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Watch as Women Wear the Pants: Parallels of Feminist
Socio-Political Change and Popular American Sitcoms
1951-1977

BY

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In her critically acclaimed work, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan captures the heart of the discussion surrounding post-World War II America regarding the steadily increasing intention of young girls to follow the specific life path of becoming a wife, mother, and home maker. This choice, is heavily dissected by Friedan within her work, and specifically within the following quote:

“The suburban housewife—she was the dream image of the young American woman and the envy, it was said, of woman all over the world. The American housewife—freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only for her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment . . . In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture.”¹

In conjunction with general observations on the state of women’s role as a housewife such as those above, Friedan used testimonies from various women, coming from both educated backgrounds and little schooling, as well as marriage age statistics and average motherhood ages to illustrate the fixation of American middle-class culture around adhering to a more confined home and family life she investigated within this work.² She talks of how fewer women sought degrees from attending school, but rather attended college for the purpose of scouting out a husband. Those who chose this route would drop out post-engagement or after their wedding to assume their new role as wife and eventual mother. Friedan marvels at the phenomenon adding “Women who wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies.”³ At a time when women were slowly, but surely, being let into traditionally male only universities, the

¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London: Gollancz, 1971) 18.

² *Ibid*, 16.

³ *Ibid*, 17.

astonishment of such a collective choice made by so many women during this time is clear within Freidan's message. This turbulent time of change for women concerning the understanding of their role within American society came with ideas across the spectrum as to what the new kind of all American girl would look like; how she would dress, think, and act.⁴ With all these questions to ask, women looked to the screens of the magical boxes quickly taking up residency in the living rooms of Americans across the nation.⁵ By tuning into television, American women were tuning into modernity. During the 1950s-1970s period in the United States, the plot content and storylines of popular television were influenced by major socio-political revolutions relating to the role of the ideal woman in American society. The lives and actions of popular female characters on television reflected the cultural realization of the evolving role of women in American society.

Part 1: Television's Influence and the Power of Wearing Pants

In the 1950s, the traditional femininity that Americans had grown accustomed to seeing women portray within society began being challenged by new images of what the modern women could be. The role of women began its shift to being viewed as an evolving nature towards gaining equal grounds with the traditionally masculine roles in society. These ideals, which maintained that women were to aspire and play the role of wife, mother, and homemaker, began being replaced with more diversified and fluid concepts of how a woman should act in the private and public sphere. Ushered in by what is now known as the golden age of television⁶, social movements were gaining acknowledgement from the programs that monopolized the

⁴ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995): 5-10.

⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁶ Bill Ganzel, "Television" *Television During the 1950s and 60s* (2007).

screens of homes across America. In this short span of three decades, popular themes surrounding the role of women in society on television went from limiting female characters to the housewife persona to taking inspiration from actual social events and change as content for episodes of popular female led shows.

Rather than focusing on showcasing perfection of women and their role in the home and family, which was typically seen in popular television representations of women in shows airing at the time such as *Leave It To Beaver*, there were some show that opted to weave in political messaging and social conflict into their episode storylines.⁷ This inclusion of politically relevant content often occurred in a few popular shows of the time like *Bewitched* and *I Love Lucy*.⁸ Women began showing up in roles more centered on careers such as in the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* in the 1970s and even before that in the interest that the character of Lucy Ricardo showed in *I Love Lucy* to get a job, even if it was for one episode.⁹ Roles that had previously been exclusively for men, were being accepting of women both in reality and, in turn, on television. This allowed for women to make their voiced heard in a new way and with the second wave of feminism that was vastly approaching toward the end of the 1950s, women found power in this representation.¹⁰ Television shows during this time contained themes and characters with consideration to demonstrating that the women on television dealt with similar problems as the everyday American, which happened to be the target audience.¹¹

⁷ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018): 15-23.

⁸ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995): 3-17.

⁹ Katherine J.. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture*(Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011): 116-120.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 3-7.

¹¹ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018): 3-10.

To represent this shift toward equality in the workforce, some women chose to use their visibility to advocate for equality between men and women in all aspects of life, include fashion related constructs. In the early 1950s, Lucille Ball became one of the few women to wear pants on her own prime time sitcom television show.¹² While wearing pants may not seem to be such a monumental achievement for those of us currently consuming media in 2021, in 1950's America, women were expected to sport the uniform as prescribed for them and their duties within society. Rather than sporting the skirts and dresses within the wardrobe typically attributed as being acceptable for women, Mary Tyler Moore also challenged the imposed masculinity on pants during this time by sported pants frequently on episodes of the *Dick Van Dike Show*¹³, something that until then had not been done regularly in the television show setting. Pants meant movability, symbolic of those who worked. Up until this point, women had been portrayed mostly wearing shirts and dresses while doing their domestic tasks on television. This was just not realistic and while the women of America knew this to be the case, female characters were still made to wear these costumes which essentially maintained the popular facade at the time that all women were docile, passive, and objects. Mary Tyler Moore and Lucille Ball turned the heads of American television viewers by intentionally claiming traditionally masculine pants as a

¹² Anna Lebovic, "'How to Be in Fashion and Stay an Individual': American Vogue, the Origins of Second Wave Feminism and Mass Culture Criticism in 1950s America," *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (2019): 178–94. Ball and Moore's wardrobe choices allowed for the emergence of fashion as a tool in combating gender. Anna Lebovic's article, 'How to Be in Fashion and Stay an Individual,' was included in a spread of *American Vogue*. It concerned the "origins of second wave of feminism and mass culture Criticism in 1950s America," showcases this shift in the understanding of the female image from 1950s to the 1960s.¹² The ultimately shows this shift in culture and understanding of the female image as seen and propagated on TV and in society.

