that parallels this paper, mainly examples of class-based literature used in Great Britain that transferred into American minds and discourse. One example of this is in *Lord Chesterfield's Letters* published in 1774 mentioning manners and behavior etiquette as ethics and overtly speaking of class-based differences. Another is John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, with twenty-seven editions printed between 1775 and 1798, mirroring the revised editions of *The American Woman's Home*

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<sup>5</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, edited by Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2013); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 234-57.

by the Beecher sisters, half a century later. Prescriptive literature decreased its class-based tone during the mid-nineteenth century and was usually when written by women. For whatever reasons very little scholarship exists on the changes of prescriptive literature in America and what does mention issues related will rarely refer to it as a category of literature, or even as consumer-profit motivated; an early example is well illustrated in *The Ladies Home Journal Treasury: 73 Years of Its Best Stories, Articles and Poetry*, edited by John Mason Brown which shows a chronology of advertisements and magazine covers, as well as articles written during the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Too often scholarly books or articles that discuss types of prescriptive literature or its consequences do not even mention it by that name; often there will not even be a term listing in many books' indices. Extensive written work on prescriptive literature is primarily linked to Great Britain's Victorian Period (1837-1901), and can only be used for comparison of subtle similarities relating to the overall concept of the nineteenth century cult of domesticity or true ideals of womanhood. Secondary literature that does reveal the complexities of American prescriptive literature pertains mainly to nineteenth century etiquette and conduct literature as a sign of gentility, and courtship among southern men and educated women elites. Other secondary scholarship collectively examines popular magazines and advertisements over broad time periods or very nuanced examples of regionalized prescriptive literature such as the Antebellum South or Puritanical New England. As of yet, no scholarship exists that gives a comprehensive

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<sup>7</sup>John Mason Brown, ed., *The Ladies Home Journal Treasury: 73 Years of Its Best Stories, Articles and Poetry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Arditi, "The Feminization of Etiquette Literature," 423-26.

view of prescriptive literature books in America, moreover, the socially dynamic twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in the 1980s, female historians began to fill in the gaps of the female historical experience by writing about women's roles, education, work and the various forms of prescriptive literature that they wrote and read for advice and how it changed overtime. Many books emerged as anthologies, piecing together various subtopics under main themes, often referring to etiquette literature, periodical journals, and magazines used over broad periods of time. One such anthology is *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* edited by Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, published in 1988. In *Making the American Home*, the editors posit the idea that the objects women chose or purchased and the ways in which they did things in and for the home served to perpetuate a set of values promulgated through literature directed at middle-class women. Two of the examples in this book are advice given for interior decorating of the home and domestic consumption, often seen in magazines that gave ideas for leisure, fashion, arguing that decorative objects gave women an escape from real life but also maintained constricting roles.<sup>9</sup> While Motz and Browne identify the link between middle-class women, popular magazines and material culture, their argument relates to consumerism and popular culture themes as trends rather than tangible objects that became permanent indicators of status and significant to

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<sup>8</sup>Arditi, "The Feminization of Etiquette Literature," 421-22.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988).



a woman's social mobility. Like many other scholarly works, there is no mention of prescriptive literature books or the significance of the women who authored the literature.

Another anthology published a decade later in 1998 is *An Emotional History of the United States*, which contains numerous chapters on etiquette and conduct literature, romance and marital advice and new identities of women in the twentieth century. In this book edited by Jan Lewis and Peter Stearns, the authors look at various angles of early etiquette literature and identify it as a symbol of clearly defined class structure and an expanding middle-class as well as consumerism. The purpose of etiquette literature according to *An Emotional History of the United States* is that prescriptive literature instructed men, women and children to control their emotions and behavior in everyday life as well as at special events and the dichotomy between public and private life.<sup>10</sup>

While this perspective of controlling one's emotions in the early nineteenth century and earlier times indicated status and social propriety, it also shows that early American prescriptive books written by men downplayed a major part of expression, especially from the women who read and heeded this advice, stifling their agency and their voices both in public and private life. *An Emotional History of the United States* also traces the link between early prescriptive literature written by men in America and the influence from domestic ideology in British prescriptive literature that emphasized class differences, oftentimes early literature in America was British and male-authored.

Other books that focused on prescriptive literature forms were published intermittently between the 1980s and 1990s, and frequently focused on advertising and aspects of consumer culture relating to women as the primary purchasers for self, family

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis and Stearns, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States*.

and the home. A prominent and highly influential book, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* recognized that advertising filled an advice position in women's lives and offered consumer solutions to increasing social complexities. Author Roland Marchand of *Advertising the American Dream* set a strong example in his book for the connection between prescriptive literature and the emerging modern society, the "new woman" and overall ties to sex roles and consumer culture. Marchand discusses how Christine Frederick introduced women consumers to personalized kitchen appliances, home furnishings, paint colors and more to make the home reflect one's identity. Marchand offers the view of Frederick as moving to the opposite side of advertising and consumerism and creating ideas for home products through "progressive obsolescence" and "creative waste" so that women could update their home environments whenever they wanted with different style options.<sup>11</sup>

A similar work that followed in 1994 is *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* by Jackson Lears. Unlike Marchand, Lears finds the connection between making things new and maintaining connections to the past in advertising and in a consumer society. Mixing traditional, religious and secular authority with modern values, relates to this thesis underpinning, asserting that in prescriptive literature, old traditions and social ideas coexisted with new, progressive ideas and were remade and re-advised throughout time, under new labels with new interpretations. Lears talks about the methods of alluding to historical narratives, traditional pastoral scenes of domesticity and how they appeared alongside advice for autonomous women and sovereign consumers as encouraged by Emily Post well into the 1950s. Lears gives the

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<sup>11</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

picture of a masculine hegemonic entity in advertising and prescriptive sources and how it clashed with the literature women wrote for themselves, opposing the continued view of a woman's "sphere" against the perils of the outside world.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the large body of secondary works on advertising, an abundance of books concentrate on magazines and their relationship with women's gender roles and work during specific periods in American history. In 1998 *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, edited and with an introduction from Nancy Walker, provided a view of modern American beauty standards and images of women's roles through magazine articles and advertisements, as well as women who wrote articles and response letters to magazines regarding war, work, marriage and motherhood, fashion and beauty. Echoing this idea is *Shaping Our Mother's World: American Women's Magazines* authored by Nancy A. Walker. Walker also discussed World War II like previously published works, noting its effects on women, changes in social values and gender roles that have persisted into contemporary times. Walker examines the motives behind magazines and other forms of prescriptive literature whether as truly helpful, condescending or merely as a means to reflect social change rather than to precipitate a transforming of norms and values. More importantly, this thesis shares one perspective with Walker: that women's roles and ideals have not changed very much since the 1950's. Overall, scholarship of the late 1980s and 1990s that discusses

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

prescriptive literature focuses primarily on magazines and advertisements, usually as objects of popular and consumer culture mass media.<sup>13</sup>

In the early 2000s scholarship changed its focus to more specific ideas within prescriptive literature such as beauty, business, the rise of domestic education, war jobs, careers and the developing image of a “Mrs. Consumer.” In 2001, *Beauty and Business* offered a fresh collection of essays that analyzed the relationship between identity, norms of appearance and the existence of different “domains.” This notion of domains, mentioned by Kathy Peiss, is another issue discussed by the majority of secondary scholarship, the concept of domains as more acceptable term than the concept of separate spheres between men and women not only circumscribes historical accounts of women, but this view of separation changed through prescriptive literature; only in a woman’s perception of domesticity exists differences relating to public and private domains. Furthermore, there are several prescriptive authors who exemplify the subject, and contribute to the supporting evidence for this paper’s argument in their contradiction and dualistic legacies. More recent secondary scholarship analyzes these individual authors of prescriptive literature such as Catherine Beecher, Christine Frederick, Emily Post, who left an ironic parallel to a modern woman of scientific principles, but also of the traditional home as illustrated by their lives, while they often advising their audiences to pursue ideals outside of or opposed to what they modeled. Author Janice Williams Rutherford published in 2003, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency*, that explores ascribed domestic and business-consumer qualities of women’s conflicting and symbiotic roles, and Frederick as an authority figure in

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women’s Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998); Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mother’s World: American Women’s Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

society on household machinery, products, budgets and personal customization of interior goods.<sup>14</sup> Aside from the aforementioned texts, there exists a large gap in historical and gender scholarship that deserves attention for prescriptive literature books, further examination of the women authors and audience.

Beginning with an introduction on the nineteenth century, this thesis traces an origin point and early development of prescriptive literature through the primary examples of the Beecher sisters and their books that were a part of most women's daily lives. Two books written by the Beecher sisters set the standard for domestic manuals in the twentieth century in their tone for women taking on public concerns and the emergence of a "new woman" who held more influence, power and autonomy through her roles. At the same time, this early literature showed the existence of a domestic duality in descriptions of women's roles for things in and outside of the home as conflicting and mutually beneficial. Chapter one discusses the 1920s and 1930s with the leading prescriptive literature examples by Christine Frederick, Emily Post, Ida Tarbell and the opposing perspectives therein. This chapter analyzes social and physical differences that books encouraged for women's image and how these differences related to the shift in education reform and new ideals represented the well-known "flapper" style and new activities they participated in as well as new types of working women and the occupations they established. Chapter one also notes changes in advice and domestic manuals that were considered modern and new in later times, mainly through women's education, work and leisure, creating obvious trends that point to a developing and consumer-focused middle-class.

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Scranton, ed., *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender and Culture in Modern America* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

Chapter two explores domestic and new types of manuals during World War II and the shift in their titles and overall themes based on women viewed primarily as army wives, including new mentalities adopted by women on their identity, appearance, relationships, the home, money and work. Chapter two looks at how women who worked were reinscribed by discourse and prescriptive literature into domestic ideals and jobs formerly occupied by men became rebranded as somehow domestic. Chapter three considers postwar America from 1945 until 1960 and notes major shifts in content from prescriptive literature of the 1920s while pointing out constant, steady undercurrents of traditional, conservative gender roles and social norms, as well as a post-World War II backlash against progressive ideas and expansion of women's roles and work. The third chapter also argues the relative permanence of prescriptive literature since post-World War II and that ideas considered modern in contemporary times are really not new at all, including resistance to equalizing gender roles and work, as well as in the home division of labor. Chapter three draws to a close with an emphasis on domestic manuals' increased focus on appearance, individuality and ties to consumerism. The conclusion brings the reader to the present, reflecting on current gender roles and social norms, comparing them to counterparts illustrated between 1920 and 1960 and their relative change since then.

