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Framing the 'Ideal' Audience: Daytime Television and Gender Ideology in Postwar America

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the emergence of American daytime television in the 1940s and 1950s. Approaching the subject from the television industry's perspective, it discusses how broadcasters tried, through programming and scheduling practices to develop a composite notion of what it considered to be the "ideal" viewer for the new medium. Envisioning daytime viewers as white, middle-class, and shopping-obsessed might have elevated broadcasters' hopes of selling this audience to advertisers, but it did little in terms of attracting viewers to the medium. This dilemma for broadcasters is well illustrated by Home, a daytime show for women that aired between 1954 and 1957.

When Betty Friedan published her seminal work The Feminine Mystique in the early 1960s, she quickly dispelled some of the romantic notions surrounding the immediate postwar era. Specifically, Friedan identified advertising and the commercial mass media among the leading social institutions holding on to an antiquated, but for them quite profitable, construct of gender. "Somehow, somewhere," she speculated, "someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless-yearnings easy-to-get-rid-of state of being housewives" (Friedan 1983, p. 207).

Starting from Friedan's by now famous arguments, this study traces the emergence of daytime television in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It discusses how the new medium, through programming and scheduling practices, hoped to appeal to white, middle-class homemakers and to influence their consumption habits. What emerges is a picture in which a sexist construct fused (and at times, collided) with the overwhelming commercial logic of the new medium's attempt to develop a composite notion of the American woman at mid-century. What is striking—and somewhat in contrast to Friedan's argument—is how difficult this proved to be for the early daytime television industry.

Unlike early television soap operas which, much like their radio counterparts, portrayed women in a variety of roles and life situations (Allen 1985; Cantor and Pingree 1983), daytime variety shows had their own agenda. Addressing white, middle-class women in their roles as mothers and homemakers, daytime variety shows also hyped consumption to new heights. Not only did television practically bring the store to the audience's living room, it also
transformed television studios into stages resembling domestic settings where selling could take place. Even shows that tried to answer viewers' calls for daytime entertainment and relaxation were eager to exploit the medium's commercial angles. So eager, in fact, that the editorial content, in many cases, served primarily to provide an accommodating backdrop for showcasing and promoting sponsored products. Few places is this more evident than in the case of *Home*, a daytime show broadcast by the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) every weekday between 1954 and 1957. Because it exemplifies both broadcasters' conceptualization of their first daytime viewers and their overwhelming adherence to commercial considerations, *Home* provides a very interesting behind-the-screen-look at the early daytime television industry and its motives.

In this article, I first look at the female consumer in the period following the end of the Second World War. I then turn to an exploration of the emergence of daytime television, including broadcasters' view on their predominantly female audience and their desire to sell this audience to advertisers. I conclude with a discussion of how these concerns were played out on NBC's *Home*. I argue that by grasping the underlying network principles behind the show, one can gain an understanding of the manner in which female audiences were addressed in the 1950s (Stole 1997). Analysis of *Home* may also shed light on why some of the same principles are still at work when media addresses contemporary women.

TELEVISION AND THE POSTWAR CONSUMER

When television was introduced to the American public in the late 1940s, few of the concerns regarding advertising and commercialization that had surrounded radio some twenty years earlier could be heard (Boddy 1991; McChesney 1993). Whereas in the 1920s, concerns about turning radio into a purely commercial medium could be detected even in advertising circles (Marchand 1985), television's commercial potential was celebrated enthusiastically, not only among advertisers, but in government circles as well. A commonly expressed postwar fear was that the economy might revert to its prewar depression standards without the impetus of wartime spending to stimulate production (Lipsitz 1990). More than a mere entertainment medium, America's manufacturers therefore looked to the new medium of television as a means of jump-starting the economy and increasing their sales (Schofield 1950, p. 13).

Judging from consumers' interest in postwar consumer durables, however, manufacturers seemed to have little reason to worry. Wartime savings had enabled many Americans to participate in a postwar consumer boom and to enjoy a new, and higher, standard of living. Between 1946 and 1950, for example, Americans purchased 21.4 million automobiles, more than 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million electric stoves, and 11.6 million television sets (Hartmann 1982, p. 8). Although it was considered unfortunate for a wife to have to work outside the home, argues Elaine Tyler May, it was considered even more unfortunate for a family not to be able to afford items considered necessary for the postwar home (May 1988). Many couples found it difficult to fulfill their dreams of a higher standard of living on one income.
alone, and by 1955 more women held jobs outside the home than at any time in the nation's history (Douglas 1995, p. 55).