¹³ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018): 5.

piece of wardrobe for themselves. This in turn, equalized an aspect of traditionally male attire and forced the public to view pants as something available for any gender to sport.¹⁴

Through the visibility and influence of television shows, alternative narratives to women being a housewife were communicated to Americans and sparked change by making a new generation aware of their potential and voice. A woman was no longer only portrayed as one thing; she could be versatile; she could demand more. This was a message that a lot of little girls who grew up with the aspirations of becoming a middle-class homemaker, had not had the chance to be exposed to elsewhere. The impact of this influence and messaging is discussed in Susan J. Douglas's book, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*.¹⁵ Within this book, Douglas argues that the images and stereotypes represented on television had a lasting impact on the youth of American society at the time. She writes that many new faces were added to the screens of American youth at this time with attention to detail, saying that, "...female icons...the bohemian, the career girl, the folk singer, the Beatles fan, the perky TV teen—were about reputing certain prescribed female traits, like being docile, obedient, a political, and sexually passive."¹⁶ While this can be viewed as a negative stance on such representation, I disagree that by portraying women in these ways it in any way hindered their ability to advance during this time.

The exploration of the impressionable nature of the youth that was exposed to these images of women on television ultimately lead to ideals they held into adulthood is lacking in

¹⁴ Anna Lebocic, "'How to Be in Fashion and Stay an Individual': American Vogue, the Origins of Second Wave Feminism and Mass Culture Criticism in 1950s America," *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (2019): 178–94.

¹⁵ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 16.

specific instances and reasons behind the images people were exposed to. I believe that by approaching this topic from the standpoint that the times were changing for women and were being reflected in the media that was being put out. The mass cultural change from the 1950's to the 1960's influenced many aspects of American life. Susan Douglas gives insight into what growing up with these original female stereotypes perpetuated through every form of media was like, and describes the impact that this slight shift in narrative left not only on herself, but also millions of impressionable American men and women also being exposed to this propagated narrative.¹⁷ During this time, the changing ideals of the woman's role in society shifted drastically from passive domesticity to ambitious goal achieving as a result of the increase of interest among women to find work and careers outside of the home. Women were being portrayed as more than just a side character and this had a major impact on female advancement in American society. By discussing this shift in the cultural understanding of a woman's role as a character on television between the years of 1950 and 1970, as well as learning more about the women responsible for changing their own narrative, one can analyze the root cause and effect of the portrayal of America women on American television as well as its effects on those who consumed this form of media.

Part 2: Uncovering Inequalities

The representation of women in television at this time shifted the perspective of the capacities of women in society as well as those quickly joining the workforce. The exposure of seeing women on television, such as Mary Tyler Moore who played a journalist at a news station on her popular show named after her, performing jobs and having experiences that were

¹⁷ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995).

traditionally unavailable to them due to their sex was alarming for many people and demanded the utmost caution in its portrayal on television.¹⁸ The little girls who had grown up believing their only option and expectation was to aspire to lead traditionally domestic and simple lives were beginning to see that such a life was only so fulfilling. Seeking more was not out of the question and with the help of female role models both fictional and real, society in the United States ushered in the second wave of feminism.¹⁹ A narrative that women could be inspired by and find their passions in life from outside of the homes that they had been taught by society to want and make for themselves.

The shift in the feminine narrative as seen through the representation of women on television was drastically impactful for American women during the time period of the 1950s-1970s. Prior to the 1950s, in the few times when women were even included in shaping the narratives that television followed, causing to have female characters created in a way that was not representative of the female voice.²⁰ Seen in a study done by Luís Nunes Amaral, João Moreira, Murielle Dunand, et al...at Northwestern University entitled “Long-term patterns of gender imbalance in an industry without ability or level of interest differences,”²¹ the percentage of female writers, producers, and directors of popular American arts and television took a significant decreasing trend after the 1920s and did not begin increasing again until the mid

¹⁸ Katherine J. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011): 45-47.

¹⁹ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995).

²⁰ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

²¹ Luís A. Nunes Amaral et al., "Long-term Patterns of Gender Imbalance in an Industry without Ability or Level of Interest Differences," *Northwestern Research and Data Repository*, (April 2020).

1960s.²² Even after that, Amaral and his fellow contributors to the study found that typical representation of women in jobs dealing directly with contributions to the production and story of television within television remained lower than 1 in 20 women to men ratio.²³ Examples of these jobs include producers, directors, writers involved in major television networks and television production on the whole.

Knowing this, it is understandable that men were more likely to have a major contribution development of television shows which includes the creative power over the characters, which ultimately translates to having an effect on the portrayal of women in general, on screen during this time.²⁴ Based on these findings, those controlling the writing, directing, and production of television at the time consisted of one specific demographic who held control over the representation of all other representations of persons on television. Especially at a time when channels were incredibly limited, representation of any kind was a powerful thing.²⁵ These sitcoms led Americans to think of themselves, as well as a women's place in society, in a certain way, causing women to often fall into the role that had been created for them by men: the docile, passive, and heady mother, sister, or love interest.²⁶

This clear imbalance in representation only fueled the need for cultural change. As discussed in the collection, *Voices of the New Feminism*, at the time of this work's publication in 1970, only one-woman Senator out of 100 and 10 women in the House of Representative, which

²² Luís A. Nunes Amaral et al., "Long-term Patterns of Gender Imbalance in an Industry without Ability or Level of Interest Differences," *Northwestern Research and Data Repository*, (April 2020): 10.

²³ Ibid, 14.

²⁴ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

²⁵ Bill Ganzel, "Television" *Television During the 1950s and 60s* (2007).

²⁶ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

at the time held 435 seats.²⁷ This imbalance of representation had a lot to do with the legal inequalities that women faced under Federal law.²⁸ The one Congress woman as previously mentioned was a woman by the name of Martha Griffiths. Griffiths, although one of 10 women in among 425 men, was able to force her hand for women by advocating on the inequalities of federal laws concerning issues from social security taxes to the creation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This addition dealt specifically with the discrimination based on sex in any kind of employment becoming illegal.²⁹ When interviewed about her contributions to make equal many gender bias laws for *Voices of the New Feminism*, Griffiths stated, “These laws discriminate against women as workers. They are enacted and upheld as if women were not workers but the mothers, wives, or widows of the men who enacted them toward...”³⁰ It is for this reason that women who chose to work at this time were at such a disadvantage.

