

Red Lipstick, Red Scares: Women's Magazines and the Cold War

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Introduction

On August 6, 1945, a modified Boeing B-29 Superfortress, called the Enola Gay, dropped the atomic bomb nicknamed “Little Boy” on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Pilot Colonel Paul Tibbets named the plane after his mother.¹ Meanwhile, the bomb’s name evoked the image of a child. Together, this small weaponized family helped the United States win the Second World War. The names of the aircraft and bomb, combined with their purpose, allude to one of the Cold War era’s most enduring institutions: the nuclear family and its weaponization.

The Cold War resulted in the weaponization of each member of the family. This thesis focuses on wives and mothers specifically. Writer Phillip Wylie drew and employed part of the above connection in his 1954 book *Tomorrow*, which he dedicated to the Federal Civil Defense Administration. The novel follows three women who dominate the men in their lives. They also refuse to take the Soviet threat seriously and oppose civil defense measures. When nuclear war erupts, one mother is grotesquely killed while the other two lose their children and sustain serious injuries.² Although Wiley’s work took the concept to an unsettling extreme, it portrayed the substantial responsibilities women held in the nuclear age. This high level of responsibility indicated that women also held great power during the Cold War. Their actions could either fortify the nation against the Soviets or leave it susceptible to them.

Political scientists Michael Rogin interpreted the bomb and aircraft’s names as representative of a mother’s ability to unleash her son’s destructive power. Mom’s influence (the Enola Gay) over her son (the atomic bomb) helped end World War II, yet also resulted in the

¹ J. Kinney, “75 years ago: The Flight of the Enola Gay,” Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/75-years-ago-flight-enola-gay>.

² Michael Rogin, “Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies,” *Representations*, no. 6 (1984): pp. 7-8.

deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. This was symbolic of the belief that mothers could both save and endanger entire nations. The ability to deploy the destructive potential of motherhood was not unique to the United States, and by 1949, neither was the possession of nuclear weapons.

The United States sought to protect itself from the Soviet Union by establishing and projecting an attractive national identity. The nuclear family played an integral role in such efforts. Likewise, conservative gender roles formed the foundation of the nuclear family. Therefore, the capitalist nation often attacked Soviet home life and gender when attempting to assert American superiority. This thesis explores the consequences of such actions by addressing the following questions: How were Soviet and American women portrayed in U. S. magazines? Does evaluating the ways in which Soviet women existed in American imaginations enhance scholars' understanding of American women and their nuclear families? How did the nuclear family evolve alongside American perceptions of Soviet ones? What do these analyses reveal about women's roles in the Cold War?

To answer these questions, this thesis discusses the thoughts and behaviors of "Americans" frequently. The term is employed in a general sense. Of course, this does not accurately reflect the diversity within the American population nor in public opinion which existed at this time. This is intentional, as the following analysis is primarily concerned with the version of the U. S. depicted in propaganda and presented to the world. Such propaganda intentionally omitted certain members and aspects of American society to appear more successful and united. Similarly, this paper's analysis of the Soviet Union is exclusively based off American portrayals of the nation. This was done in an attempt to recreate the U. S. S. R. as it existed in the American imagination—not in reality.

In terms of time, this thesis looks at depictions of Soviet women from about 1953 to 1964. By the mid-1950s, anticommunism was fervent but McCarthyism had largely died out. Consequently, Americans did not convey admiration for Soviet women, but they did not excessively villainize them either. This slight ease in Cold War tensions can be attributed to the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and rise of Nikita Khrushchev. Americans could detect hints of the de-Stalinization occurring behind the Iron Curtain. There was also proof of a thaw in tension, as the two superpowers engaged in cultural exchange. In 1959, the wives of Vice President Richard Nixon, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, and Anastas Mikoyan graced the cover of an August edition of *Life* magazine.³ The women smiled as they stood arm-in-arm. Pat Nixon had accompanied her husband on his famous trip to the Soviet Union. In addition to meeting with the wives of Soviet officials, the second lady visited schools, comforted hospital patients, and handed out candy to children.⁴ Nina Khrushchev would engage in similar activities during her husband's visit to the United States that September. Both of these trips reflect the thaw in tensions between Washington and Moscow. They also highlight the diplomatic contributions of the wives of prominent world leaders. Richard and Nikita may have held the governmental positions, but Pat and Nina made the cover.