Interestingly, however, advertisers tended to ignore this fact, focusing instead on women's roles as homemakers, mothers, and consumers. America's consumer culture, says Susan Douglas, "was predicated on the notion that women were the major consumers of most goods—that was their job after all—and that, to sell to them, you had to emphasize their roles as wives and mothers, because it was in these capacities, not in their capacities as secretaries or nurses, that women bought" (Douglas 1995, p. 56). The middle-class homemaker, argues another scholar, became "an important basis of the social economy—so much that it was necessary to define her in contradictions which held her in her limited social place" (Haralovich 1989, p. 66). Her role as homemaker was marginalized in the sense that her labor within the home was kept outside the marketplace for commodity production. Yet, at the same time, her role and function in the home made her the focus of a larger consumer industry (Haralovich 1989). While the entire advertising industry seemed gripped by the notion that all women identified themselves primarily as wives and mothers (Douglas 1995), it was also conscious of the fact that women did not always view themselves in this role. "The manufacturer wants to intrigue her back into the kitchen—and we show him how to do it the right way," explained an advertising strategist to Betty Friedan in the early 1960s. "If he tells her that all she can be is a wife and mother, she will spit in his face. But we show him how to tell her that it is creative to be in the kitchen" (Friedan 1983, p. 227). In designing programming and commercial structures for their daytime operations during the late 1940s and early 1950s, television broadcasters based much of their strategies on such theories.

DAYTIME TELEVISION

The development of commercial television, modeled to a large degree on experiences with radio broadcasting two decades earlier, was largely based on widespread sale of television sets to private homes (Baughman 1987), where the success of programming supported by direct advertising was seen to depend on the housewife as the "household purchasing agent" and the attentive target of advertising messages. Those most involved in planning television's commercial development—the electronic manufacturers and the commercial broadcasters—defined television as both a consumer product for the home and an "audio-visual showroom for the advertiser's consumer goods" (Boddy 1990, p. 20). It was television executives' hope that daytime television would follow the pattern of previously introduced entertainment medium. Both the phonograph and radio had rapidly overcome initial suspicions regarding their disruptive presence in the work routine within the home. While radio had developed programming formats that served successfully as "background activity" for the working homemaker, broadcasters feared that television's visual component would be quite a challenge. Early on, they warned that daytime television, in order to avoid interference with the efficient functioning of the household, had to avoid programming formulas that demanded the audience's constant and undivided attention (Boddy 1990; Spigel 1992).

According to Lynn Spigel, it is through an understanding of the rather fluid interconnection between leisure and labor within the home that representations of the early daytime audience best can be
understood. Women's leisure time, she argues, was shown to be coterminous with her work time. "Representation of television continually addressed the woman as a housewife and presented her with a notion of spectatorship that was inextricably intertwined with her useful labor at home" (Spigel 1992, p. 75). By offering daytime programming that emphasized cooking, sewing, shopping, as well as tips on beauty and fashion, broadcasters hoped that women would regard daytime television as instrumental in making housekeeping more efficient and as an aid in bringing about a more "gracious" standard of living for her family (Stasheff and Bretz 1956).

In November 1948, WABD, Du Mont's flagship station in New York, became the first television station to offer daytime programming on a regular basis. WABD's move was the first and foremost based on a desire to attract a growing group of advertisers who considered prime-time television to be too expensive. The task of locating an audience for the new medium was more of a challenge, however (WABD Delays Launching 1948). After overcoming some initial concerns about women's ability to operate television sets because they were "a piece of engineering equipment, not an item of household furniture" (Horton 1946, p. 16), broadcasters decided that their most pressing task was to design television programming that complemented rather than disrupted the daily routine within the home. Through abstractions and speculations as to what a "typical housewife" would find interesting, the industry hoped to capture women's attention. Not only did broadcasters try to develop schedules that mimicked the patterns of the homemaker's daily activities; they also aspired to make television viewing part of her daily routine (Spigel 1992; All-Day Television 1948).

The early television "soaps," a carryover from radio, were perfect in this regard. With their minimum amount of action and limited visual interest, they enabled the housewife to follow the storyline while working away from the television set. Also, the soap operas' segmented storylines (usually two a day), combined with their constant synopsizing of previous episodes, allowed women to combine television watching with household work. The television "magazine" was another flexible format. Consisting of various, and often unrelated, programming segments strung together by a television host or hostess, magazine shows allowed the busy housewife to tune in and out of program while losing little in terms of narrative plots (Spigel 1992).