Not only were women not yet protected against gender discrimination in regard to working opportunities, but there were also many jobs that women were just simply not allowed to do. Generally, women were permitted only to apply for what were considered domestic jobs: teaching positions, childcare positions, secretarial work, assistant work, social work, etc.³¹ This greatly limited the freedoms of women in terms of choosing a career path and in the exertion of their potential and skills. Mary Lou Thompson, editor of *Voices of the New Feminism*, comments on this blatant discrimination noting that there are “better paying fields usually labeled “Help Wanted: Male,” such as repairing household appliances, or in professions such as medicine and

²⁷ Mary Lou Thompson and Lucinda Cisler, *Voices of the New Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 103.

²⁸ Ibid, 103.

²⁹ Ibid, 103.

³⁰ Ibid, 105.

³¹ "History," United States Department of Labor, accessed November 02, 2021, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/about/history>)

law.”³² Examples such as this commonplace barrier to entry for women into specific fields at this time due to gender discrimination was a battle that the working women of the 1950s-1970s were eager to change. How better to enact change than to inspire and challenge a nation to it through the influence of entertainment?

Part 3: Leading Ladies with Purpose

When analyzing the television content of the 1950s-1970s, three shows stood out as examples of how television began reflecting the evolution of the role of women that was occurring in the socio-political sphere in America. These three shows were *I Love Lucy*, *Bewitched*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the women who portray the lead roles evolve their characters to match the evolution of the women that tuned in every week to watch them. The mutual growth between the feminist movement and the female icons on popular television show is the most natural growth for an audience to see on screen.³³ It is what keeps television relevant and popular. These three shows managed to navigate particularly turbulent times by inserting political allusions and acknowledgements for their audience members to follow along with.

When it came to following a status quo in which women were expected to fulfill the sole role of caretaker for their house and family, there were some actresses who chose to fit the traditional narrative as outlined within Betty Friedan’s described society within the *Feminine Mystique*; however, Lucille Ball was not known to be one of them. Ball became famous for using her comedy and influence on television as a tool to empower women. She showed viewers that a housewife could be more than what society thought she was at the time. Ball used her wit and

³² Mary Lou Thompson and Lucinda Cisler, *Voices of the New Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 77-78.

³³ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

intellect to demonstrate strides toward equality between different genders as well as races through her marriage and character on and off screen of her very successful show.³⁴ As a woman on television, her narrative was heavily controlled not only by the values of the time, but the group who controlled the narrative. Most of the writers and directors who were involved in the making of her show were exclusively male at the beginning of the show's run and heavily impacted to create art that would sell both to the network as well as the people at home.³⁵ To do so, compromises were made to maintain an image for her character that was in comfortable accordance with the traditional images of women portrayed on television. However, when it came to certain aspects of their characters within their shows, actresses, like Mary Tyler Moore, Lucile Ball, and Elizabeth Montgomery, took the leap and decided to make their own personal ideals about female representation on television speak through the character as well as episode content.³⁶

Mary Tyler Moore was one of those women who spoke through her character's actions and script, as well as often providing suggestions for episode content.³⁷ *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* followed the underrepresented narrative of a young single businesswoman who begins the show unmarried and with a career in a field primarily dominated by men. Mary Tyler Moore was the perfect example of the young ambitious girl trope that had begun to be so popular in the

³⁴ "I Love Lucy Fast Facts," Lucille Ball Desi Arnaz Museum, March 05, 2021, accessed November 02, 2021.

³⁵ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

³⁶ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995): 67-80.

³⁷ "Mary Tyler Moore, Season 3, Episode 1 'The Good-Time News.'" (*YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2019).

media of the time;³⁸ she was also known for making statements with her wardrobe on the show.³⁹ When asked about their time on the show within interviews of the time, many of the women who did appear on popular talk shows, such as Elizabeth Montgomery's appearance on the Mike Douglas Show,⁴⁰ often, conversation lingered to the more traditional topics and considerations about what a woman would talk about. In the case of Montgomery's talk show appearance, throughout the course of her interview, Montgomery was asked very few questions that pertained to her work on the show. Rather than ask about the job or the character she was portraying on *Bewitched*, Mike Douglas opted to point out her husband's work as the director and the fact that she had recently become a mother; even at one point inquiring as to how she is able to adequately continue acting while having a child to take care of.⁴¹ This interview is merely one illustration of how confined women were to their traditional roles as mothers and wives even when they were clearly rebelling against such stereotypical lives. This is complexly lost on the interviewer, Mike Douglas, because during the time of this interview, the societal norm was not to see a woman's career as her priority.

While Montgomery did indeed have a family and was a mother, this was one aspect of her multifaceted personality that interviewer Mike Douglas chose to focus on. Because of the slow shift in the understanding of the role of women at the time, Mike Douglas, along with other popular interviewers, tended to stick to the comfortable and known territory when interviewing women.⁴² This included topics on family and motherhood, such as was demonstrated as the topic

³⁸ Katherine J. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011): 3-4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-14.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Montgomery and Mike Douglas, "The Mike Douglas Show," (April, 1966).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Katherine J. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011): 145-149.

of conversation from the interview as mentioned above. In support of this understanding of misunderstanding of the modern push for more equality between genders, Diana Miller argues in her article entitled “Masculinity in Popular Sitcoms, 1955-1960 and 2000-2005”⁴³ that the expectations of masculinity as showcased in popular sitcoms in the 1950s-1960s were also detrimental to the images of women that were being portrayed. It essentially brings up the fact that women were used as a foil to the men in sitcoms. Men were put in the roles of the masculine providers with little emotional availability while women were propagated as the emotional nurturer and domestically passive role. This is possibly because the other job of provider was already filled by the man, so to even out the home, the writers felt that men and women must be separate in their abilities. This was as much a reflection of the necessity of mirroring popular society at the time as it was a situation of convenience; however, this modern approach to looking at classic 1950s-1960s television does not account for the thoughts of the people who consumed it.⁴⁴ The reality of women leaving the home to pursue jobs and a life outside of their roles as mother and wife were just beginning to sweep the nation, as was the influence of such ideals on popular television.