Although progressive, this diplomacy did not erase fears of nuclear annihilation. When surveyed in 1959, "two out of three Americans listed the possibility of nuclear war as the nation's most urgent problem."⁵ The same edition of *Life* included the "sheltered honeymoon" of Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Mininson. Instead of a traditional vacation, the newlyweds chose to spend

³ *Life*, August 10, 1959.

⁴ "The Vice President in Moscow: A Barnstorming Masterpiece," *Life*, August 10, 1959, pp. 26, 27.

⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 2nd Ed, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), p. 26.

the first two weeks of their marriage in a bomb shelter.⁶ Historian Elaine Tyler May opens her classic analysis of the nuclear family, *Homeward Bound*, with this stunt. May describes the Mininson's non-traditional honeymoon as perfectly encapsulating the relationship between Cold War tensions and American families.⁷

Historiography

Homeward Bound was first published in 1988. Since then, Elaine Tyler May's work has served as the foundation for nearly all studies of the postwar American family. Historian Jane Sherron De Hart called May "especially influential," and described her book as a "pathbreaking study of white middle-class family life." In "Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality and National Identity in Cold War America," De Hart reviews the metaphor of domestic containment central to *Homeward Bound*'s argument. May states "containment was the key to security," as it related to both Geroge F. Kennan's policy for preventing Soviet expansion and protecting American families from subversive activity. De Hart evaluates if the term appropriately conveys the relationship between family life and national politics during the Cold War. She does not discount May's metaphor or argument, yet she ponders if domestic containment was a policy unique to the era of American-Soviet rivalry. Does post-Cold War "pressure for gender and sexual containment," characteristic of modern conservative movements, mean the war is not truly over? Or is domestic containment always present during attempts to form a strong national identity? De Hart leans towards the latter explanation.⁸

⁶ "Their Sheltered Honeymoon," *Life*, 10 August 1959, pp. 51-52.

⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 1.

⁸ Jane Sherron De Hart, "Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality and National Identity in Cold War America," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press), 2001, pp. 144-146.

Scholar Stephanie Coontz also analyzed the nuclear family in her 1992 book *The Way We Never Were*. The title alone indicates that Coontz looks at the topic with a more critical lens than May. Neither historian believes the nuclear family truly existed in the manner propaganda alleged it did, yet Coontz takes a more overtly critical stance. She is trying to prove that no era from the past, certainly not the 1950s, should serve as the blueprint for the future. Meanwhile, May is more concerned with domesticity's interactions with Cold War politics and the circumstances and emotions which drew Americans to it. Stephanie Coontz and Elaine Tyler May both determine that there was, and is, an extreme disconnect between traditional depictions of the nuclear family and the realities of marriage and parenthood during that time.

Many other works follow Coontz's example and address the hard truths of the atomic age. The Lavender Scare and early Civil Rights Movement have received decent scholarship. These pieces often juxtapose the wholesome depictions of the nuclear family with the struggles faced by millions of queer and non-white Americans. The antiradicalism which underlaid the ideal domicile also fueled homophobic and racist movements. Modern trends, like the debate surrounding critical race theory, have inspired and highlighted works on this topic. If the nuclear family was quintessentially American and widely remembered with fondness, what does this reveal about race in the United States? A similar question can be asked about homosexuality. This thesis will not answer these questions. It will, however, offer insight into why white heterosexual couples became so important to America's national identity and why other citizens were excluded from Cold War propaganda.

The most recent publication exploring depictions of women in Cold War propaganda is Diana Cucuz's *Winning Women's Hearts and Minds: Selling Cold War Culture in the US and the USSR*, published in 2023. Cultural historians of the Cold War often refer to the conflict as a

competition for hearts and minds. Cucuz takes a look at the attempts to win over the hearts and minds of slightly over half the population. After tremendous wartime losses, “women ages 20 to 39 outnumbered men in the Soviet Union by 10.2 million in 1946.”⁹ The United States also had more women than men, but not to such a dramatic extent.¹⁰ In both nations, women made up more than half of the population and did a majority of household chores, shopping, and child rearing. Therefore, governmental and propaganda agencies needed to understand and appeal to wives and mothers most of all. A scholar cannot fully comprehend the nature of Cold War competition without possessing at least a basic understanding of the era’s main homemakers and consumers. Cucuz goes far beyond a basic understanding as she explores the ways in which the United States portrayed its women to foreign audiences. Historian Robert Griswold, on the other hand, studied how Americans depicted Soviet women in his essay “‘Russian Blonde in Space’: Soviet Women in the American Imagination, 1950-1965.”