Not all broadcasters were convinced, however. "Many observers," noted Business Week, "feel that the housewife is not going to be able to watch a television screen while she washes, peels potatoes and cooks the evening meal. Will she be able, they ask, to transfer her radio-listening habits to video?" (Television Reaches Stage 1948, p. 26). Set on overcoming the attention getting problem, WABD broadcast an audible signal whenever a programming segment it believed to be of special interest to homemakers was aired. As Newsweek explained, "When a shot of the latest fashion (from Manhattan show windows) or a particularly difficult stitch (on the daily sewing class) turns up something that must be seen to be appreciated, then Du Mont will sound an audio come-on to bring mother running to the set" (All Day Television 1948, p. 52).

In the spring of 1949, a marketing outfit called Advertest Research published its first, and among broadcasters and advertisers, eagerly awaited, report on daytime television. One of the more significant
findings in the report was that women were rather selective in their choice of television programs. If the daytime audience found a program to be of particular interest, time for watching would be found. If, on the other hand, women did not like the programming, they would not watch even if they had ample time to do so (e.g., during a break from housework and children's demands). "Thus," concluded the report, "it is possible for the homemaker to overcome the inconvenience factor by causing the housewife to rearrange her work schedule so that she finds time to watch a program she likes." Much to the television industry's concern, however, a majority of respondents admitted they did not watch television in the daytime, stating lack of time and a general disappointment with the programming as main reasons (Advertest Research 1949, p. 2).

But concerns and speculations did not deter Du Mont and WABD's enthusiasm. Not only had the move into daytime attracted a wide range of advertisers; many viewers also seemed to prefer WABD's daytime shows over popular radio programs (All Day Looker 1948, p. 46). Du Mont was so encouraged, in fact, that it began to offer regular daytime television programming to its other affiliates. The first program broadcast on a network-wide basis was an audience-participation show called Okay Mother. The fact that Sterling Drugs, one of the pioneer sponsors of daytime radio back in the 1930s, agreed to a lengthy sponsorship of show and started to move its advertising allocations from radio to daytime television, did not escape the other networks' attention. Slightly worried, they began to explore their own daytime TV options.

It was not until late 1950 or early 1951 that the other networks began to offer daytime programming to their affiliates on a regular basis. With evening schedules close to fully booked, however, a daytime expansion made financial sense. It did not take long before NBC and Columbia Broadcasting Systems (CBS), the leading networks at the time, began to realize the importance of developing reliable daytime schedules and programming that would appeal to audiences and sponsors alike (All Day Long 1951; Daytime TV 1951; Spigel 1992). In the fall of 1950, NBC launched a daytime package which included The Kate Smith Hour, hosted by the popular singer Kate Smith, to thirty-one of its affiliates. At approximately the same time, fifty-one CBS-affiliated stations could offer The Garry Moore Show to their viewers. The commercial structure of The Kate Smith Hour represented a dramatic departure from established practices handed down to the television industry via radio. Whereas prime-time shows and television soap operas adhered to the established system of allowing one single advertiser to sponsor (and produce) an entire program, The Kate Smith Hour sought one sponsor for every fifteen minute interval of programming. While publicly claiming that increased network control would lead to better programming for its audiences, NBC's real motives could not have been more obvious: it was mainly about putting the network in a position to maximize the commercial potential of television (Boddy 1987; Jaffee 1954; Wilson 1995). While greatly reducing sponsors' financial risk, the new format also introduced the element of competition for viewers' attention during a single show. High ratings on The Kate Smith Hour helped put sponsors at ease. After three months, the show commanded an ARB rating of 22.3, which translated into an audience of close to 2 million homes with over 4.5 million viewers. No wonder that NBC declared the show "one of the best bargains
in TV (McFadyen 1950). One month later, in January 1951, an overly optimistic trade journal predicted a "virtual sellout for daytime network television within a year" (Daytime TV 1951, p. 36).