Each of the chapter titles include stereotyped ideas of women because the term "stereotype" derives from print culture itself and is very fitting to describe its relationship to prescriptive literature. A stereotype is a preconceived image or idea of a person or group and relates to their behavior or a certain way of doing things. While stereotypes may or may not be true, may be positive or negative, they almost always indicate

reinforcing power inequality, an image perpetuated without little or seemingly no change. This definition or course relates to elements of prejudice and discrimination based on a person's cognitive abilities, appearance or motives and reinforces the stereotypers' expectations and beliefs about the person or group in question. Stereotypes created by print culture have perpetuated society's unwillingness to rethink their attitudes about women and their roles, and creates opposition to women entering or succeeding in certain areas of society or fields of work. In prescriptive literature, women authors at times, knowingly or unknowingly perpetuated ideas about women, whether with appearances, education, work and roles, sometimes to effect positive change and other times reinforcing problematic stereotypes that created opposition and outside challenges to women's progress. As prescriptive literature books advocated for a duality of ideals in women that created ambivalence in women's attitudes about their identity, work and obligations, so too are the stereotypes found within this literature that evoke an ambivalent reaction from the reader because of self-identity and social progress paradoxes.

There are several things to consider in the following text, firstly, the perspective taken in this thesis argument comes from the examples of the prescriptive literature book authors and takes into consideration their backgrounds, credentials and personal mobility achieved. Second, this paper does not attempt to interpret the audience of domestic manuals considering that their authors wrote in plain English, were mass produced and distributed all over America and available to act as a catalyst in a variable range of social mobility to any literate women, which by 1850 was at least ninety percent of the population. Last, is the request that the term "domestic" be understood as broadly

descriptive and also applicable to context outside of the home, because the term is commonly associated with and limited to the home and its immediate surroundings.

The public and private sphere concept is an idea of space similar to that of an imagined community and the people within it a fictive people created by public and private constructed ideas through literature, media and discourse. In reality, the woman's private sphere expanded with ever changing boundaries in motion, open to new education and work, individual perception and life experience. The so-called domestic sphere, unable to be contained to home life, encompassed women's lives at various intersections of education, work, social relationships and leisure through an extra-domicile mentality and activity. Due to the fact that the term "domesticity" has no antonym this term can be applied to places outside of the home, certain occupations or roles performed in public. The term 'domain' is more appropriate based on gender roles and authority. Women did not necessarily feminize ideas or places, as some scholars argue, but rather "domesticized" them or marked them with identification by ascribing a particular idea, role, occupation or place with domestic qualities, abilities and their overall presence through a process that took root over many decades.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars should not argue that women feminized ideas, places or work, because being feminine is a constructed concept that changes over time and space, can be stereotyped, exaggerated or a fabricated unrealistic ideal, variable by individual perceptions. The concept of feminizing means to make something more suitable for women or make something more feminine which cannot be applied to workplaces or roles previously occupied by men because women did not exact an immediate change by

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<sup>15</sup> Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 83-5.



expanding their roles, but what women did enact was rather a process of transforming domestic knowledge, rituals, practices from the home into established education, professions, roles, identities. Women did feminize prescriptive literature as authors and as its primary readers, as Jorge Ardití argues; although he only refers to etiquette literature, this idea can be understood in a much broader sense.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jorge Ardití, "The Feminization of Etiquette Literature: Foucault, Mechanisms of Social Change, and the Paradoxes of Empowerment," *Sociological Perspectives* 39.3 (1996): 417-34; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991); Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 88.

## Chapter One: Pedagogy for the 1920s New Woman and the 1930s Working Woman

A new type of woman is evolving, a woman sophisticated, self-reliant, competent - a woman of the world, in short, having her own philosophy and outlook on life and her own conception of values.

-Robert E. Park, *The Saleslady*, 1929<sup>1</sup>

With the nineteenth century drawing to a close, many decades founded upon religious and traditional principles faced a change with the standardizing of education and uniformity in institutions opening their doors to women. The “woman question” that men asked for many decades pondered if women were truly capable of intellectual reasoning and with the advent of more women writing instructional literature for other women, the old order of patriarchal authority lost its hold in advice literature. Women knew the next step in achieving social equality meant first gaining a legal-political right to vote. Despite being a formality, the act of voting represented a level slate for the right to choose things, what remained was the pursuit of work and professional status.<sup>2</sup>

Following World War I and the acquisition of women’s right to vote, the tone of prescriptive literature books transitioned from the nineteenth century emphasis on keeping busy and content, clearly defined spaces for men and women, hesitation toward leisure and ambition, to new perspectives of time-saving efficiency, leisure and alternative financial roles for women in and outside of the home. Although the emphasis was still largely on women’s domestic qualities, authors gave advice on much more than

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 96, 157.

marriage, motherhood and social propriety. Women vindicated their multi-faceted worth leading up to and during World War I not only by performing duties outside of tradition, but also by managing the home, the budget, working for wages in war-related industries and childrearing while their husbands and other family or domestic servants were not there to help. Women learned self-sufficiency and autonomy as well as how to balance the dual roles of public and private life. Author Celia Kingsbury of *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* notes that women's influence and strength showed through the belief by soldiers that domestic ritual was inescapable and invaluable and prescriptive literature reinforced this in the war's aftermath with illustrations of women in agricultural scenes, the producers and harvesters of abundance.<sup>3</sup>

Receiving the right to vote in 1920 was a means to an end, women wanted passage of the Nineteenth Amendment but used it as a gateway right to the other social, financial and occupational rights that would greatly enhance women's quality of life and social mobility. By 1920 about one-fourth of the workforce was female and in working alongside men, women noticed not only wage differences and gendered titles, but the need for labor laws on standards of safety and minimum wages. It would not be until 1963 that the Equal Pay Act would pass, dictating that men and women doing the same job received equal wages, but until then women focused intensely on social issues and improving their standard of living with the help of advice in prescriptive books.<sup>4</sup>

Following progressive reforms such as women's right to education and suffrage, the temperance movement culminated in achieving prohibition in 1920 showing women's

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<sup>3</sup> Celia Malone Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly Boyer Sagert, *Flappers: A Guide to an American Subculture* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 11-13.

continued use of their moral superiority harness as alive and well. The belief in women's moral superiority persisted to advance down new paths related to thrift, efficiency and improved quality of life through innovations in housekeeping, consumer product quality and customizing home interiors. Domestic manuals sustained reinforcement in the necessity of women's roles and care of the home, but also supported jobs that war had forced women out of the home to occupy.

Principles of domestic science remained equally important after war, although for different driving purposes. Christine Frederick emerged with the 1927 publication, *Efficient Housekeeping or Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* elevating the importance of homemaking as a science and declaring that women deserved praise, admiration and an incentive as well as acknowledgment from men. As an author, an advertising consultant and a consumer advocate, Frederick like Beecher used her career and independence to encourage other women to remain in the home and to above all embrace their role as professional consumers. Credited with industrializing the home, Frederick, like Beecher in her own way merged traditional values with modern ones, professionalized homemaking but conveyed her own ambivalence toward ways of the past and standards of the future.<sup>5</sup>

As early as 1912 Frederick began directly implementing Catherine Beecher's ideas and concepts in her own writing and professional work. Eliminating monotony, saving money, time and labor in order for women to make time for themselves whether for leisure, time with family, education or for a wage-earning job. Frederick championed the idea of women making their daily roles more personal, accustomed to their identities

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<sup>5</sup> Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1-6.

and individual preferences, thus making housework more interesting and getting more enjoyment out of the home environment. While incorporating more masculine terms, new technology and new attitudes about women's domestic roles as a profession and time for leisure or self-focus, Frederick's manual still reinforced women's roles at home as necessary and as gender specific.<sup>6</sup>

A biography of sorts, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* by Janice Williams Rutherford also confirms this newly obtained social mobility and its irony, "Among the women who had enjoyed increased access to education and at least partial entrée into the public sphere, there were some who used their new-found emancipation to reinforce the old ideas about women's and men's places in a changing society." Rutherford places domestic manual author Christine Frederick at the top of the list for women who embodied the duality between public and private advice, perpetuating the conflict between work and family relationships. Although Frederick continued to espouse home-making primarily for women, her advice and efficiency tips provided women increased time for self-fulfillment. Frederick also entrusted her readers with renewed importance as primary consumers and financial managers of the home. While Frederick's book allowed readers to ponder new found freedoms in and outside of the home, it also questioned why there could not be a balance between men and women in public jobs and domestic duties; surely an equal division between home and public lives would have benefitted men just as much as women in a variety of ways.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Christine Frederick, *Efficient Housekeeping or Household Engineering: Scientific Management of the Home* (Chicago: Home Economics Association, 1925), 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, 2-4.

A domestic manual that contrasted Christine Frederick's *Home Making A Profession for Men and Women* by Elizabeth and Forrester MacDonald. Although this book is an anomaly for its time in placing an equal emphasis on men as homemakers, it argues that for the sake of practicality, dividing business and domestic life for both sexes is a realistic solution. The book also claims in its foreword that the main idea of both men and women homemakers is not a new idea but a recognition of essential facts that were already understood by the general population. Overall this book proves the upholding of homemaking as a profession on the basis that the home is the center of every individual's life.<sup>8</sup>

Although the early attempts of education reform by transcendentalists in the 1830s did not materialize, the later education movement started in the late 1800s carried over into the early nineteenth century and greatly benefitted women and other marginalized groups in society. For many years what was known as "the woman question" discussed how women could progress in society and social rights they should have focused greatly on intellectual capacity relating to raising children and helping society, and when post Civil War women proved intellectual ability as authors, higher education open to women gradually became a widespread phenomenon. Initially, educating women meant to benefit them through their role as mother and wife but soon expanded to many other roles, for self-sufficiency and professionalizing women's education with occupations put them one step closer to complete social equality. In "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education by Patricia A. Graham, the transition of education between mid-nineteenth and mid-

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth and Forrester MacDonald, *Homemaking: A Profession for Men and Women* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1927), 2-5.

twentieth centuries related to a mainstreaming of curriculum and broadening of student body demographics. With this change, prescriptive literature as a central part of women's curriculum and texts shifted from religious to secular and socially multifarious ideals, "This submitted women to new, more complex pressures that thwarted their professional ambitions and development and [led to] a dramatic increase in the proportion of women the prescriptive literature affected." This essentially universalizing of social norms would have reached a more dynamic audience, moving past an exclusively middle-class, educated, elite audience of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Through the process of turning the methods of homemaking into educational programs and degrees, colleges offered the information and experience to both men and women and was useful for both due to the increased rise of singlehood either by extension of college education, dating or delay of marriage to improve financial stability and security. Considering that together, a man and a woman coauthor *Homemaking: A Profession for Men and Women*, it boldly declares the effects of higher education, technology and Christine Frederick's movement of household efficiency:

A unique need for such concern springs from the social effects of power-driven machinery. As a result of its use, homemaking, for the average woman, for the first time in history is brought squarely into competition with other callings. Economic independence for women brings with it free choice between marriage and other vocations. Homemaking is no more limited to women than to men. His duty is not discharged when he has provided financial support, nor hers when she has cooked, cleaned, and mended. There is no inherent reason why this traditional arrangement should be assumed to be final.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia Albjerg Graham, "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education," *Signs* 3.4 (1978): 759-60.