This paper intends to highlight the connections which existed between depictions of Soviet women in American periodical literature, anticommunism, the nuclear family, and women’s overall contributions to the Cold War. Many works explore one or two of these topics, few explore all four. The following analysis relies and expands on the concepts established by the aforementioned historians, particularly May and Griswold. In doing so, it will show that reviewing the way major aspects of the Cold War—anticommunism, media, politics, and more—involved women is first and foremost an act of Cold War studies, not just women’s history.¹¹

⁹ Elizabeth Brainerd, “The Lasting Effect of Sex Ratio Imbalance on Marriage and Family: Evidence from World War II in Russia,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 99, no. 2 (2017): p. 230.

¹⁰ “Cut in Male Population by War Held no Curb on Husband Mart,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1946, p. 14.

¹¹ Women’s history is an important field which enables historians to highlight the stories, actions, contributions, and more of a gender usually overlooked. However, its existence sometimes encourages scholars to categorize any historical events, analysis, etc. which heavily involves women as “women’s history” rather than just “history.” This can imply that men make history and women can only make “women’s history.” By no means does this paper

Women's Magazines

Monthly magazines were consistently available and affordable, making them one of the most accessible forms of media at this time. There were magazines for every age group, class, hobby, and more. Since this paper is concerned with middle-class white women (the typical nuclear housewife), it devotes particular attention to women's magazines. While publications like *Life* held more cultural capital, they could read like a sermon or lecture.¹² Women's magazines, on the other hand, actively sought out the attention of female readers. They centered around topics interesting and relevant to the sex, and were explicitly marketed as doing so. These publications offer a wealth of information on what American women did and were expected to do, enjoy, think about, and more.

The manner in which women's magazines portrayed womanhood and femininity attracted criticism from feminists. Articles usually centered around topics like household tasks and physical appearances. Most notably, author of *The Feminine Mystique* Betty Friedan argued such publications portrayed a one-dimensional and limiting image of femininity and motherhood. Historian Diana Cucuz contradicts this, stating such publications "contained multiple and often contradictory messages" about womanhood which reflected the complexity of both the Cold War and gender in America.¹³ Cucuz points out that postwar women's magazines had two objectives. Firstly, they sought to convince readers that conservative gender roles best served the family and

advocate for the eradication of the term or field, it simply implores the reader to consider this analysis a work of Cold War studies, not just one of "women's history."

¹² Diana Cucuz, *Winning Women's Hearts and Minds: Selling Cold War Culture in the US and the USSR* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2023, p. 28.

¹³ Cucuz, *Winning Women's Hearts and Minds* p. 26.

the nation. Secondly, they encouraged women's political participation, mainly in anti-Communist campaigns. Censure like Friedan's only addressed one of the two intentions of these publications.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* was a fairly conservative publication, yet it still urged its female audience to take an active interest in politics. Lawyer and activist Margaret Hickey "launched the *Journal's* monthly 'Public Affairs Department'" in 1947.¹⁴ Three years later, Hickey wrote an article about an initiative led by the League of Women Voters. "What's the U. S. to You" was essentially a self-reflection quiz. The League wanted women to evaluate their political beliefs and consider how they could act on them. Hickey adored the approach. The organization and the writer were mobilized by the low number of women who went to the polls. Only 52 percent of women eligible to vote in the 1948 presidential election did so. Hickey sought to motivate women to become more effective citizens and told them, "make politics your business." She implored them to vote, join discussion groups, run for office, and even babysit for other mothers so they could do "political chores."¹⁵ The *Journal's* decision to partner with Hickey and publish articles like the one described did not signify a reversal in its traditionally conservative policy. Instead, it illustrated that one could value conservative gender roles and women's political participation. Additionally, it highlighted conservatism's reliance on politically active women.

At first glance these magazines only offered a stereotype of a housewife. However, a closer look reveals a woman who took care of her home, not just by cooking, cleaning, and carpooling, but by engaging in politics. It is important to note that such political participation was not an act of rebellion against the traditional home. Rather, it was part of an effort to

¹⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946- 1958," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (1993): p. 1467.