Unlike local daytime programming, which to a large extent were devoted to service programs with cooking, beauty, and household tips, network shows departed from this emphasis. In the case of The Kate Smith Hour, for example, producers devoted only 30 percent of the content to such topics. Likewise, most segments of The Garry Moore Show consisted of interviews and entertainment (Daytime TV 1951). This programming trend was completely in fune with surveys conducted by Advertest Research in the summer of 1951. When asked, close to six in ten respondents mentioned entertainment as the main reason for watching television during the daytime. Only one in ten admitted to watching daytime television in order to obtain information. The survey concluded that much like prime time audiences, those who watched TV during the day preferred variety shows, audience participation programs, and dramas (Advertest Research 1950). "Women's service programs on network television," predicted Sponsor in late 1951, would soon be replaced by "escapist television programming for the housewife" (Don't Lose Out 1951).

Television producers were somewhat frustrated by these findings. On the one hand, they wanted to develop programs that commanded high ratings and massive sponsor demand. On the other hand, they wanted to accommodate advertisers' desire for programming that would serve as a great backdrop for their products. Homemaking shows exemplified this dilemma. While these provided great vehicles for the integration of sponsors' products, they failed to attract large audiences. "Our expertise to date," noted one NBC executive in 1952, "indicate [that] as soon as you start to televise to women about home service exclusively you are no longer televising to them. They switch the dial over to the charms of Francis X. Bushman in a 1912 thriller rather than look at a 1952 kitchen range in action" (The Network's View 1952, p. 15). Because "the realities of domestic routine," according to the same spokesman, discouraged the housewife from viewing home service programs on the screen, the best use of home economics programming was to fold it into small segments on shows like Kate Smith (The Network's View 1952, p. 46).

On the local level, however, industry leaders considered the blurring of programming with commercial messages to be one of daytime TV's strongest attributes. Cooking shows, for example, were equally popular with broadcasters and advertisers. Besides being relatively inexpensive to produce, the editorial format of the genre allowed for perfect integration of sponsors' products. "It is as natural as baking a biscuit for the show's star to switch from talking about cooking to a commercial for a flour product, or a food brand," enthused one supporter (Daytime TV 1951, p. 43). Other shows stressed shopping as home entertainment. The basic ingredient for the standard "shopping program" was a charming "femcee" backed up by an organization of shoppers bringing new products and "good values" back to the television studio for "on-air" presentations. "In one sense, the whole show is commercial," produced the trade journal Sponsor in a piece celebrating daytime television's commercial attributes. "It is virtually impossible to determine where the commercial starts and leaves off. The commercial pitch is indirect and completely
interwoven with the program" (Department Store TV 1951, p. 31).

Not only did these programming formats provide excellent opportunities for commercial display and promotion, they also introduced audiences to the concept of consumption as home entertainment. In addition to practically bringing the store to the audiences' living rooms, some daytime programs transformed their studio settings into stages resembling domestic settings where selling could take place. Your Television Shopper, for instance, featured two different sets, one resembling a living room and the other a kitchen, where clothes, toys, and gadgets could be demonstrated to potential buyers who watched the show from their own kitchens and living rooms.

Producers claimed enthusiastically that most newcomers to the show would have a difficult time telling which items on the show were advertised and which were not (Robertson 1949).

In line with traditional gender stereotyping, most homemaking shows featured a woman in charge of the kitchen. Men's role on these shows were most often as "general-taste-testers," as on WADF-TV's Kitchen Klub (Advertisement for WDAF-TV 1954, p. 47) or as "next door neighbor" types informing homemakers about new products, news, and human interest happenings, as on Let Skinner Do It (Advertisement for Let Skinner Do It 1952, p. 61). Frequently, however, daytime shows used male show-business personalities to "educate" women about the superiority of the sponsors' products. In 1950, for example, WABD credited show personality Johnny Olson with "showing women how to use Sauce Arthuro successfully" (Rumpus Room 1950, p. 63). And A Trick in Time consisted of having "Uncle Allie" dole out helpful household hints to "the average young housewife" placed by the show's female star (Household Hint Shows 1952, p. 94). The notion that these shows provided their predominantly female audience with needed services was reflected on a regularly level as well. In 1952, for example, the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (NARAB) asserted that these "announcement programs" provided a special service to the public. Stating that the commercial contents of daytime television held particular information value to its viewers, the NARAB allowed more advertising on these programs than it did during prime-time broadcasts (Head 1956, p. 201).