Part 4: Mirroring Socio-Political Change

Women like Ball, Montgomery, and Moore used their representation on television at this time to provide visibility to social and political issues at this time that indirectly assisted the second wave of feminism that was taking hold in America in the 60s and 70s. Women on television at the time were playing these roles while grasping at whatever chance they could get

⁴³ Diana Miller, “Masculinity in Popular Sitcoms, 1955-1960 and 2000-2005.” *Culture, Society and Masculinities* 3, no. 2 (2011): 141–59.

⁴⁴ Laura Westengard and Aaron Barlow, *The 25 Sitcoms That Changed Television: Turning Points in American Culture* (Santa Barbara 2018).

to change their character's narrative from that of their parent's generation to one that better reflected the changing of the times. One that showed how women were not apathetic to important issues such as politics, careers, and their own liberties.⁴⁵ This ambition was not only a thought on the minds of the women representing American women on television at the time, but also heavily intertwined with the political and social atmosphere. This became abundantly clear in the mid 1960s when the Equal Rights Act was being drawn up and presented to Congress.⁴⁶

The Equal Rights Act of 1964 came at a time when much tension between women and minorities fighting for equality against a society rooted in sexism and racism. It also came into public interest shortly after President Kennedy created the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1963 to assess the state in which women were treated and supported by American society to better their living standard.⁴⁷ It was in 1963 that the Equal Pay Amendment was also added to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act. The amendment, that was signed by President Kennedy on June 10th, 1963, was meant to address gender pay disparity, aiming to create a more equitable labor force when it came to pay.⁴⁸ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Commerce, in 1968 there were over 29 million women working, making them approximately 40 percent of the workforce.⁴⁹ However, women were reported to be making 58.2 percent of what men were making in wages for doing much of the same jobs.⁵⁰ The humor that made sitcoms so

⁴⁵ Katherine J. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011): 132-133.

⁴⁶ Mary Lou Thompson and Lucinda Cisler, *Voices of the New Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971): 77-80.

⁴⁷ United States. President's Commission on the Status of Women. *American Women: Report of the President's Commission On the Status of Women* (1963).

⁴⁸ "History," United States Department of Labor, accessed November 02, 2021.

⁴⁹ Mary Lou Thompson and Lucinda Cisler, *Voices of the New Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971): 77.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 77.

popular with the American people thrived upon bolstering these issues surrounding the unequal status of women and minorities as the lesser group; however, in the latter half of the 1960s into the 1970s, television began addressing concerns such as those surrounding the equitable treatment of workers regardless of their gender as well as the necessity to pay people equally if two are doing the same job, regardless of gender.

Noted as the second wave of Feminism, this social movement throughout the 1960s-1970s aimed to establish a more equal place for women within America society. The position that women had been occupying in the American public until then had until then been often subordinately trading behind the patriarchal driven system. This was a time in which women began to make their voices heard by getting involved more in the work force and putting themselves in positions of power and visibility. Being a leading lady on screen was just one of these ways that actresses like Ball, Montgomery, and Moore were able to gift themselves to the narrative of women who were challenging the status quo. It was more common for women to be finding roles outside of being an obligatory caretaker for others and began finding ways to take care of themselves. As Susan Douglas remarks in her book, *Where the Girls Are*, "Since viewers had been socialized to regard female sexuality as monstrous, television producers address the anxieties about letting it loose by domesticating the monster, by making her pretty...and playing the...situation for laughs."⁵¹ This display of feminine power, although it was revelation art, was fraught with the implication that women were capable of much more than their male counter parts were allowing them display or utilize. This became a major topic of the time, even

⁵¹ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 126.

eventually being addressed by specific legislation during the Kennedy administration which was lobbied to do something the address such inequality.

While adhering to the understanding of what a typical suburban couple should demonstrate in their day to day lives, *I Love Lucy*, with the help of the title actress herself Lucille Ball, managed to charter unknown territory for a daytime television show. Actor Desi Arnaz, who also happened to be married to Ball during the entirety of the show's run, was a Cuban American man; making *I Love Lucy* the first show to feature a multiracial marriage on American Television.⁵² By including this element, *I Love Lucy* expanded representation on the show to include more members of American viewers, while still catering to known and comfortable representation of the typical American and American family most often seen on screen at the time.

The challenging of the legal and social constructs surrounding interracial marriages in America at the time was met with disdain by much of the American people. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz were pioneers on television and in American society for interracial partnerships as they were married many years before the landmark court case in 1967, *Loving v Virginia*.⁵³ In this case it was ruled unconstitutional to prohibit interracial marriages under the Equal Protection and Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment.⁵⁴ With a decision such as this more than a decade in the future from when *I Love Lucy* first aired, the ideas surrounding marriage between people of different ethnicities and nationalities was not something that much of the American public was widely accepting of. After concerns were raised about potential negative response from the viewers on Arnaz's background as well as the couple's relationship within the show were raised,

⁵² "I Love Lucy." *The Aggie*, 28 Nov. 2016, <https://theaggie.org/2016/11/27/i-love-lucy/>.