<sup>10</sup> MacDonald, *Homemaking*, 2, 12,

While *Homemaking* identifies a balance between division of labor at home and in society between men and women, it mentions one of the problems that prescriptive literature books illustrate, that it is admirable for women to take on the multiple roles of homemaker, earner and consumer yet makes no mention of men doing more than partial of two roles.<sup>11</sup>

Another book that illustrates social relationships in greater detail than the solitary chapter “Social Relationships” in *Homemaking*, is *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage* by Emily Post. Post, who was educated and attended finishing school had an affinity for writing since her youth, marrying a banker who was notorious for his affairs led her to become skilled in social tact and manners and she desired to help others in all social situations, pleasant or otherwise. Unlike The MacDonald’s, Post devotes an entire book to social relationships, events and etiquette for every situation whether at home or in society. Although much of the instruction given by Post is considered excessive in manners, it remains practical and relevant. Many readers may interpret Post’s topics as meant for upper-class individuals but is rather meant for those aspiring to be middle-class or to build a good reputation in society. Chapters span life event politeness at weddings, funerals, holidays and dinners as well as general information such as introductions, word pronunciation, letter-writing and how to be a good guest or host. While several chapters apply specifically to men, the numerous others are specific to women revealing that moral and social propriety remained the primary burden-responsibility of women rather than men. Some scholars perceive the excessive advice on social events and leisure in *Etiquette* as a sign that it was meant for a refined audience but could also be used by those who pretended to be elite, represented by scheming confidence men and women

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 199.



who appeared gentlemen by dress and speech to get ahead socially or monetarily. Nevertheless, Post is adamant that she has no intention of appealing to anyone exhibiting even the “slightest tinge of snobbery.” Post’s motives for social elevation and notoriety reflect the widespread belief that social mobility hinged on good behavior and manners in order to advance one’s position in society, not by wealth, birthright or class.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that Post elaborates on numerous social and leisure activities in the midst of the 1930s, the introduction written by Richard Duffy makes clear the book’s central locus rests on manners and morals. Duffy links etiquette with the Ten Commandments, ethics, civility, politeness, courtesy and virtues. These words that reflect upon principles of Christianity are fused with the secular concept of manners and therefore pay homage to the prescriptive literature tone of the nineteenth century. The 1935 edition of *Etiquette* contains a large section that details hundreds of questions readers sent to Post in order to have answered and added to revised editions of her book between 1927 and 1935. The level of communication and wide range of topics in “Letters and Answers” an addendum to the book, point to an extensive continuum of readership and a sense of dependence on prescriptive literature advice in order to achieve social mobility and social success. Yet it remains ironic that even in the hardest years of the depression society still preoccupied themselves with concerns of social decorum and *etiquette*, the one word that aptly describes the refinement and formality of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Emily Post, *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1935), xvii; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Post, *Etiquette*, xi-xii, 685-734.

Aside from the looming advice authority of Christine Frederick and Emily Post, the separate domains they represented led women to search for supplemental literature that guided them through decision-making for education, jobs, how to stretch and spend their money and how to develop a sense of individuality. The establishment of home economics as a profession permeated public schools and prompted prescriptive literature authors to direct instruction and advice to women at a younger age. Times had changed and opportunities had broadened for women making it commonplace for high school age girls to start thinking about how to develop as a well-rounded person, rather than a one way route to marriage.<sup>14</sup>

In “Expansion and Exclusion,” author Patricia Graham offers an interesting argument, that between 1920 and 1960, America’s principal focus was on a uniform standard by which all women would be judged, that expectations of society for women and for women themselves resulted from Americanization campaigns from the government and print culture as a reaction to large scale immigration from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the aftermath of World War I. “By the late 1920s and 1930s, that common cultural standard was emerging. Class differences were being minimized as both the lower and upper classes gravitated toward the attitudes and beliefs associated with the middle-class as the ideal. While most American women embraced middle-class ideals, they pondered what occupations and professions were for women because those they entered constantly changed and new ones kept emerging. Author and perhaps a literary feminist, Virginia Woolf wrote a series of essays throughout the 1930s that became published as “Professions for Women,” and in it she

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<sup>14</sup> Adelaide Laura Van Duzer, et al eds., *Everyday Living for Girls: A Textbook in Personal Regimen* (Chicago: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1936), v, 1-7; Ruth Wanger, *What Girls Can Do* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926), v-vi, 15-20.

stated, “I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know...I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill.”<sup>15</sup>

*What Girls Can Do* by Ruth Wanger and *Everyday Living for Girls* co-authored by six career women of public education in Cleveland, Ohio exhibited a duality of public and private advice, still unable to focus on public life with undivided attention. Spanning 1926 to 1936, these manuals offered instruction on how to carefully maintain an array of options for social mobility and to consider the diverse abilities of every individual for work, stressing it as an imperative, rather than a source of extra-marital income. However, what complicates the advice of these manuals is the complementary stress placed on good looks as a dependent variable for success and the subsequent reliance of women on consumer goods to attain a desired image. All of the professions listed as suitable for women in Wanger’s book have a direct liaison to domestic roles and rituals except for the pursuit of law, which is reduced to the ability to give good speeches and set one’s emotions aside.<sup>16</sup>

The other professions listed in *What Girls Can Do* follow a clear transcription of private qualities believed as inherent to homemaking and women’s natural talents, transferred to a public domain. Teaching and authorship derives from the role of the nineteenth century republican mother in educating the future generations of America, instructing and nurturing, skilled handwork in clothing or small machinery operated tied to needlework, seamstress and crafting with the arts, sales-work in buying or selling

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<sup>15</sup> Graham, “Expansion and Exclusion,” 769.

<sup>16</sup> Wanger, *What Girls Can Do*, 232-35.

products, primarily textiles or clothing related to women's former roles as household producers and clothes-makers, office and librarian work akin to women's disposition and ability to clean and make things orderly, foodservice with cooking, nursing and medicine with "natural" caring, nurturing maternal instincts and social work had its roots in Christian charity. Even though Wanger acknowledges hundreds of occupations open to women, only these select few have an expanded place in her book.<sup>17</sup>

The conclusion of the aforementioned conflict between women entering predominantly "male" professions and instead prescribed to occupy those that could easily be domesticized, lies in the consequences of the industrial revolution. When the industrial revolution mechanized women's traditional domestic roles of the home into assembly line work and mass production it reversed the functions of public and private domains. The private domain, traditionally under the woman's authority acted as the producer and the male public domain served as the business-consumer, but by the 1920s the functions of the two domains reversed; forcing women to find work outside of the home and rather than relying on expectation and occasional verbal or token appreciation from the family, the appeal of wages gave women more motivation and the ability to meet their own wants and needs. By 1930 women constituted almost 45 percent of the professional workforce, eager to spend what they had earned.<sup>18</sup>

In a timely fashion, *How to Spend Money or How to Get Your Money's Worth* by Ruth Brindze arrived on the prescriptive literature scene and served as an informing agent on consumer goods, quality of products and how to avoid being swindled. Published in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>18</sup> Graham, "Expansion and Exclusion," 764.

1938, this book acted as a consumer report on product materials, prices, and warned women on the dangers of fabric dyes, food ingredients and interactions between substances that could be harmful or damaging. Brindze's advice targeted the population's main goal of stretching money, saving money and getting the most out of what they bought; the role of consumer more often than not fell upon the woman, whether single or married.

Still feeling the effects of the Great Depression, Brindze calls attention to the shortcomings of New Deal efforts, dishonest sales practices, monopoly and price-fixing of certain items and violation of quality and safety standards. As consumer culture developed, large retailers and brand labels deceptively marketed inferior merchandise under a higher price, another pitfall for the new "Mrs. Consumer's" of America. Brindze both informs the reader and empowers her to trust only her instincts in buying and consuming products after examining them, remain cautious of their pleasing appearance and avoid advice from advertising agencies as well as government organizations, who in her opinion did not do enough to help inform or protect women in their consumer responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s women's employment proliferated, for a number of reasons, but the most controversial reason based on the fact that they accepted lower wages than men, not by choice but too often out of desperation. This concept proved somewhat mutually beneficial for both women and for employers in the interest of financial security. Although many women, especially married women were discriminated against and ridiculed for taking "men's jobs" women did not want to give

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<sup>19</sup> Ruth Brindze, *How to Spend Money or How to Get Your Money's Worth: Everybody's Practical Guide to Buying* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1938), 3-4, 6-7, 9-10, 36-37.

up the freedom and autonomy they had earned. Men accused working women of only working for selfish reasons, to buy frivolous things with their “pin money” because of their vanity and financially neglecting the needs of their family, or taking jobs that men felt belonged to them.

Lois Scharf, author of *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* claims that while women commonly faced accusation of only working for extra money for themselves, in truth, women worked in order to support their families, whether married or not and what they earned barely held their lives together. Although some historians have tried to say that the employers’ or public assumption of women working for pin money explains why women received lower wages than men, this cannot be valid due to the fact that women have consistently been paid lower wages since the 1920s and are still paid less than men in contemporary times. Regardless of this widespread hostility towards working women, prescriptive literature authors continued well into the late 1930s to advise women to have a job and praised the benefits of spending time outside of the home in a remunerative occupation.<sup>20</sup>

As more women entered the workforce they gained more authority at home in making decisions and taking on the responsibility of household purchasing. While men were able to come home from work and relax or focus on things they enjoyed, women still faced tasks at home and maintenance of household appliances. Women hesitated to spend money on maintenance or repairs and rather than wait for their husbands to help,

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<sup>20</sup> The wage rate for women in 2007 was around seventy-seven percent compared to their male counterparts, eighty-seven years after receiving the right to vote, a six cents difference from the highest paid clerical workers in the 1920s, Jane Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives*, 239; Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), xii-xiii, 17, 139, 163-64.

many women used skills they learned in the workforce to fix things at home. This “do-it-yourself” mentality not only saved money, but also gave women the satisfaction of self-reliance. As rates of women enrolled in college dropped and those in professions, many women pursued clerical work and lower paid jobs such as waitressing, and many found a living through a return to domestic servitude.<sup>21</sup>

Although domestic manuals like *Maidcraft*, *Household Engineering*, and *The Business of Housekeeping* helped women by instructing them, explaining how equipment worked and giving tips on how to better do things, it also placed additional responsibility on the woman for keeping the house running smoothly even when she was not always there. Home improvement through do-it-yourself relied heavily on consumerism, another aspect of women’s ever-expanding domain and through advice literature, women believed that buying better products or more products would make their life easier at home. Women’s reliance on advice literature and consumer products led many of them to work more outside of the home for earnings in jobs related to retail, advertising and product design; perpetuating a cycle of what Jackson Lears referred to as consumer fetishism and work, ironically in search of a more simplistic yet improved quality of life. This concept of home improvement and self-reliance further disseminated the supply of prescriptive literature domestic manuals as spin-offs from well-known magazines. Manuals by *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes and Gardens* and many others portrayed