**HOME**

Careful commercial tuning was high on the list in 1954 when NBC launched *Home*, a "magazine on the air" for women. As research into television audiences, their attitudes, product preferences, lifestyles and spending habits expanded, it had become increasingly clear that advertisers were not only concerned with the size of a program's audience. They also wanted to know the viewers' characteristics. Like other advertisers, sponsors of daytime television were interested in reaching people who were consumers, or potential consumers, of their products (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990). "Just because a show has a high audience it doesn't necessarily produce big sales," warned chairman of NBC's parent company, David Sarnoff. "What we need to know is more about the rating to sales" (Christopher 1953, p. 3).

After several years of experience in the daytime television field, however, NBC believed it was in a position to create network daytime programming that would help advertisers get in touch with an audience that was particularly eager to buy
the sponsored products. Although it wanted to attract an audience of affluent women, NBC did not have a particularly clear sense of this group's viewing habits and programming preferences. It was not until the late 1950s that ratings services routinely reported demographic information along with program ratings (Beville 1985). Before that time, reaching a specific audience involved a good deal of speculation and sheer guesswork. "One of the first considerations," warned Advertising Age, "is to decide whom you have to reach" (Who's Looking 1954, p. 92).

In 1951, a research organization called Social Research claimed to have found an answer to some of the television industry's problems. In a report that year, the outfit pointed to distinct differences between the daytime viewing preferences of the upper-middle class and those of the lower-middle class or "middle majority." "The upper-middle class," stated the report, "look for sophistication, cosmopolitan poise and individuality in character and taste in their entertainment. They feel it genteel to devaluate their possessions and are likely to become hostile when exposed to long sales talks." The survey exemplified Kukla, Fran & Ollie (a popular, and among critics, highly acclaimed children's show) as a typical upper-middle class program due to its integrated commercial pitch. On the other hand, The Kate Smith Hour, argued the study, appealed to middle majority women because of its sincere, successful, and motherly aura. Social Research stressed that these two types of programming represented different worlds both in terms of entertainment appeal and the social structure of their audiences. "We find that commercials, unless carefully attuned to the different audiences, will be ignored," cautioned the report (Social Report 1951, p. 66). Unfortunately for broadcasters, however, reaching the intended audience was still easier said that done.

Claiming that the existing daytime face tended to draw a lowbrow, and for advertisers not-so-attractive audience, NBC wanted to locate an audience able to identify itself with the lifestyle, interests, and, most importantly, the consumption pattern of upscale women. More specifically, the network hoped to attract up-scale-minded, if only moderately affluent, housewives whose daily life consisted not only of chores but also of shopping for the family (Today's Home). For advertisers, NBC promised to create an atmosphere, a mood, and an editorial background against which their sales job could be at its maximum effectiveness. Home's audience, promised the show's producers, would consist of "women preconditioned to buy" (Pinkham 1953).

The claim that Home would appeal to upper-class-minded women was largely based on two assumptions. First of all was NBC's claim that no daytime television programming catered to the up-scale-minded woman. Secondly, it was based on NBC's assumption that once appropriate daytime programming became available, the desired audience would tune in. To lay out the stark contrast between Home and other forms of daytime TV, NBC determined that the best time-slot for Home would be in the early afternoon when CBS offered its television soap operas (Today's Home a Preliminary Report n.d.). In their eagerness to locate a consumption oriented audience, however, Home's producers made some fatal errors which eventually helped lead to the show's downfall. Holding on to the assumption that women wanted up-scale household and shopping tips as much as advertisers wanted to attract their dollars, NBC paid very little attention to programming preferences.
among the same viewers. Instead, the network poured a lot of efforts into designing a commercial structure that would attract sponsors to the show.

In terms of commercial structure, *Home* expanded the sponsor-participation format developed on *The Kate Smith Hour* a few years earlier. While the latter had required advertisers to sponsor at least a fifteen-minute segment of a show, the new concept, called "magazine advertising," offered them short, and relatively affordable, segments of commercial time. This, according to NBC, gave advertisers the "flexibility to move in and out of shows at will, to put pressure in peak seasons, and to get maximum results at minimum cost" (Broadcasting as You Need It 1954). By the late 1950s, and certainly by the 1960s, this would become the dominant form of television advertising. In order to get advertisers' commitment, NBC promised discounts and special deals to those signing up for a minimum of fifty-two weeks of weekly one-minute participations on *Home*. Sponsors signing up as Charter Members were assured a prominent role in the show's editorial features and were told that once a year, an entire show would be devoted to them and their products. On this day, promised the network, "the difference between service features and commercials would be as imperceptible as possible." It would, in fact, be "difficult to tell where the commercial begins and information leaves off" (Mills 1953b).