⁵³ "Loving v. Virginia." Oyez. Accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1966/395>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Ball had to convince the network to hire Arnaz and air the show with an interracial couple.⁵⁵ While this was no fight within a court of law like in the case of the landmark decision in *Loving v Virginia* to come, Ball's decision to fight the network on the issue of hiring Arnaz proved to be instrumental in providing one of the more diverse casts on television at the time. Ultimately, Arnaz went on to star for the entirety of the shows run alongside his then wife, making television history while also opening the door to a more diverse and inclusive narrative of storytelling for the show and its viewers.⁵⁶ Very few multiracial actors were included in the television industry as actors on screen, so the representation that Arnaz was providing for people of color as well as immigrants at the time of the shows release was very impactful for both the network's understanding of the representation of diverse actors and their stories as well as the audiences understanding of this diversity.

Ball continued to challenge the television sphere to include more relevant material within the show that mirrored realistic and underrepresented stories the American social climate during the shows run. When Lucille Ball was pregnant during the filming of the first season of *I Love Lucy*, her real-life pregnancy was incorporated into the show. This not only made her the first female character in an American sitcom to openly discuss and show pregnancy, but also put her in the position to illustrate to viewers that women could be successful within their careers while navigating also motherhood. Radio and television columnist, Jack Gould of The New York Times remarked in a 1953 spread of his, "Far from ridiculing motherhood, "I Love Lucy" has made it appear one of the most natural and normal things in the world."⁵⁷ This praise of the show

⁵⁵ "Filming the I Love Lucy Show." *American Cinematographer*, The American Society of Cinematographers, Jan. 1952, <https://ascmag.com/articles/filming-the-i-love-lucy-show>

⁵⁶ "Desilu: The Story of an Empire." *Parade* magazine, October 13, 1957. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷ Jack Gould, "Weekly Radio and Television Column," (New York Times, January 16, 1953): 1.

extended to that of how Ball chose to portray her character through periods in which her womanhood and motherhood was on through pregnancy.

As many viewers had yet to experience such a candid look into the subject on national television, Lucille Ball was making history while placing herself as a role model for women who wanted to prove their multifaceted nature of retaining their identities while also taking on the traditional roles of motherhood. As described in Kristi Rowan Humphry's analytical book, *Housework and Gender in American Television*, the constructs of feminism and motherhood at this point in history tended to find themselves either at odds or in a balancing act of switching between roles; there was no example of how to do both.⁵⁸ Humphry's understanding of how women were viewed at this time was certainly put to the test within the *I Love Lucy Show's* plot quite often, giving viewers a female model of a multifaceted woman. Lucille Ball was a wife, a mother, an actress, and a comedian. Just because she was all of those things did not lessen her ability to do one over the other. It merely set her priorities in a slightly different path.⁵⁹

Through the pretense of comedy, The *I Love Lucy* show was able to showcase an alternative and multicultural American experience on air and do so in a conscious and understanding way for the audience it was appealing to. In an article from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published shortly after the show's pilot episode aired, the newspaper reported that,

⁵⁸ Kristi Rowan Humphreys, *Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean*. (Lexington Books, 2016): 8-10.

⁵⁹ An example of this compromise comes from the fact that while filming the show, Ball and Arnaz were adamant about filming the show in Los Angeles, due to the fact that their home was there and they wanted to be around for their daughter while not filming the show. This was odd for the time considering that most of the popular sitcoms in America were being filmed live on the East coast, specifically in New York, due to demand and the inability to broadcast to areas outside of a certain range. Knowing this, the couple held firm with the network that they would work out of the city that they lived in, coincidentally pulling more studios to film in the Los Angeles area.

“while the show won’t win any prizes for advancing the art of television, it’s bound to make a hit with viewers.”⁶⁰ While this blurb did acutely predict the way in which the show would be received by viewers, it grossly underestimated the impact that the *I Love Lucy* show would have on television and American popular culture surrounding not only the beginnings of the second wave of feminism, but the reconstruction of the understanding of American life.

Part 5: Bolstering the Advancement of Women Through Strategically Political Television

This newfound freedom that women were experiencing in the world was being reflected in the television that they consumed. However, like their new liberties, female characters on popular television series were not simply give unbridled liberation from traditional female expectations. While the number of main female leads starring on their own primetime American television shows increased significantly in the 1960s, the control and power that they were given was no more than falsified powers firmly held in the captivity of the male gaze.

“All of the sudden, female characters in TV sitcoms were capable of magic. They had fantastic supernatural powers. This is more than just the ultimate in kitsch or the triumphs of special effects. If we put these TV shows and the impulses behind them on a shrink’s couch for a minute, we see that a significant proportion of the pop-culture moguls were trying to acknowledge the impending release of female sexual and political energy, while keeping it all safely in a straitjacket.”⁶¹

Whenever women, like Samantha from *Bewitched*, used these powers outside the home, in the public sphere, the male world was turned completely upside down.” This was the common trope given to most of the female driven, popular shows in the 60s. Women were finally given power and liberation, but only in such a way that did not affect public spaces. “Seemingly normal

⁶⁰ Walter Annenberg, editor. “I Love Lucy Premier.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, (22 Oct. 1951): 22–22.

⁶¹ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995): 126.

looking female characters possessed magical powers, which men begged them not to use; if women did use them, their powers had to be confined to the private sphere."⁶² Characters, such as Samantha from *Bewitched*, were capable of extraordinary things that their male counterparts were not. To keep the patriarchal side of society at ease with this major gift of power to the typically oppressed gender, they surround these characters with rules about when and how they were supposed to use their powers. Majority of the conflicts that occurred on these TV shows or because the woman was using her powers without the man's permission, and outside of the home.

These inequalities were on display in the sitcom *Bewitched*, which successfully navigated being independent of the status quo of the time, while also allowing women to be seen as being capable of more than what they appear. The show follows the newly married couple Samantha and Darrin Stevens in their day to day lives. Everything about them appears normal to the outside world; however, Samantha is anything but normal: she is a witch. In Season 1 Episode 1 of the show, *Bewitched*, moments after she informs her husband that she is a witch, Samantha is instructed to bury that side of herself and never use her magic again now that she is married: thus beginning the major reoccurring conflict of the show.