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<sup>21</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997), 3-7.

women doing in and outside home projects and remodeling work, while illustrated in an unrealistic state of perfect beauty and domestic bliss.<sup>22</sup>

Domestic masculinity and masculine domesticity are other terms that often appear in secondary literature surrounding gender roles and prescriptive literature, and while they often discusses men engaging in domestic or “feminine” tasks, it equally applies to women in the obverse definition. In *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, the chapter titled “Do-It-Yourself” by Steven Gelber states, “With a widening female household sphere...the increasingly equalitarian rhetoric of democratic households...acknowledged the right of women to use tools in the same way as men...there was a steady expansion throughout the twentieth century of the kinds of do-it-yourself tasks women were willing to take on.” Although the 1920s had increased literature for women on electrical appliance maintenance, even greater necessitation required women’s repair savvy during the years of the Great Depression. Among all the benefits of do-it-yourself, leading women examples in maintenance stressed the value of independence, analogous to survival and the ability to stretch money when times were hard and financial security proved scarce. Gelber credits the first female textbook on home mechanics to J.C. Woodin and published in 1938, before America’s involvement in World War II, women had time to hone their skills and take on increasing amounts of heavier work. Women enjoyed an increased repertoire in household work and projects but as quickly as this repair-woman image and instructive literature proliferated it also

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<sup>22</sup> Harriet Bonnet and Lita Price, *Maidcraft: A Guide for the One-Maid Household* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1937); Christine Frederick, *Efficient Housekeeping or Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* (Chicago: Home Economics Association, 1925); Mildred Maddocks Bentley, *Good Housekeeping’s Book on the Business of Housekeeping: New Ways of Handling the Familiar Routine of Housework* (New York: Good Housekeeping Magazine, 1925); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Do It Yourself: Home Improvement in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).



led to higher expectation from men, desensitization in the workplace, but a valuable familiarity with machinery and a developed sense of thrift and practicality.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of singlehood also played a major part in 1920s and 1930s prescriptive literature because many women and young girls wanted freedoms and those who could be financially independent did not want to burden their parents living at home or relying on them for expenses or entertainment. Although the types of single women differed drastically between the garish “flapper” and the solitary depression worker, plentiful advice literature applied to both in several ways. In the 2006 publication *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern*, author Joshua Zeitz posits the idea that 1920s women were the first true generation of feminists, “Women who came of age just before World War I weren’t prudes. They were ‘determined to have both, to try for everything life would offer of love, happiness, and freedom- just like men.’ This didn’t entail a rejection of femininity.” Prescriptive literature books did not encourage long-term singleness like the example set by Catherine Beecher, but rather suggested ways to take advantage of freedom, flexibility, educational, financial and social opportunities. The flapper embodied every aspect of what a “New Woman” could be in challenging traditions, social norms and even gender boundaries. The flapper’s behavior was a clear result of post-war life, a cultural backlash against limitations. Flappers indulged in controversial drinking, cigarette-smoking, dancing and new forms of dress and beauty. The flapper

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Scanlon, ed., *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 71, 75-77; Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 122.

embraced desires for things they wanted to buy, expressed personal opinions and displayed more open sexuality.<sup>24</sup>

Despite scolding from moralists and substance reformers in America, flappers disregarded qualms against their liberating behaviors because they saw it as mirroring behaviors of men, thus maintaining a more level ground for social mobility. While prescriptive literature books may not have condoned all flapper behaviors or activities in which they participated, authors encouraged exploring social and leisure activities and hobbies, but most of all they advised young girls and women to attend college and stressed the value of higher education. It was this coupling to the co-ed college experience from which many flappers acquired their notorious habits. For flappers and other women who adopted a modern mentality, achieving the right to vote was a means to an end, not the pinnacle of equal rights. In *Beauty and Business*, the chapter “Questionable Beauty” by Nancy Bowman explains that the flapper despised nineteenth century behavior prescriptions by moralists because they were narrow, unrealistic and ignored women as physical beings. Flappers believed the best policy was being true to one’s self, developing individuality and truly living all of life’s experiences.<sup>25</sup>

Prescriptive literature and consumer culture gave women a vexing combination of advice about their roles and social norms based on nineteenth century morality, while accepting some of the new behaviors as healthy self-expression. Instead of denouncing new behaviors or excesses, prescriptive literature books rebranded behaviors such as use

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<sup>24</sup> Joshua Zeits, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, And The Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Scranton, ed., *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 64-69.

of makeup, formerly considered vain, seducing and improper, to a positive idea that would attract and maintain a husband to be faithful or reflected a woman's inner beauty in a balanced form of symbolism. This rebranding of behaviors and roles by prescriptive literature books and consumer culture opened up a number of positions primarily to single women. Women began to view work in retail, department stores, work as editors of magazines, even writing copy for advertising as appealing careers. Advice in prescriptive literature books in turn created more roles for women to offer advice to others, precipitating an increasingly broader readership to gain new kinds of personal and financial autonomy.<sup>26</sup>

Leading into the 1930s women's overall employment increased by approximately four percent and with the eleven percent decrease of male employment created a fifteen percent employment gap favoring women, particularly benefitting single women in the white-collar public scene. Clerical work such as secretary, office clerk, bookkeeper and managers of some company departments found the highest pay rate, 71 cents to the male dollar. The 1932 Economy Act prevented both spouses from working under federal employment and because women earned less, it was more sensible that wives quit, thus giving single women more opportunities in the workplace. Author Sharon Strom of *Beyond the Typewriter* acknowledged that in advice literature women identified themselves as practical, tactful and capable of managerial duties because of its correlation to scientific management in the home, praising new ways to put their domestic skills to

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<sup>26</sup> Scranton, *Beauty and Business*, 68, 76; Scanlon, *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, 201.

use, seemingly another double standard based on traditional concepts rather than natural ability or the result of hard work and education.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of experiencing new freedoms, self-fulfillment, financial opportunities and embracing individuality, many single women expressed their sense of unhappiness, ambivalence or discontentment because of new unpleasanties from their jobs or critics of their lifestyle. Prescriptive literature authors who felt the need to reassure women of their decisions and new freedoms changed advice to also acknowledge single women who felt anticlimactic boredom or drudgery with returning to the home. *Live Alone and Like It* by *Vogue* editor Marjorie Hillis told women how to make the best of being single by taking control in every aspect of their life, expelling all passivity and preaching the positives of being single. Hillis cited that single women did not have the burden of catering to a husband or taking care of children so they could take up hobbies, decorate their house however they wanted and they could have pleasant company over whenever they wished. Prescriptive literature books somehow always returned to their ancestral domestic manuals and the reinforcement of women always finding joy and solace in household activities.<sup>28</sup>

Another woman very much reminiscent of Catherine Beecher is Ida Tarbell. Author of *The Business of Being A Woman*, and *New Ideals of Business*, Tarbell displayed paradoxes in her words and in her actions relating to women and their roles at work and in the home. Tarbell had experienced great success in her life, freedom through travel and multiple types of professional work with teaching languages and science,

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<sup>27</sup> Blackwelder, 100, 106; Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 124.

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It: The Classic Guide for the Single Woman* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1936).

advice writing, political and social journalism, but she advised other women with a traditional and hesitant tone. Tarbell as a multi-faceted professional scolded the capitalist-industrial and consumer world as corrupt and said that women belonged in the pure home environment, where women could be “emotional” and at ease. Tarbell furthered this saying that the “new woman” wrongly believes that housework confines her but admits that housework poses an “independent personal” problem. Tarbell asserted that a career woman cannot be emotional and that expressing emotion is unhealthy and makes her vulnerable rather than strong. At the same time Tarbell contradicts her own actions of public housekeeping when she exposed the immorality of the Standard Oil Company with a scathing and emotional article on industrial corruption. *Modern Women, Modern Work* by Francesca Sawaya claims that Tarbell and many other authors of prescriptive literature not only expressed gender role ambivalence, but also displayed an unstated and perhaps subconscious, self-defeatist attitude in spite of their own success, freedom and financial achievement. Ironically Tarbell once stated, “Our only hope for usefulness was keeping our freedom, avoiding dogma...” even though all her writing displayed very personal, subjective tendencies.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s women of all ages and backgrounds experienced many new things in diversified roles and work. What persisted after these two decades still spoke in favor of Christine Frederick’s principles of scientific management applying initially in the home and proven equally beneficial in the workplace. The familiarity and experience with efficiency through the use of machinery exceeded its money and time

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<sup>29</sup> Francesca Sawaya, *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 92-94, 108; Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 110; Ida M. Tarbell, *The Business of Being a Woman* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912, 1925).

saving value once America entered World War II in 1939. Once again women became reacquainted with mechanical equipment, efficiency and various other learned behaviors and skills when they emerged into factories all over America and out to fields for agricultural production. With another national event that teetered the balance of single women versus working wives and mothers in employment, working wives and mothers replaced most jobs abdicated by men. In the 1940s women gave birth to the “Rosie the Riveter” image in the present and “Supermom” of the future and prescriptive literature books would have just as much to advise and instruct about the gender role changes that took place during war as they did in peacetime.

## Chapter Two: The World War II Army Wife and The Rise of Rosie the Riveters

The whole purpose of the relatively short business career is to make the girl a better homemaker.

-Elizabeth Cushman, *Harper's*, 1940<sup>1</sup>

Once women proved their intellectual capacities and success as authors, opposition to women's progress and full equality questioned their physical capacities. Turn of the century clerical positions proved women's better abilities with efficiency on small, tactile work like piece assembly and typing but more labor and better paying work seemed out of the question. Financial need had driven women to work in post Civil War years and it continued into the early twentieth century. Women who worked in office work applied scientific management and improved efficiency and production thus displacing many men in the decades following World War I.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the overwhelming number of men who did not find a place for work during the 1930s Depression years, the onset of World War II produced a massive shortage of "manpower" when the government started drafting men for war in 1940. Fortunately, droves of women openly embraced new industrial work experiences in the public domain and earned the nickname "Rosie the Riveter." Countless women proved they did manufacturing jobs well regardless of sex, age, race or marital status. Women readily became pilots, bomb and arms assemblers, vehicle part welders and even

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is At the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 87-91.

electricians because the wages in these occupations were higher due to the classification as a masculine job or labor intensive, skilled work.