As part of an elaborate branding strategy, NBC intended to capitalize upon *Home's* merchandising potential. It was speculated that the show, through "exploitative" devices such as magazines being its imprint and featuring *Home* personalities and experts, could bring in as much as half a million dollars a year in additional revenues. *Home* test kitchens a la *Good Housekeeping* as well as establishing a *Home* seal of approval to adorn *Home* sponsors' products were considered as well. Other plans included the creation of a dress line based on the show's femcee wardrobe and the sale of recipe boxes for recipes demonstrated on the show (Some Facts About *Home* n.d.). In order to present *Home's* various segments, the network in 1954 constructed an innovative $200,000 set for the show's premiere. The studio features gadgets to revolve, lift and tilt consumer goods, promoting and demonstrating their every feature. It was also equipped with a special-effects area to portray the effects of rain, fog, and sleet on various kinds of merchandise. The set, in NBC's own words, was built to accommodate *Home's* function as a "machine for selling" (Promotional Material for *Home* 1954). Perhaps best of all, speculated the network, "We will be consciously creating an atmosphere, a mood, an editorial background against which the advertiser's sales job can be at its maximum effectiveness. The audience will be in a buying frame of mind" (Pinkham 1953).

Much consideration went into the planning of a central personality or "editor-in-chief" to lead the show. NBC did not consider a glamour girl to be the ideal hostess. It wanted "a pleasingly attractive, middle-aged woman – Hollywood's answer to the home economics teacher" (Spigel 1992, p. 84). The network's final choice fell on Arlene Francis, a "self declared anti-feminist" and "ordinary housewife" who held decidedly traditional opinions about gender roles and women's place in society. "A girl's job is to be a girl," stated Francis. "Once she takes over a man's position, she loses her femininity and her place in society" (What is Her line? 1954, p. 4). As hostess on *Home*, Ms. Francis strung together a wide range of departments designed with the up-scale-oriented woman in mind. *Home* offered
fashion tips, recipes, interior decoration and gardening, child rearing and, not coincidentally, information on shopping and consumption (Spigel 1992). Determined to maintain its up-scale profile, the network tried hard, though not always successfully, to reflect these aspirations in its programming. On August 8, 1954, for example, Arlene Francis welcomed the ballerina Alexandra Danilova, performer of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty ballets. Francis also introduced Dr. Ashley Montagu, whom NBC termed an "outstanding authority on human behavior," who discussed "the baby" (Home promotion on A Time to Live 1954). Only four days later the show's hostess interviewed "a famous time-and-motion-engineer" whose function was to estimate the number of miles an average housewife might walk in the kitchen during the year and suggest how the amount of walking could be reduced by as much as one-half. "While Arlene bakes a gingerbread cake, the efficiency expert will trace her steps [and] after the cake pops from the oven, the engineer shows Arlene how she could have saved herself half the time" (Marshall 1954). Later that week, Home introduced Dick Satterfield, a man who had brought beauty aid to "a million women." Dick's purpose on the show was to instruct the audience on how to combine weight-reducing exercise with garden work. This was the same day Arlene Francis introduced Jim, a gentleman with a penchant for "doing anything," including hatching an ostrich egg by himself and selling an icebox to an Eskimo (Home promotion on Three Steps to Heaven 1954).

THE RESPONSE TO HOME AND ITS DEMISE

NBC had high expectations for Home. Even before the show was aired, network executives predicted that it would score a minimum Nielsen rating of 10.0 within six to nine months of its premiere, which would translate into an estimated audience of 4.4 million viewers (Mills 1953a; Mills 1953b). Although the first Trendex after Home was launched placed the show behind both of its direct network competitors (Strike It Rich and Arthur Godfrey on CBS), NBC was very optimistic about Home's ability to eventually capture the time slot (Cornell 1954). By early April, however, the show's ratings had leveled off to a little over 3.0, leaving NBC to concede that the network was in for "several months of very bitter fighting" (Culligan 1954; Report on Home to NBC affiliated stations 1954). Trendex ratings for the early part of June carried more bad news: Home's ratings had fallen to 1.9 (Dauenspeck 1954). Network executives were quite bewildered as to why the show was not catching on.