The plot of each episode follows a similar pattern; Darin or those around him create a problem for the Stevens and Samantha attempts to use her powers to fix it, but ends up making it worse. The episode always ends with a heartfelt lesson on not meddling with situations and Samantha gives her signature nose wiggle as she cheats by using her magic to successfully complete housework. Samantha is a representation of the transitional idea of the changing

⁶² Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 125-126.

expectations of women in society. Often, her husband is the real one making himself look like a fool rather than Samantha as she tries to fix things with her magical intervention. This understanding of the double standards for men and women in the show is discussed at length within Susan Douglas's work *Were the Girls Are*. Douglas argues that writers of *Bewitched* carefully crafted a family friendly show that maintained the understood normalcies of married life at the time while also introducing the whimsy of Samantha's powers, but in doing so, held a tighter leash on the character herself.⁶³

In her critical analysis of the show, Douglas affirms that, "Samantha embodied important contradictions...She was at once traditional and modern."⁶⁴ Faced with the sudden and intense changes surrounding women's role in America, Samantha's character on the show began falling a bit behind in the times on the show as other popular television shows began showcasing their women getting jobs and being independent. Samantha, already set in her narrative, would have been disingenuous to begin changing to meet the modern audience's approval. Caught between compromising their classic character and losing their audience for the show, producers decided to introduce a new kind of woman entirely. In season 2 episode 18, Samantha gives birth to a daughter, named Tabitha, and her cousin, Serena, is introduced as a new character within the show.⁶⁵ Both of these events prove to be significant, because the show was able to represent Samantha as a mother and introduce motherhood as a theme for later episodes, while also introducing Serena as an answer to the need to modernize the show with the times. Serena is

⁶³ Susan J Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995): 126-133.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 128.

⁶⁵ "Bewitched S02E18 "And Then There Were Three"," Dailymotion, March 10, 2018, accessed November 02, 2021.

introduced as a foil to Samantha and is also played by Montgomery herself. By maintaining the lead character's personal integrity and introducing her opposite in the form of a character played by the same main actress, the writers and producers of *Bewitched* made the best of their situational need to progress with the times.⁶⁶ While Samantha continued to represent traditional womanhood and the ideals of the previous generation, Serena became the face of the new age as a single and strong female character with little regard for following the status quo. This was the type of character that the public was beginning to express a desire for seeing as such shifts in the understanding of femininity were playing out in America's socio-political sphere.

In an appearance on *The Merv Griffin Show* in December of 1970, Elizabeth Montgomery discussed her favorite episode of *Bewitched*, "Sisters at Heart."⁶⁷ It was revealed on this talk show appearance that the concept for the episode came from a real life interaction that Montgomery and Ashner, who were at the time married and working on the show together, had with a fan of the show. The premise of the episode follows Samantha and Darren's daughter, Tabitha, and a friend of hers from school named Lisa. Tabitha and Lisa encounter a bully on their playground who makes fun of the pair for being friends because Tabitha is white, and Lisa black. Tabitha eventually settles the issue with the bully by using her witchcraft to give her and her friend polka dots on their skin to prove that they are in fact the same after all, and that what they look like should not have to prove their equality. Montgomery commented on her pride for the episode saying that, "There were times when I certainly would have liked to have gotten a little bit more political. But there were certain parameters that we could not pass...the feeling

⁶⁶ Douglas, Susan J. *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995) p.126-133.

⁶⁷ Herbie Pilato, *Twitch Upon a Star. The Bewitched Life and Career of Elizabeth Montgomery* (Lanham: Taylor Pub., 2013): 212-215.

that *Maybe if I do help [it] wouldn't be so bad if the end result was okay.*"⁶⁸ Through this statement, Montgomery voices the problem that many actors faced at the time; that they understood their potential for good by speaking up about certain politically relevant issues, yet understood that within their role as actors, it was difficult to distinguish when it was socially acceptable to do so, and when it was overstepping.

During the height of the civil rights movement, the *Bewitched* episode "Sisters at Heart" demonstrated solidarity and the expulsion of prejudice between races. The episode was met with both criticism and praise from the public, with the latter being the reason show won a Governor's Award at the *23rd Emmy Awards*.⁶⁹ Montgomery voiced in this interview the key point surrounding the additions of characters and difficult themes to the series in their attempt to connect with their audiences, saying "*Bewitched* was not about cleaning up house, zapping up the toast...and flying around the room. It was about...difficult relationship[s]."⁷⁰ By showcasing These relationships, *Bewitched* earned itself and the *ABC* network a place in America's heart. The show's popularity jump started the network's recognition, allowing for it to produce many successful shows and beginning the legacy that allows the network to still be a prominent channel today.⁷¹

It is notable that *Bewitched* first aired not so long after the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, a work in which ordinary middle-class women were given a voice and a platform to discuss the ways in which the mundane feminine role they found themselves

⁶⁸ Herbie Pilato, *Twitch Upon a Star. The Bewitched Life and Career of Elizabeth Montgomery*(Lanham: Taylor Pub., 2013): 214.

⁶⁹ "Nominees / Winners 1971," Television Academy, [PAGE], accessed November 02, 2021, <https://www.emmys.com/awards/nominees-winners/1971>)

⁷⁰ Herbie Pilato, *Twitch Upon a Star. The Bewitched Life and Career of Elizabeth Montgomery*(Lanham: Taylor Pub., 2013): 214.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 209.

confined to within American society was suffocating and untenable. The confinement describes by Friedan as well as the many women she interviewed throughout the course of her work affirmed the broken nature of the current role of women as homemakers and housewives. The same audiences that were reading Friedan's work were also being exposed to the popular sitcoms of the time such as *Bewitched*. As Friedan demonstrated, this type of lifestyle was being ushered out by women who wanted more than to be confined to a singular role. Women wanted to show their multifaceted natures as more than just nurturers. Viewers were tuning into a representation of an American experience for women in which compromises were beginning to be made on both sides of marital relationships.