Despite many women in these positions being paid male equivalent wages, prescriptive literature and government advertising reinforced that women managed their new jobs successfully because suddenly their routines correlated in some ambiguous way to an already well-known domestic, household task. This attitude towards directly linking formerly male roles and occupations to housework undermined women's contributions and deflected their newly established confidence and publicly perceived heroism.<sup>3</sup> Regulating a gender-segregated workforce meant changing title of jobs based on whether a man or woman performed it, perpetuating a hierarchical, male-dominant workforce based on the relation to domesticity. The nineteenth century idea of separate spheres was reaffirmed, even when women had to work in the public-industrial scene and prescriptive literature during the early 1940s reinforced the idea that public work replicated housework, constantly reinscribing women into gender-based work under a domestic mantle.<sup>4</sup>

An indication of the paradox present in women's roles during World War II frequented the pages of the *Army Woman's Handbook* by Clella Reeves Collins. This handbook, published in 1942, explained in great detail the ins and outs of wartime America on the home front and thoroughly dichotomized women's duties in their public and private lives. Collins filled the pages of this instructional book with practical information that women might not usually be familiar with relating to legal concerns,

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 442-45.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 27-29.



pensions, funeral arrangements for husbands, wills, and interaction with military organizations and service people. Alongside this swathe of military spouse commonplace issues, Collins placed a considerable collection of courtesy and etiquette advice that in context seem trivial and ridiculous.

Chapter eighteen details daily life for the army wife and states that homemaking is an instinct, as if it required no practice, training or hard work but also said that it functioned like a business, exciting and earning great dividends. However, Collins presumes to say on the following page that homemaking is not a business or a profession, that it is a game learned well through long practice. This complete contradiction denigrates housework by implying that it is neither hard nor worthy of pay, but at the same time is fun and exciting, as if not a serious job. To make matters worse Collins' further statements question women's agency and autonomy such as "Too often wives assume privileges and prerogatives to which they have no right whatsoever," which goes unexplained and "...a wife can make or break her husband's position [in the service]...and otherwise materially injures her husband's reputation, as well as her own." The latter notion of the woman as responsible for her husband's reputation projects back to the nineteenth century with the myopic placement of moral superiority on women and the burden of responsibility for their spouse's actions, reputation or occupational success.<sup>5</sup>

While the *Army Woman's Handbook* proves very useful, helpful and practical it also sends mixed messages to women on the importance of housework, how it should be done, and the role as an army wife. Collins acts as though women who worked to

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<sup>5</sup> Clella Reeves Collins, *Army Woman's Handbook* (New York: Whittlesey House of the McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942), vii-vx, 145-46.

support the military had many benefits and blessings and should be cheerful about housework and other work, but that they also had to make many sacrifices, and should not make time for themselves. War-time prescriptive books under government or other public organization authority claimed that women ought to be careful about overstepping their boundaries in speech, thoughts and actions concerning the reputations of their husbands, alluding to a past way of life that held women responsible for the actions of others and limited their social agency and self-expression. This book, like many others before it, has an absence of material aimed at single women, treating them like second-class citizens to those married because of having no husband to depend on, care for or support.

Prescriptive advice attempted to convince the reader that being at home and housework overrode the importance of public service, industrial contributions, and that women who faced workplace discrimination in doing “men’s work” would only be in their position temporarily before returning to their more important domestic-housework commitments.<sup>6</sup> During and after World War II many women faced the reality of industrial work by day and domestic chores by night, while being told by males and government authority that the work redefined as inherently domestic, although previously understood as a physical, skill capacity of males and that when veterans returned women should return to their “natural spheres.” The literature-prescribed contradiction on separate spheres for men and women, gendered work titles and deep ambiguity in job descriptions is supported by Ruth Milkman’s *Gender At Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*. In *Gender At Work* Milkman argues that the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 145-49.

widespread male-female fear of unemployment and the government and media-print culture standards of conformity exacerbated sex-typing, gender segregated jobs and the reinforcement of women's domestic sphere being predominantly at home.<sup>7</sup>

Prescriptive literature books also continued to emphasize the aesthetics of women's looks and unrealistically described them as having glamorous appearances while on the job, which made women seem less threatening to men, less masculine and therefore interpreted as less capable under the pretense that women still "looked good" while or after doing heavy labor, blue-collar jobs. This public perception of model-standard wives -industrial workers found reinforcement in a new wave of advice manuals focused on glamour but also the importance of appearances based on how women would be perceived by job interviewers regarding their weight, use of cosmetics and the clothes they wore. By emphasizing femininity, prescriptive literature convinced women that they should focus on gendered traits and ideals, finding a mate and that one of their primary responsibilities could only be exercised through purchasing products to improve themselves. This trend of beauty product and consumer purchasing power accelerated in post-war life, where women found a consumer-based role through which they could define and control for themselves and for the home.<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect of World War II prescriptive literature focused on the home and its relationships, emerging quite often in high school and young adult coming of age books. One such example is *The Family and Its Relationships*, which contains a small

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Milkman, *Gender At Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5, 49, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Milkman, *Gender At Work*, 114-16, 123-25; Clarice Louis Scott, *Work Clothes for Women* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1942); Grace Stockwell, *Change Your Weight for Beauty's Sake* (Capital Times Reader Service, 1945).

excerpt aimed at young girls who are graduating. Although it is not explicitly clear if this advice refers to girls graduating high school or a future college graduation, it does not matter for the message from author Dorothy Thompson speaks a universal female language that takes on a “motherly” tone:

It is harder to be a woman than to be a man. But more fun because more various. If you have a job outside, you will have another one at home. If you help the family income, you will still have to manage most of the affairs of the family...don't feel inferior to women “with careers.” It is harder to be a good wife than a good [career]woman. Women make modern civilizations, because [they] set the standard of those civilizations. By the kind of men they choose, by the kind of goods they buy, by the demands that they make in the way of production and behavior.

The above advice gives women readers quite a contradiction to contend with between placing higher value on earning an income or being the virtuous, stay-at-home wife. Many women believed they were perceived as less virtuous if they worked in predominantly male fields, whether they necessitated dirty, hard labor, and proponents of separate spheres insisted factory working women and others like them, neglected their children, and wrongly “took” male jobs. Chapter four of *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* by labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris, presents a question that many working women faced, “Why is it can a woman not be virtuous if she does mingle with the toilers?”<sup>9</sup> While Thompson acknowledges the benefit and dual responsibility of women who worked outside the home, she also puts career women as second best by holding homemaking wives on a pedestal, reinforcing a self-sacrificing, serving role. Thompson also asserts being a good wife as more difficult

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<sup>9</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A Wage-Earning History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 75.

than being a career woman or working outside the home, but undermines her own argument by stating that women will have to do both roles regardless because they are credited with establishing behavior and consumption patterns in America.<sup>10</sup>

There are many examples of prescriptive books written for high school and college curriculums that began the initial stages of the teenager subculture movement, and while these books usually focused on education and domestic roles, World War II expanded, to some degree, progressive ideas on individuality. Many of these books created new roles for teenagers as consumers and defined them as a social group subject to different expectations for work and leisure. *Your Home and You* and *Our Share In The Home* both educated teenagers in the skills for home economics but also placed interest on the development of one's personality, manners and most of all, appearance. During World War II, younger generations read prescriptive material on the family as a functioning unit and how they could contribute to the family by various means whether at home, at a job, or at social functions, which enhanced both the individual and family's reputation. While these domestic manuals continued to emphasize activities at home they also placed high importance on conformity, popularity and having a broad social circle. Although the authors of these books openly state that the books are for boys and girls to learn proper home economics, life skills and wartime values, the illustrations and descriptions overwhelmingly declare the assumption of a female audience.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Thompson, "To The Girl Graduate," *The Family and Its Relationships* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1941), 549.

<sup>11</sup> Carlotta C. Greer, *Your Home and You* (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1942), x; Laura Baxter, Margaret M. Justin and Lucile O. Rust, *Our Share In The Home* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1945).

Many prescriptive literature books published during the mid to late 1940s illustrated impossible or unrealistic standards of beauty, work, disposition, finances, and leisure, to which countless girls and women aspired. Advice in these domestic manuals told females to develop an individual identity but to also conform to certain societal norms of appearances, occupations and social pastimes, to be frugal, careful not to waste but also take up hobbies, decorate the house, buy numerous house and beauty products and to involve themselves with entertaining guests and going to movies. These paradoxes of how to spend time undoubtedly perplexed female readers and frustrated them on top of their numerous responsibilities. Chapter twenty-two in *Your Home and You* also expresses the importance of being likeable to a fault, to be happy all the time regardless of true emotions, to highly value popularity rather than transparency, sincerity or candor and to never show emotions other than happiness, maintaining that even one's tone of voice is always low-pitched so to please others.<sup>12</sup>

The mentality that prescriptive literature books perpetuated still revolved around women as people-pleasers and self-sacrificing, always promoting altruism at their own expense. Despite acknowledging women's ability to enter professional occupations and advance as self-made women prescriptive books insisted on speaking rhetoric that cast a negative light on women who wanted to earn a living and be self-supporting. The chapter "Earning a Living" in Greer's book opens with an emblematic conversation, "Should a girl learn how to earn a living? "It seems such a waste to me!" said Mrs. Penfield. "Marion spent four years in college, getting ready to earn a living, and here, after working only six months, she is to be married next Saturday." [Marion's] time spent

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<sup>12</sup> Greer, *Your Home and You*, 318-25.

going to college is not lost...[it has] prepared her to be a homemaker.” The chapter continues to admit that homemaking does not pay a wage but makes no effort to posit that women can and should continue a job regardless of getting married. However, following World War II the number of births for married women increased the most among the highest educated women, showing an increased effort to combine marriage and at the least, preparation for careers.<sup>13</sup>

This short-sighted attitude of some prescriptive book authors treated college education as something to do before marriage, education merely for the sake of expanding interests, making friends and learning to keep busy rather than a means to an end. The suggestions in many school curricula and domestic manuals for women’s occupations, however small, explained jobs that related most closely to rituals and tasks in homemaking and gave lists more narrow and predictable than those offered in pages of prescriptive literature books in the 1920s and 1930s. This trend of renewed encouragement of women staying at home only received more goading from government propaganda and advertising that assured women that the best female patriots spend the most time at home. Another focus that increased after war suggested that college was ideal for women looking to find a future spouse.<sup>14</sup>

The government unfairly spoke in the place of thousands of women by urging the public that women would willingly return to traditional house roles once the war ended, reflecting prejudice and showing a lack of gratitude to their efforts in helping to run

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<sup>13</sup> Greer, *Your Home and You*, 333-41; Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women’s Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mother’s World: American Women’s Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 66-9.