¹⁵ Margaret Hickey, "'What's the U.S. to You?': Where do You Start?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1950, p. 23.

preserve it. Friedan would have likely argued that the constant connections women's magazines made between domestic responsibilities and politics supported her claim. Why could women's engagement in politics not be separated from their roles as wives and mothers? Sometimes, politics were the best way for a homemaker to ensure the health of her family. Other times, the safety of the home simply served as a good excuse to enter political discussions women would have otherwise been excluded from.

In all fairness, Friedan's description of woman's magazines as largely limiting was partially accurate—just not in the way she intended. These publications did not exclusively depict womanhood as restricted to the home. However, they almost exclusively portrayed white women and their white households. Even an incredibly nuanced analysis of this literature cannot justify its lack of diversity. According to popular publications like the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*, the ideal, and even just “average,” American home was white, middle-class, and heterosexual. Such messaging reinforced the idea that conservatism and homogeneity were necessary to protect the health of the nation.

Cucuz describes magazines like the *Ladies' Home Journal* as “not necessarily feminist,” but “certainly pro-feminine.” Such magazines showed great interest (in a commercial sense and a more wholesome one) in women's passions, concerns, and responsibilities. Many pages were dedicated to women's domestic roles, yet this did not mean women were exclusively homemakers. Rather, this focus indicated the importance of the nation's wives and mothers. The how-to articles, letters to the editors, advice columns, and so on in these publications demonstrated that creating and maintaining the ideal American home was a major feat. Mothers and wives held so much responsibility because they also wielded so much power. How they approached their domestic duties impacted the health of their families, as well as the nation's. In

their own, at times subtle, manner, these publications acknowledged the significance of women's contributions to the Cold War. In fact, the *Ladies' Home Journal* embraced "never underestimate the power of a woman" as their official motto.¹⁶

The United States Information Agency also recognized women's value, especially in regard to politics. Furthermore, the agency understood that women's magazines were an effective way to engage with the female populations of both the United States and the Soviet Union. As Diana Cucuz notes, "a deep connection" existed "between the USIA's information program and these magazines."¹⁷ The USIA would not have concerned itself with periodical literature or female audiences if it believed they were not important to the Cold War's outcome.

Anticommunism

Following the end of the Second World War, the United States experienced its second wave of anticommunism. Like women's magazines, the anticommunist movement reinforced what proper American women should and should not do. Additionally, it provided them with an acceptable way to get involved in politics.

The Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s was not the first wave of anticommunism the United States had experienced. Understanding the nation's first Red Scare enhances the analysis of its second since identifying the similarities between the two produces a characterization of twentieth American antiradicalism. A period of widespread radicalism, supported by government involvement, preceded each wave of anticommunism. The Progressive Era, marked by movements like Populism, carried on into the early twentieth century, ending around the time of

¹⁶ Cucuz, *Winning Women's Hearts and Minds*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Cucuz, *Winning Women's Hearts and Minds*, p. 52.

the Russian Revolution. Later, the heavy-handed and left-leaning government interference which characterized the New Deal set the scene for the second offensive against communism. The blurring of gender roles during World War II also contributed to this.

Before the 1917 Bolshevik-led revolution, most Americans held “a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward communism and socialism.”¹⁸ Historian Erica J. Ryan argues that this ambivalence shifted to widespread disapproval between 1917 and 1919. The establishment of the Third International followed the Bolshevik take-over. The organization, dominated by Russian Communists, sought to facilitate a worldwide proletariat revolution. This communist call to action threatened antiradicals who mobilized in response. The establishment of the Soviet Union laid the foundation for the first Red Scare, whereas its expansion following World War II inspired the second.

Acts of radicalism within the United States also stoked the flames of anticommunism. Resistance to radicalism accompanied and survived the changes of the Progressive Era. Nativists disapproved of the influx in immigration to America, racial tensions resulted in violent division, the labor movement invoked anger, and not everyone responded positively to the Nineteenth Amendment. This stance against radicalism was motivated by a fear of drastic alterations to society which would weaken the White, Anglo-American identity and its monopoly on power. The “belief that the nation was under threat from radicalism, internally and externally” characterized both Red Scares.¹⁹

¹⁸ Erica J. Ryan, "Women, Gender, and Red Scares in the Modern United States," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History (June 30, 2020): p. 2.