Part 6: Visibility for Working Women

By playing the role of Samantha Stevens, Elizabeth Montgomery received appreciation outside the show for her role model appearance on television for female viewers from critics and interviewers alike. In the previously mentioned interview on *The Mike Douglas Show*, Douglas interviewed Montgomery on the challenges and success of playing the role as well as how it was affecting her personal life, referencing her motherhood and asking if her two occupations, one as a mother and the other as an actress, often clashed. Her reply was more directed toward the work aspect of her role in the show but was very forthcoming on the challenges of balancing motherhood and a career.⁷² By talking candidly about her experiences on her popular television show, being a career woman while also balancing such a thing with motherhood is yet another way in which she illustrated feminine strength outside of her character. When asked very little about her work and more about her family within the interview, she politely diverted the conversation back to the work. By doing this, she shown a light on the nature of women in the

⁷² Elizabeth Montgomery and Mike Douglas, "The Mike Douglas Show," (April, 1966).

workplace as always carrying around the stigma of being a homemaker rather than a contributor to the workforce.

With a surge of women entering the workforce in the 1960-1970, representation of women shifted on screen to fit this new understanding of feminism that was developing. The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* introduced a character to American television that embodied the persona of an independent single women which was becoming an increasingly appealing lifestyle for young American women of the time. In her book, *Those Girls*,⁷³ Katherine Lehman argues the appeal of being single and independent for the women of the 60s and 70s. As middle-class women were diverging from the previously widely accepted path from youth to marriage and starting a family, to pursuing careers and living independently and nomadically, the stories of these women were made more relevant. This liberation was a phenomenon among young girls as well as the youthful generation of Americans who did not want to be tied to their mothers' limited path in life. Converging conveniently at this time with the beginnings of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* on television, this show illustrated the experience of these women as well as the challenges and successes they encountered by diverging from the traditional view of womanhood into the second wave of feminism's understanding of women as trying to be equal contributors to society as their male counterparts.

As demonstrated in the plot of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, more women were joining the workforce and occupying previously unattainable jobs for their sex. When analyzing the rate at which women were entering into these jobs, the statistics gathered by the Bureau of Labor Management reported that "In 1950, the overall participation rate of women was 34 per-cent.

⁷³ Katherine J. Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture*(Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas., 2011).

The rate rose to 38 percent in 1960, 43 percent in 1970,...” in their centennial report entitled *Labor Force Change*.⁷⁴ Being a these statistics were an indication of the rapid growth of female representation in the American labor force, this change report was the manifestation of the desire to contribute to society in a way that women up until that point has not had the opportunity to do. This is precisely the premise of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which happens to be a television show that exposed American women to the realities that faced working women in this time. This exposure opened a new narrative that had been yet to grace the television screens of American society.

This new narrative for working women at the time as seen *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* follows Mary Richards as the first associate producer of a prominent news station. As seen in Episode 1, Season 3, “The Good Time News,” Moore’s character on the show remarks that her role at times makes he feel as if she now “represent[s] women everywhere.” Along with the equal treatment of men and women in other spheres, the wage gap was becoming an increasingly hot button issue that many men and women alike were bringing to turn their attention to. This was indeed the case when within the show her character chose to make known the stance on the importance of equal pay. In this very same episode, Mary finds out that she is being paid \$50 less per week than her male predecessor. A debate is sparked in the office of Mary’s boss upon learning this, and Mary confronts her boss and says in what is now considered a revolutionary line for women on television, “Mr. Grant, there is no good reason why two people doing the same job at the same place shouldn't be making the same.”⁷⁵ This quote demonstrates the

⁷⁴ *A Century of Change: The U.S. Labor Force, 1950-2050*.
<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2002/05/art2full.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Leotaoctavia 2694, “Mary Tyler Moore S03E01 The Good Time News - Dailymotion Video,” Dailymotion, March 27, 2021, accessed November 02, 2021.

eagerness to address political issues and injustices for women in the workforce at the time by the show and those involved in its production.

The discussion of such politically relevant issues such as the wage gap within *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* cemented the legacy of the show in talking sociopolitical storylines that mirrored the important current events of the time. The show became the first sitcom in which the wage gap was discussed on American television.⁷⁶ Not only that, but the character demonstrates the ability and desire to discuss the current reasoning behind why such a gap existed. For every reason thrown her way, Mary was ready with a counter agreement, actively piecing together and making a case for women who might not have been able to themselves at the time. While debating, Mr. Grant stated that men are more likely to have a family to feed and that is why they are paid higher, telling Mary that the man in the job before her, “had a family to support, you don’t.”⁷⁷ Mary counters this with the fact that, “Financial need has nothing to do with it. In order to be consistent with what you are saying, you would have to pay the man with three children more than the man with two children; the married man more than the bachelor, and Mr. Grant, you do not do that.”⁷⁸ Not only does Mary make a sound case for herself and eventually gain the same pay as her male predecessor was making, she illustrates the tension surrounding the inequalities that woman were facing in the workforce at the time.

The Mary Tyler Moore Show positioned itself in the conversation surrounding current political policy and strides towards equality such as the Equal Rights Amendment, within which

⁷⁶ Jim McKairnes, "'The Mary Tyler Moore Show' Turns 50: Love Is (still) All around for the Trailblazing Sitcom," USA Today, September 18, 2020, accessed November 02, 2021).

⁷⁷ Leota Octavia 2694, "Mary Tyler Moore S03E01 The Good Time News - Dailymotion Video," Dailymotion, March 27, 2021, accessed November 02, 2021.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the wage gap between men and women was discussed in depth.⁷⁹ In an attempt to move towards the same kinds of ideals that Mary Tyler Moore was demonstrating through her character on the show, so too was the United States government making progress on an amendment to the constitution that was designed to even the ground between genders. The Equal Rights Amendment was approved by the Senate in March of 1972 and sent to the states for ratification.⁸⁰ By including this conflict within the first episode of the third season of this show, the producers and writers of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* jointed the conversation in the lighthearted fashion that they used to tackle other socio-politically relevant issues throughout the run of the show.