America, support the troops and win the war. Employers and the government never cared to ask whether women wanted to keep their jobs, if they needed their jobs or if it was their only financial support, especially for those who were mothers, widowed or single. What women recently received praise and thanks for in contributing to the war effort now pulled from their grasp due to a bipolar relabeling of public workplace as a foreign domain, and occupations viewed as less virtuous than returning to the home. Advice and war propaganda made women who wished to remain in their wartime jobs sound like scabs, unworthy replacements, traitors unnatural to the void they filled, greedy and selfish. Author Jane Marcellus of *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* described the treatment of working women being exiled from jobs, the same as if they had trespassed onto men's property.<sup>15</sup>

Despite overcoming gender boundaries in work, the gender gap in wages remained and many women retreated hesitantly or unwillingly to the home with a new belief that an outside job of less hours and less vigor should remain as a part of a woman's life. As cultural homogeneity and conformity reached a peak, so too the change in worth determined by one's occupation. The prestige for an individual's work no longer based on the type of work or reputation, but was entirely salary based, wealth was based on a pay-scale and women still felt the pull to work and contribute to society. Class differences and social origins blurred during wartime mobilization, putting many who entered the workforce at ease, and even though women knew their college experience preceded a career, "the twentieth century female virtues were seriously at odds with a career." Many women looked forward to certain aspects of homemaking but

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<sup>15</sup> Kerber and De Hart, *Women's America*, 447; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 274-77, 288-89; Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives*, 9.



had refocused their self-perceptions to constitute a new definition of domesticity. Regardless of societal pressures to marry and have children women tried to harmonize domestic responsibilities with professional ambitions, seeking more participation in society and feeling less commitment to their “natural” sphere. Although numbers of women pursuing terminal doctorate degrees decreased, women continued to search for meaningful work outside of what was always waiting for them at home.<sup>16</sup>

Prescriptive literature books, magazines and advertising encouraged adult women to focus on their families and home and placed self-consumerism and leisure more on teenagers and single-women. Many authors insinuated that married women would have no time for themselves based on their own personal experiences of marriage and motherhood, suggesting part-time work as a more viable option and that the will always keep a woman completely happy and satisfied. Prescriptive books assured women that because of new products and household technology, housework was not only greatly reduced but fun, that in domestic roles women had a new form of leisure. Social behavior was prescribed in terms of buying or using new products.<sup>17</sup>

Adding to the idea of domestic leisure, prescriptive books facilitated the obligation to returning men from war that women should not only take on chores previously done by men such as machinery or home repairs, that the woman should make the home a haven for men to return to from war and future work. Perhaps housewives sensed that they were no more emancipated in the 1940s than they were in the 1920s, “when it seemed women embraced modernity and progress, the reinforcement of

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<sup>16</sup> Patricia Albjerg Graham, “Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education,” *Signs* 3.4 (1978): 769-73.

<sup>17</sup> Marcellus, *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives*, 43.

traditional, domestic roles was never far behind.” The phrase “a haven in a heartless world” from the nineteenth century literature returned, setting the stage for post-war prescriptive literature and its renewed standards of feminine ideals, traditional gender roles opposite to new challenges of domestic boundaries that prescriptive literature authors both questioned and reinforced. It could easily be said that many women reading prescriptive literature advice asked themselves, “should I return to work after the honeymoon?” What did happen in the late 1940s and in the decades after is the increasing appearance of the term of “girl” used to refer to working women in a number of jobs, maybe showing the trend focusing on youthful ideals, or on the other hand a term that infantilized and denigrated many women by making them seem less competent. Many prescriptive literature authors continued to argue that the biggest threat to post-war domestic bliss was the two-job wife who supposedly downplayed her most valuable ideal: her femininity, and as a result this gender neutrality threatened men’s undeniable “right” to work in the public sphere.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 66, 151, 195.

### Chapter Three: Revisiting June Cleaver: Post-War America's Feminine Mystique

Men are not the enemy, but the fellow victims. The real enemy is women's denigration of themselves. A woman has got to be able to say, and not feel guilty, 'Who am I, and what do I want out of life?' She mustn't feel selfish and neurotic if she wants goals of her own, outside of husband and children.

-Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*<sup>1</sup>

In 1950 women still comprised almost one-third of the public workforce, and although only half of them worked full-time, women's contributions to the economy and family income still lacked positive recognition by the government and traditional, conservative voices who treated women's public work as less than important compared to homemaking and as standardly supplemental to the "true" male breadwinners. By 1953 previously domesticized occupations that had been reclassified as "women's work" reported major labor shortages and a desperate need for more women employees.<sup>2</sup> Many women hesitated about what to do between jobs and housework, vacillating between their obligations of private and public life. Prescriptive literature books offered advice and solutions for every kind of woman who felt the pain of gender double standards, the scare of conflict in the workplace and new experience for the women who had to face working outside of the home for the first time.

Although many women still worked outside the home out of necessity, the government and popular media encouraged women to submit their work positions to the

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<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, edited by Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A Wage-Earning History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 301-03; Ruth Milkman, *Gender At Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 4-5.

returning veterans, thus reaffirming the workplace and segregated sphere hierarchy under the reinforcement of America as patriarchal. Despite post-war prescriptive book authors such as Betty Friedan and later historical scholarship adopting a view that post-World War II enforced a domestic ideal and created a retrenchment of women's progress, many women acted and communicated ideas and experiences outside of traditional boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

*There is a Right Job For Every Woman* by Anne Heywood insisted that any woman could find her sense of normalcy with an array of jobs that could make a woman happy and feel fulfilled, receiving a sense of achievement and more importantly, a paycheck. Heywood, who worked in counseling at a Career-Changing Clinic thanks thousands of clients who made her book possible and begins her first chapter with the common question women reported, "I don't know what I want." Other common feelings of working women placed anger, frustration and acknowledgment of misplacement, on the top of their problem list with work in the public domain. Heywood also identifies one of the most widespread misconceptions of post-war life, that husbands and public authority figures told women they were really happier at home, that they just did not realize it. Like Betty Friedan would later note, *There Is A Right Job For Every Woman* emphasizes "The Modern Woman's Dilemma," and that the difference between the sexes, is certainly not vocational.<sup>4</sup>

The most adamant part of Heywood's advice is her level of emphasis on women finding the right job as equally important to finding the right man to marry, saying the ideas are two sides of a coin and that a girl rushing into the wrong marriage is just as bad

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<sup>3</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1-11, 38-39, 58,61.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Heywood, *There Is A Right Job For Every Woman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1951), 8-9, 13-15.

as going into the wrong career and not getting enough education. An insightful discovery of women's attitudes following World War II reveals that many women Heywood spoke to admitted to settling with any job, choosing something less serious, assuming they would get married in the near future and did not feel planning a long-term career or financial advancement as necessity. Too many women accepted the fate of depending on whomever they would marry for adequate financial security and personal fulfillment. Heywood stated her worry that too many women seemed willing to make any personal advances and achievement sacrifices by assuming that once they had children there was no point returning to a job and Heywood's book looked to rectify this attitude.<sup>5</sup>

While most of Heywood's book seems to be in a modern, gender equality and career women advancement mentality, she ends her book with a chapter for housewives and careers that relate. Heywood describes that housewifery as an occupation relates to seven basic jobs and that there is a relatable profession in the business world that a housewife should try before solitary homemaking. Having an outside job acted as a security blanket for a husband and Heywood also stressed the benefit of having an interest outside of the home. Although Heywood lists a predictable number of domestically correlating jobs for housewives, she also presents several uncommon positions that women would be capable of such as business administrator, store manager, and insurance or investment sales.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Heywood conveys the message clearly that being a housewife, no matter how busy is simply not enough and does not contribute anything to society. She calls it "not making the grade" and that while it is

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<sup>5</sup> Heywood, *There Is A Right Job For Every Woman*, 86-89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 180, 189.

necessary, will not earn an individual anything. This idea of playing down the importance and constant labor of housework, childcare, cooking and other domestic tasks developed into the perception that women could and ought to work, even if only part-time and do the majority, if not all of the housework because they managed it rather than expecting a more equal division of labor between men and women. Heywood convinces the reader that a fate of housework is not fulfilling, will lead to boredom, monotony, isolation and poor development of maturity and intellectual abilities. This message told women that house was a prison, not a haven and that it could not give fulfilling happiness or put all their God-given talent to use.<sup>7</sup>

Author and former journalist, Betty Friedan published her famous book, *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, mirroring many things women experienced, challenging gendered roles but also unknowingly reinforcing a constructed stereotype of post-war American women. The resounding truth women across America identified with was the complex discontent they felt based especially on domestic housework. “The feminine mystique” was essentially a domestic fable of happiness, the house a cage and women had been teased with self-actualization during World War II only to have it taken over by returning veterans, the government and employers who found new loopholes to discriminate and refuse women, mostly those married, for jobs. Friedan argued that the domestic ideal promoted by public authority and traditional male perspectives told women they could find fulfillment through passivity, submission, housework and maternal love. However, in Friedan’s argument she centered the women victims as white, middle-class, suburban and largely unemployed, neither an accurate portrayal of the population or representative of the various demographics of women who worked

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<sup>7</sup> Heywood, *There Is A Right Job For Every Woman*, 112-14.

outside the home. The television character June Cleaver was the ultimate embodiment of Friedan's description of the elusive middle-class, happy, ideal housewife. To further women's repression, this domestic ideal refused women from having careers and external freedom outside of the home, Friedan's view like many others, narrowed women's activities and greatly reduced their agency.<sup>8</sup>

To further complicate points in *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan credited writers and editors, primarily in mass-circulation magazine companies for creating a so-called "feminine ideal monster" that the feminist movement rallied against and scholars adopted as a realistic representative of post-war American women. Many traditional conservatives looked upon this domestically ideal woman as a virtue to perpetuate and reinforce, reflecting upon it with misplaced nostalgia. Friedan in actuality was not trying to overthrow an established system or social discourse on gender roles or work but argued that all humans, including married women and mothers needed achievement outside of the home and its duties and had an indisputable right for personal growth. Developing a personal identity could not be achieved by serving others and completing menial, routine tasks and hundreds of women testified that Friedan's book opened their eyes and changed their lives for the better.<sup>9</sup>

After many years in the feminist voice spotlight, Friedan, like many other prescriptive literature authors, she identified within her, personal contradictions, ambivalence and competing voices ultimately leading her to retreat from writing to return to the home. Like many early feminists, Friedan was married and jointly applauded parts

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<sup>8</sup> Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 229-32.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-38.

of domestic with the non-domestic and other women who did unusual and exceptional jobs, as well as those who did them all, a modern “superwoman.” Even though the dualistic roles of public and private life were not always entirely compatible, *The Feminine Mystique* promoted combining the two aspects of life and maintaining gender distinctions within roles.<sup>10</sup>