Arguing that the show was too highbrow, one network executive suggested that Home adjust its content to better fit the concerns and interests of "the average gal in Suburbia" (Barry 1954). "As long as Home must be fundamentally about things," worried a colleague, "it can never be endowed with identification, spirit, warmth, and the rest of the things that goes with the fundamental human relationships that makes most successful television (emphasis on daytime television in particular)" (Parks 1954). Television critics agreed: "Where Home may have a difficulty is that, even for a woman's program, it consists of a phenomenal amount of straight talk," wrote Jack Gould in The New York Times. "Almost everything is a demonstration or a
discussion and after several mornings the pace begins to drag, at least for masculine ears. The program now is so determinedly pro-housewife and pro-mother in its approach that a little more material of general interest may not be amiss. There may be some women in the audience who would not be adverse to being respected for their brain rather than their pocketbook" (Gould 1954).

At the same time as Home's producers adhered to the criticism by replacing some of the show's service segments with entertainment, they were not ready to admit that their hopes of establishing Home as a "machine for selling" were fading. "We know," insisted a wishful network, "that the basic concept of Home ... providing demonstrable service information for America's housewives ... is one which is long overdue for both audiences and advertisers" (Report on Home 1954). Unfortunately for NBC, however, the daytime audience did not seem to agree. As one disenchanted viewer of Home wrote: "Won't you men ever give us women, some of us anyway, credit for wanting to think about the larger issues of our lives, rather than the things most of us can learn by ourself?" (Rogers 1954).

In August 1957, after more than three years with poor ratings, NBC realized that Home, which had been accorded one of the largest staffs and budgets of any program in the NBC stable, had proven a resounding failure. The network attributed the show's cancellation to low ratings, high programming costs and, most important, declining advertising revenues (No place for Home 1957; Ratings, biz dip 1957).

In analyzing what went wrong with Home, much suggests that NBC was hurt by its arrogant attitude towards the preferences of its daytime viewers. For example, while fully aware of the fact that women preferred entertainment over instruction, the network insisted on airing a show instructing viewers on how to run up-scale households and use the advertisers' products. The show's commercial structure did not help. "The magazine format of advertising," claims one writer, "turned out to be first and last to accommodate advertising. At its worst, the format amounted to little more than commercials in search of a program" (Bergreen 1980, p. 173).

What the audience rejection of Home and similar programs suggests, then, is that women, in a very subtle manner, had begun to reject shows that addressed them primarily as homemakers and consumers. The television industry was plainly out of touch with their female audience. "American women in the fifties were not simply trapped in a paternalistic superstructure," argue Miller and Nowak, "parts of that structure was in collapse" (Miller and Nowak 1977, p. 365). As more and more women entered the work-force and, at the same time, were subjected to media portrayals that contradicted their actual life situations, shows like Home were doomed to short life spans.

EPILOGUE

Given the more than fifty years that have passed since the introduction of daytime television and the unsuccessful tenure of programming concepts like Home's, one might think that the television industry had learned a lesson. Add to this that during last half-century, society has undergone a drastic turn-around regarding its views on "acceptable" roles and professions for women. Consequently, one might assume that the advertising community, which prides itself on being a step ahead of new
trends, and the media industry, which is joined at the hip to the advertising industry, would be reflecting these changes. Yet, while advertisers have made some adjustments, it is also surprising to see how little things have changed (Prose 2000). Advertisers still insist on addressing women primarily as mothers, homemakers and consumers. This is evident even on the Internet, a medium that did not come of age until the latter part of the 1990s. Websites created specifically for women demonstrate this very well. The promise from iVillage.com to provide women with "relaxation and distraction, solitude and community," during "a few precious moments stolen—just for [women]—from [their] families and jobs," for example, is a direct throwback to the manner in which television executives promoted daytime television in the 1950s (Prose 2000, Spigel 1992). The online magazine offers hints on self-improvement and reasons why chocolate may be beneficial to one's health. "Not interested in football?" asks an article, then—"Cook up a 'Souper'Bowl and other tasty snacks for your favorite football fans!" (Prose 2000, p. 66). Arlene Francis could not have said it better.

The manner in which advertisers and mass media continue to address women suggests that instead of escaping what William Chafe has termed "the gender prison of the 1950s" (Chafe 1972), women have ended up with what Francine Prose describes as "A Wasteland of One's Own" (Prose 2000). Exactly how and why this happened continues to be an area ripe for future study.

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