Moore's character became a representation of the experience of the single young women, doing what many considered a risky move for women in the workforce; she argued with her boss on the issue of the fair and unbiased pay of women. Earlier in the show, it is explicitly stated that the reason she is paid less than her predecessor is because she is a woman.⁸¹ Ultimately, Mary argues her way into a pay increase worth of her position and with the idea in mind that equal pay in the workplace was possible and worth fighting for. This is not a stance that many women were able to take at the time due to the instability of their positions in the work place, but as Mary had been shown to have a good relationship with those she worked with as well as having the qualifications and status at the news station that she worked at, she was able to stand up to her boss and prove that women should be upset about being expected to take less than their male counterparts for doing the same work. While there is a bit of dancing around the subject in order

⁷⁹ "Equal Rights Amendment," Equal Rights Amendment, [PAGE], accessed November 02, 2021, <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/>)

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Mary Tyler Moore, Season 3, Episode 1 'The Good-Time News.'" *YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2019.

to placate the audience's need to feel comfortable around such a touchy subject by adding in the carefully times comedic elements, Mary eventually gets the salary that she deserves through her advocacy for herself. By doing so, she gave women the inspiration to do the same.⁸²

In season three of the Mary Tyler Moore Show entitled "You've Got a Friend,"⁸³ without the mention of contraceptive pills directly, Mary alludes to the fact that she does indeed take birth control, a contraceptive option that had only been available for public use since 1960 when the pill was first approved by the FDA,⁸⁴ and was widely stigmatized at the time. In a brief interaction with her mother in the episode, Moore responds to her after being reminded to take her pill, that she will not forget to.⁸⁵ The understanding that the two women are referring to two entirely different pills, in the mother's case, medication, and in Mary's case, birth control, is alluded to through the physical comedy and audience's reaction to the scene, though never really confirmed by lines spoken.⁸⁶ This mention of the pill in the form of a joke was effective at indirectly affirming her stance on the issues surrounding reproductive health knowledge of her as a single woman as well as maintaining the lighthearted feel of the show that allowed for the careful discussion of such current relevant topics. This detail within the show also gives rise to the possibility of Mary's understanding of sexual health in general, ultimately de-stigmatizing the sexual liberation of women, specifically young single women such as Mary and the women she was inadvertently representing.

⁸² "Women's Annual Earnings Are Substantially Lower than Those of Men": Statistical Studies on Women Workers. 4. U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, (Oct. 1966)

⁸³ "Mary Tyler Moore, Season 7, Episode 1 'You've Got a Friend.'" (*YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2019).

⁸⁴ "The Birth Control Pill: A History," Planned Parenthood, June 2015, accessed November 1, 2021, https://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/1514/3518/7100/Pill_HistoryFactSheet.pdf

⁸⁵ "Mary Tyler Moore, Season 7, Episode 1 'You've Got a Friend.'" (*YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2019).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Concluding Remarks:

Television evolved with the social and political climate of the 1950s 1970s and this is evident in the instances from the three shows carefully analyzed within this thesis. The American audience gained exposure to the stories and experiences of women that had not so candidly been portrayed in the public forum before these representations had been presented through characters such as Lucy Ricardo, Samantha Stevens, and Mary Richards in their respective shows, *I Love Lucy*, *Bewitched*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Each of these shows tackled their own relevant sociopolitical content for their time by attempting to normalize their characters' understanding and stance on political and social issues, most often of which mirrored those issues that were currently unfolding in America. The content that was being discussed was intentionally in line with many modern subjects that concerned the advancement of women and society on the whole.

I Love Lucy, *Bewitched*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* all aired during times of political and social unrest, making television the perfect stage for the women portraying the idealized all American Woman to take back this image and reinvent it in the modern and evolving image that was beginning to be gain traction in American society. On and off screen, women were fighting for the right to representation that men successfully monopolized up until this point in history. Women were demanding representation in government, the workforce, and many other facets of American life that had been deemed unfit for their gender to participate in until this evolution took hold in the 50s and has been carried out into modern society. Lucille Ball made it unacceptable for people to discount the character of Lucy Ricardo due of her status as a more traditionally mundane housewife; a role that was representative of so many 50s women's experience. Ball was a comedian and made Americans at home who tuned in

religiously to watch her deliver her jokes as she and her husband singlehandedly tried to tackle the job of promoting tolerance for multi-racial people and relationships in the United States during a time of political opposition and skepticism to both. It was not enough for Samantha Stevens to be a housewife who followed the whims of her husband. She possessed secret magical powers that could get her whatever she wanted with the wrinkle of her nose. She held more power in her pinky than her mortal husband did in his whole body but instead showed grace and understanding rather than feed into the temptation of power or let it get in the way of her relationship. And lastly but most certainly not least, it was not enough for Mary Richards to not live up the expectations of an industry predominated by men. She rose in the ranks and tackled the socio-political injustices that women faced in the workplace during the rise of their involvement in such a sphere.

The television of the 1950s -1970s brought to light that it was not good enough for America to leave half of its population behind. Through micro adjustments to the representation of women on screen, such as the seemingly insignificant shift in wardrobe choices as a form of protest against the gendering of pants, the women of television sitcoms ranging from 1951-1977 found a voice through their characters and the influence they held by playing them. It is for this reason, that the storylines of America's most beloved sitcoms trace the events of the second wave of feminism. It was not good enough to be left behind, because for the sake of mutual advancement, women belong in all the rooms they had been excluded from up until this point in history. Television's influence and impact on the perpetuation of change for American women represented the evolving role women were playing within American society, and opened avenues for the advancement of women for generations to come.

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