As the war’s end produced an onset bombardment of weddings and births, younger adults and adolescents desired to establish separate lives, values and pastimes apart from their parents. A barrage of prescriptive literature books that once again emphasized the importance of looking attractive in order to gain popularity and the approval of others flooded the publishing market and mixed gender leisure became a regular part of life. *Secrets of Charm* by John Powers and Mary Sue Miller emphasizes an overwhelming list of what makes a woman charming, relying on weight management, posture, clothing, skin and hair care, makeup and toiletry use. Christine Frederick’s concept of “selling Mrs. Consumer” or in this case, Miss Consumer, was alive and well. This manual also details the most desirable personality traits and etiquette for restaurants, the theater, telephone conversation and even smoking. The four pages in this book devoted to women getting a job overstate the importance of looks and mention business skills only once, insisting that women look as feminine as possible, not to wear men’s clothing and that in work women should be gentle and sensitive to the feelings of others rather than their own. As the authors mention a career woman who wishes to advance to

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<sup>10</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.



managerial positions, a reference is made to maintaining all the duties of the house and leaving time open for social activities.<sup>11</sup>

Not only did the retail and marketing world acknowledge young people as a new group of workers, and consumers of products and leisure, but so too the authors of prescriptive literature. *The Art of Entertaining* by Blanche Halle sets apart chapters for young guests as important and that the home no longer served as a place for basic necessities but a place that provides fun. College crowds desired parties and game nights and Halle described “new ways” among couples related to a lifestyle of fun but also ease, fast-paced dating and entertaining in the home. Halle directs at young couples for cooking and having parties and although she remarks that men should learn to cook for guests while the wife does other things she mentions gender-specific terminology. Halle presents progressive ideas for both spouses as working outside of the home but referring to domestic household roles compares men to excellent European chefs and describes women as “willy-nilly cooks.” This concept of gender-labeled roles is similar to sex-typed jobs and continued to put women under a less-prestigious or denigrated title regardless of the task and where it took place. Women authors still placed progressive ideas alongside gendered labels and illustrated women’s roles as second-rate to the same ones men performed.<sup>12</sup>

Another double standard that appeared alongside gendered hiring and wages for jobs also applied to leisure for young people. Prescriptive literature told women to enjoy new experiences and engage in dating and mixed gender activities but only to a certain

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Sue Miller and John Robert Powers, *Secrets of Charm* (Philadelphia: John F. Dille Company, 1954), xi-xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Blanche Halle, *The Art of Entertaining* (New York: Laurel Publishers, 1952), 80, 91-2.

degree. This literature warned girls and young single women about “going too far” and that freedom should have its limits, especially vilifying any female who pondered sexual exploration, sexual deviants were basically any women who did not intend on eventually marrying or having children, dressed too differently or did not embrace a feminine look, authors painted androgyny as dangerous and a rebellion against a safe and “normal” prescription of conformity. In the anthology *Not June Cleaver*, chapter sixteen, “The Other Fifties” author Wini Breines discusses rebellious subcultures and how women from all walks of life desired to dabble in the new freedoms, experiences, leisure and style, that young women and teenage girls wished for a very different life experience than their mothers had:

A subterranean life...generated by a culture that penalized girls and young women who were unable or unwilling to fit the model of the perky, popular teenager eagerly anticipating marriage and motherhood. The rigidity of what was acceptable...made some young women feel discontented and unreal...the parameters of feminine beauty, personality, intelligence and ambition were narrow enough that a minor deviation meant exclusion...some young women looked to interests that betrayed the [idea] of a life of suburban domesticity.<sup>13</sup>

While teenage girls and young women had anxiety about jobs and dating and felt ambivalent about future roles as wives and mothers, most prescriptive literature continued to embrace materialism for expression within safe boundaries. Authors promoted experimenting with style and makeup as acceptable for self-expression and developing individual identity, but stressed maintaining gendered characteristics. Many

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<sup>13</sup> Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 402.

youth were disgusted by middle-class mainstream images, stereotyped sex role definitions and social indifference; girls wanted increasingly adventurous looks.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1950s, beauty manuals and fashion guides picked up great popularity and just like the nineteenth century, had overtly French-European influences. *Lilly Dache's Glamour Book* refers to the readers as girls and women and describes her advice and methods as modern. The author, Lilly Dache, grew up in France and claims to be an expert on glamour by describing her own beauty evolution. Dache states in the opening paragraph, "I am like an evangelist who preaches his creed to anyone who will listen and to some who will not...I want to convert everybody," assuring that glamour is one of the most valuable commodities and that females can get whatever they want if they are glamorous. Dache relates the fast-paced times with the need to stay young-looking and assures the reader that it is possible, "If you want to keep up with this modern, wonderful world, you must be young in thought, feeling and appearance...all you have to do is stretch out your hand...we have in America today what is truly a golden age for women."<sup>15</sup>

Chapter eleven of Dache's book is titled, "Looks Are Not Enough," and gives an impression that it might be about education, work or something intellectual but actually looks are transcended by how a woman is perceived. Dache presumes to describe every beauty ritual from picking the right fragrance, to exfoliating, skin and hair maintenance and how to take care of nails. Chapter twelve encourages the reader to relax and have fun, stipulating that if a woman does not, will otherwise get more wrinkles and be unpleasant. Dache also suggests new types or settings of leisure including that if women

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 387, 390.

<sup>15</sup> Lilly Dache, *Lilly Dache's Glamour Book* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1956), 11, 15, 31.

get tired of dining in restaurants they should eat in and cook for their beau, as if that would be relaxing and fun for the woman. The rest of this chapter on leisure gives instructions on how to keep the man in a woman's life happy and occupied with activities he likes to do and that subsequently the woman will also be happy and relaxed not playing a "martyr role" or having an "attack of hysterics."<sup>16</sup>

As prescriptive literature shifted its focus alongside consumerism to the ideal of youth and having fun, it reinforced not only the concept of a fast-paced lifestyle but the ability to have instant gratification through purchasing power and amusement. Young children and even adolescents no longer read about the constant obligation to assist with chores but the activities and hobbies they could engage in at home, how to spend time with friends at school, college or at various places of leisure such as parks, theaters, as well as first-time jobs that benefitted a young person's individual spending allowance. The authors of this book declared, "The young person's problems cannot wait. Time is now. Lucky you, if you have learned to get happiness from the present minute." *The Questions Girls Ask* by Marjorie Vetter and Laura Vitray answered a broad number of questions based on over seven thousand letters received from girls all over the United States.<sup>17</sup>

The authors of *The Questions Girls Ask* urge girls to take advantage of all the opportunities they find in life including jobs, college education, careers and a chapter on boy friends and dating information. The most unique chapter in this book is the last one title, "Road Map: Finding your own idea of happiness. Forming a personal code of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 173-74.

<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Vetter and Laura Vitray, *The Questions Girls Ask* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1959), 7-8.

ethics.” Much like women authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries changed the moral code on women’s responsibilities and instructed other women on their duties and characteristics of moral superiority, post-war authors told readers to make their own standards by which to live, their own set of guidelines based on personal preference. Chapter eleven verbalizes this emphasis on personal autonomy, “What is your private prescription for achieving happiness? Have you a road map for reaching the destination of your choice? What do you do about others who get in your way...with ambitions of their own? Vettors and Vitray praised ambition in young girls but warned that reaching their full potential in a career could cost them their family and friend relationships, posing their success with the inevitable outcome of being alone or socially awkward. The book suggests that girls should try to have the best well-rounded combination of experiences in life between work, being a wife and mother and having time for herself, but like previous books, this text claims that women could not have unbridled success like men without it costing them a great deal, that having the best of both worlds was not a reality for women. *The Questions Girls Ask* reiterates the old adage that women find the most happiness in serving others and serving the country but also tells girls to create their own ethical standards choosing from ideals, and values that have been passed on to them.<sup>18</sup>

As America became increasingly characterized as consumer focused, so too did prescriptive literature that connected women, and now young girls to the drive of the consumer market. The 1950s addressed teenagers directly and credited them with contributing enormously to the richness of the national economy, “You are taking great...advantage of the bounty set before you and young though you may be...already

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6, 135-36, 138, 141.

making your own return. With open hearts and willing hands you...have contributed nine billion dollars in earnings...half of this from you, the gentler sex,” chided *The Seventeen Book of Young Living* by Enid Haupt, the editor and publisher of *Seventeen* magazine. Published in 1957, this essential beauty and social manual credits teenage girls with purchasing power, and consumer influence but calls them the “gentler” sex as if less autonomous than men and undermines their contributions to national revenue. Further into the introduction Haupt makes a personal connection and recalls her brother giving her advice aside from having seven sisters and states her hope that the book would help as much as her brother’s wisdom had in her adolescence, as if looking to an older male’s approval and opinion is what all girls should be doing.

Unlike past prescriptive books that approached girls planning and attending college with an assertive tone, *The Seventeen Book of Young Living* called it “The College Try.” This chapter lists numerous benefits of girls who attend college only to conclude, “I am not convinced that every girl needs or should go to college,” and suggest that girls who plan to marry young should select non-advancing unskilled positions such as dressmaking or hairdressing to earn money for their husband’s college tuition, sacrificing their education and work ambitions and working a static job only to advance their male spouse. Another chapter focused on girls preparing for marriage boldly declares that marriage is the greatest career a woman can have and that girls need to spend copious amounts of time preparing for it with the responsibility for running the household, stretching the budget and complete meal preparation. While Haupt acknowledges the woman’s right to a college education, a job, even when married she stipulates that the woman be responsible for the husband’s happiness, whether by running

the house the way he wants or making the meals he wants. To further this it states that marriage is a partnership, but only regarding leisure and responsibilities, not in leadership and posits that happiness in a marriage relies completely on the wives self-sacrifice and submission to the husband's wants, authority and daily requests.<sup>19</sup>

In *Betty Cornell's Teen-Age Popularity Guide*, author Betty Cornell talks about the increasingly important factor of popularity and its dependence on personal care and good conduct. Although Cornell lists good conduct as necessary to popularity and success, her book is almost entirely based on good looks and uses her own experiences of modeling as the basis for her credibility. While consumer society told women to be unique, stand out, develop individuality, and purchase products based on personal preferences, prescriptive books insisted that women and girls adhere to a strict standard of beauty, dress, speech, and behavior. While this ever growing list of conformity riddled pages of domestic and beauty manuals, prescriptive books assured that following this plan to fit in would lead to success, popularity and happiness. Like other prescriptive book authors before her, Cornell devotes a chapter to jobs that can turn into careers and highlights the benefits of earning money to be independent. Chapter eleven of Cornell's guide emphasizes the need for manners in order to get noticed by employers, courtesy, and knowledge of business etiquette, the notion of careful appearances rather than training or competence. A reoccurring theme that emerges again in this teen-age popularity guide is the importance in working to make others happy at home and at work, "A willingness to please is one of the biggest assets a young girl can have," Cornell proclaims. Following this principle to live by, Cornell dissects the problems in

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<sup>19</sup> Enid Haupt, *The Seventeen Book of Young Living* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1957), vii-viii, 179, 189, 198-201.

“underdeveloped personalities,” citing shyness as unhealthy and unnatural for women, illustrating that even when a girl is unhappy, acting introverted or unpleasant should not be obvious to others.<sup>20</sup>

As the 1950s came to an end the prescriptive literature audience had broadened to encompass not only a wide range of ages in females but also readers interested in more than the narrowly defined domestic ideals portrayed in popular media and some prescriptive books. Young girls looked for very different experiences than their mothers, wanting to push the boundaries even they were advised to keep, preparing for the most notorious feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Stereotypes that had persisted were losing their grasp on women’s set of ideals, when women realized that prescribed ideals were not just unrealistic but too often unattainable; chasing the *feminine mystique* proved to be empty, choosing to help others achieve rights such as through participation in the civil rights movement of the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

Despite decades of progress in education, work and individuality, women still faced gendered roles, job titles and stark wage differences that contrasted even sharper the higher women’s education levels. Gender discourse still had a foothold in society as well as in prescriptive literature books and authors still managed to perpetuate domestic ideals and aspects of separate sphere ideology. “Whatever it was that trapped educated American women in their kitchens, babbling at babies and worrying about color combinations for the bathroom, the trap was laid during the roaring 20’s not the quiet 50’s,” stated author Ruth Schwartz Cowan, an interwar historian of women and their

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<sup>20</sup> Betty Cornell, *Betty Cornell’s Teen-Age Popularity Guide* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), 68, 77, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 202-04.



domestic roles. What is more, is that in the following decades of World War II very little changes occurred, as if post-war print culture and gender discourse paralyzed women from further challenging the perceived norms, supported by a drastic decline in higher education enrollment, women working in full-time careers and a great increase in motherhood. It would not be until 1963 that Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* would be published and resonate with thousands of women who felt or would soon feel the walls of "the housewife trap." Friedan said what many women thought and would not say and verbalized questions and desires into realistic desires; that women could have a higher education, a job or career, a family, hobbies, leisure time and more without having to sacrifice themselves, their time or their ambitions.<sup>22</sup>

Although the overall amount of women in the public workforce had gradually risen since 1947 women still faced complex pressures to conform to the ideal mold praised in prescriptive literature from many years ago. Women still continued to face the expectation to sacrifice their careers once married or expecting children and to bear responsibility for household chores regardless of external work obligations. The questions still remained of why prescriptive literature authors perpetuated the very ideas and concepts that they challenged and why they encouraged other women to do the opposite of what they pursued or achieved in the public domain.<sup>23</sup> As the 1950s waned, American women sensed a feeling of collective unrest in their daily lives and read it on the pages of female authored prescriptive books and magazines. Many women prepared for the rights protests that would emerge in the 1960s that focused both on women and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>23</sup> Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 190-91.

civil rights for African Americans, by joining more women's organizations and donning the title of "feminist." Once again women did what they knew best and used a mantle of moral authority to achieve rights and increased social influence in the public. Women in political organizations grew tired of their stereotyped roles as members who baked, brewed coffee, made copies and ran errands and responded dynamically by launching the women's liberation movement, what would later be known as the second-wave of feminism. In this new wave of feminism two themes appeared, many women's behavior and appearances imitated the "new women" of the 1920s and the women who opposed this movement reinforced an even more defined model of conservative domesticity; one that prescriptive literature books would circumscribe more than ever around achieving the epitome of feminine looks and behavior.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron de Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 496, 501.

## **Conclusion: The Glory of Woman: The Legacy of Mrs. Consumer and Supermom**

I've yet to be on a campus where most women weren't worrying about some aspect of combining marriage, children, and a career. I've yet to find one where men were worrying about the same thing. I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and a career.

-Gloria Steinem<sup>1</sup>

Prescriptive literature books provided a medium through which women could educate and learn, inform and be instructed, encourage and advise. These books created dynamic changes in gender perception not only for their authors but by women who read them. While not all the results advising women toward or away from traditional, domestic roles were intended by the women who wrote prescriptive books, women who read these books expanded their roles and reinforced traditional ideas about education, home-making and the importance of work for self-fulfillment or the needs of their family. Women, used prescriptive literature as a tool, and helped to shape each generation of women into new mothers, wives, workers and consumers throughout society, transcending the middle-class and trickling down into lower and working class women who aspired to stretch the boundaries of their lives. The changes in women's roles and lives appeared through hard evidence in prescriptive book titles, words, phrases, images and topics discussed and were not temporary, but lasting and significant, stretching between nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ideas and roles assumed to be new by women of post-war America were in reality a part of the pervasive legacy of nineteenth century ideology and values, but also what

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<sup>1</sup> Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sharron de Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 601.

many women authors learned from their own increased autonomy and mobility to expand their domain through education and work. While many authors achieved careers and relative financial independence, some continued to reinforce the boundaries and limited roles they fought against and believed oppressed countless women of their time.

Prescriptive book authors knowingly or unknowingly perpetuated gender role concepts and ascribed traits to women and their domains and professions they habituated in previous decades, creating a lasting trend for many years in America. Like outside opinions during and shortly after World War II, the government, employers and society's gender discourse suddenly characterized formerly male jobs or work as "domestic" because women began doing them; authors furthered the idea of domesticizing roles, work and certain occupations by how they related to domestic chores and rebranded them as a part of the domestic sphere, no longer contained within the walls of a home, but expanded work relative to what women already knew.

Gender segregation and separate spheres began between the home and public society, but with changes in industrialized work and diversified job classifications, prescribed roles reinforced gender roles in the home and sex-typed jobs in workplaces. Prescriptive literature books contributed to the cycle of prescribing and reinscribing gendered ideas, roles and work through literature and frequently perpetuated stereotypes believed to be ideals that actually created obstacles and further circumscribed women's agency in public and private around domestic traits. Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* sought to challenge boundaries, stereotypes, gender double standards and prescribed roles but also reinforced the image of the post-war "ideal" happy, middle-class, white, suburban housewife as the norm, when in fact it was not the norm. Friedan

supported her challenge to domestic ideals with her own ambivalence toward domestic roles and her argument that all women experienced “a problem that had no name” as she and many others did not find happiness or fulfillment in domestic housework or family relationships.

The duality of advice in prescriptive books can be visualized in various ways, overall as a geological process of overlapping and shifting changes, like tectonic plates or like periodically deposited sedimentation in a stream of consistent ideals or gender roles about public and private life, domestic and industrial duties, producer and consumer tasks, all of which encompass the role of the American woman. The norm for many decades in the early twentieth century reflects upon the contemporary American woman who works outside of the home and engages in domestic chores, has a husband and or children, who achieves a higher education and works, who makes things at home, earns a living and acts as the primary consumer of her own life or that of her family. Regardless of the advances women have made in the public sphere, parity has not been achieved to the fullest extent, partially because too many women continue to accept the widespread gender roles portrayed in prescriptive books, magazines, advertisements and news sources as an identity rather than a purveyor of ideology.

Like Catherine Beecher, other women authors promoted the value of earning a salary as more valuable and rewarding than housework but also putting others’ needs and ambitions before self, a principle virtue placed on women primarily during the nineteenth century that continued into the twentieth century social discourse. Echoing turn of the century career women such as Christine Frederick and Ida Tarbell, prescriptive book authors of post-war America told other women that merging religious and secular,

domestic and industrial activities, work and education created the best lifestyle, but still proved best when centered in the home to protect against the corruption and moral perversion of the industrial-capitalist society. Although women balancing careers and homemaking, has been embraced following World War II, there is still an established rhetoric that women often have to choose between a career and domestic duties, especially when expecting children. Prescriptive literature that followed war, which occurred in every decade discussed in this thesis, other than the Depression, valued similar traits of thrift, self-sufficiency and overall emerging independence by women, but continued to downplay their demand in public work with lower pay and downgraded job titles without changing job descriptions or expectations. The do-it-yourself mentality encouraged by prescriptive books only added to the perceived oppression that women faced in industrial society and at home, increasingly focused on consumer goods for ease, work improvement, efficiency and supposed enjoyment of women's roles as leisure. The expansion of roles for women as breadwinners allows them more options for work but still assumes their responsibility for housework, "a one-sided shift in the division of labor."<sup>2</sup> It can be argued that America will never value housework and other domestic responsibilities in the home, simply because it is not salaried.

Between 1920 and 1960 prescriptive books shifted women's focus on improving the lives of others based in the home or an educational setting, to improving the self and home for family, to improving one's self for personal fulfillment and contributing to society wherever women exerted their presence. The glory of woman no longer existed in a woman's home or in building up her family at her own expense and self-sacrifice,

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<sup>2</sup> Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 184-86.

but in herself and wherever she went, whatever she did and her overall self-perception. A woman no longer determined her worth by the actions of her family members or how society perceived them, but by what a woman did for others through their own self-fulfillment, what they accomplished by reforming education, professional occupations and their own multi-faceted identities.

In contemporary times individuals such as Martha Stewart embody this duality of roles and gender expectations by combining domestic and professional work. As a domestic mogul, Martha Stewart merged traditional roles and business mastery to become a successful career woman. Stewart writes prescriptive books on how to purchase the best products, create items for the home, do-it-yourself in a variety of functions whether with food, decorations, or utilitarian products and ensures the reader what is cost-effective and aesthetic like many prescriptive authors before her. Other authors such as Peggy Post continue the legacy of ancestor Emily Post on practical etiquette for weddings and other social functions with updated models of technology, social and cultural change, while still placing the emphasis of moral conduct and behavior regulation on women's shoulders.

Other prescriptive books have continued the focus of 1950s beauty manuals with detailed, explicit advice that convinces its audience of women the surest way to success depends on clothes, perfect weight, skin and makeup, competence and education taking a backseat to appearances. The appearance-competence double standard is something that men are not faced with in prescriptive literature or faced with the relating to promotion and the gender gap in wages. However, in recent years prescriptive literature has made a

comeback with increasing male authorship that is also directed at a growing male audience.

Although not all these recent male-authored books have a serious tone, they are mostly practical and show a renewed interest in instruction and self-help, as well as a new focus on the male population for social mobility and self-improvement. These recent prescriptive literature publications show a glimpse of progress and equality in broadening the prescriptive audience, overcoming double-standards of gender expectations, gendered roles and redefining concepts of domesticity, masculinity, femininity and what constitutes social norms. Scholarship focused on prescriptive literature still requires additional examination of gendered occupational labels, analysis of the prescriptive literature book audience and the media-print culture domestic woman ideals that still plague contemporary women's social progress, work equality, public and self-perception. Until this research and examination takes place, American women will continue to perpetuate and experience ambivalence about their gender roles and the relationship between domesticity and work. Only when prescriptive and popular literature, scholarship and society all identify the concept of separate spheres as a construct of patriarchal hegemony rather than gender complementary domains, and reconcile gender segregation in public and private life, will true gender equality exist.



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