¹⁹ Ryan, "Women, Gender, and Red Scares in the Modern United States," p. 1.

The invention of the atomic bomb exacerbated this threat by drastically heightening the stakes of the American-Soviet rivalry. Public opinion held that communists, regardless of nationality swore allegiance to the Soviet Union. Therefore, any communist involvement—let alone espionage—was considered treasonous. The United States entered a period of intense hysteria upon learning that the Manhattan Project had been infiltrated by Soviet sympathizers. This atomic spy ring involved multiple individuals, yet a wife and husband, parents to two young boys, suffered the severest consequences. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were found guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage and executed in 1953. They were the first Americans ever executed for treason during peacetime (although to what extent this was a time of peace is debatable). *The New York Times* summarized the debate on the decision to execute the couple. There were two main arguments which supported their death sentences. One, Julius and Ethel were considered to be known spies, yet they refused to admit so (the other atomic spies confessed and avoided such a sentence). Two, the secrets shared by the couple regarded “a weapon capable of destruction hitherto unknown.”²⁰ The public feared nuclear war and the communists who might have incited it. Stories of convicted spies heightened these fears.

Mass hysteria over the communist threat provided an opening through which women could enter politics in an acceptable manner. Anticommunist propaganda relied on the idealization of traditional gender roles, yet the anticommunist movement needed women to take action outside of their homes. How could such a contradiction exist? Overtly antiradical, the anticommunist movement fought feminist efforts to change women’s roles in American society. Scholar Erica J. Ryan pays particular attention to the relationship between antiradicalism and

²⁰ Joseph Kraft, “Rosenberg Spy Case: Facts and Arguments,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1953, p. 149.

antifeminism, as she considers the two “fundamentally tied” together.²¹ Despite its dedication to keeping wives and mothers in the home, anticommunism enabled them to further participate in politics. If women did not enter politics and stop communism, there would be no home to care for. Women took a stand against communism by writing, participating in clubs, demonstrating, and running for office.²²

Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, encouraged such participation in an article for *Woman's Day*. In the January 1953 edition, Hoover insisted US citizens, particularly women, needed to learn how to detect Communists and identify subversive activity. This was especially imperative since the US Communist Party sought to “expand its membership among women.” Hoover warned these subversive agents could take the form of “the wife of the local businessman” or “the mother of little Bobby.” Outwardly, they appeared good-hearted and loyal, like everyone else. Secretly, however, they detested the American way of life and swore allegiance to the Soviet Union. The ongoing coverage of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg underscored this. Hoover elaborated on their character and listed red flags to stay vigilant for.

Hoover wanted the nation’s wives and mothers to take the offensive. Already, many women served their communities through volunteering in parent-teacher associations and the like. While such engagement strengthened localities, Hoover revealed it was also a vital component of national security. If patriotic American women were not filling seats at community meetings, Communist ones would. The director of the FBI sounded an alarm: “the enemy is here, invading your backyard, your home, your school.”²³ The nature of this “invasion” enlisted diligent housewives rather than soldiers. Consequently, anticommunist women defended

²¹ Ryan, "Women, Gender, and Red Scares in the Modern United States," pp. 3-4.

²² Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace* (University of Colorado Press, 2008), p. 85.

²³ Hoover, “The Communists Want You,” p. 37.

“community organizations such as school boards, libraries, and health care facilities” from the Red threat.²⁴ In this piece, Hoover acknowledged the threat Communism posed to the nation’s status quo. Additionally, he recognized the power wielded by American women, both patriotic and subversive, and its significance in the outcome of the Cold War.

The end of the Korean War, Stalin’s death, and McCarthy’s undoing calmed down much of the Red Scare hysteria. However, this period of “thawing” did not dissolve anticommunist sentiment. The country, although no longer engulfed with paranoia, remained cautious. Historian Mary C. Brennan notes that many female anticommunist crusaders “continued to voice concern...even as others lost interest.”²⁵ The political opportunities the anticommunist movement offered women influenced American politics for decades. Prominent conservatives, like notorious opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment Phyllis Schlafly, began their political careers as anticommunist crusaders. Like Schlafly and her STOP ERA campaign, many conservative women applied the power granted to them by the anticommunist movement to fight other radical movements. Some conservative women used their new political platforms to uphold white supremacist values and resist the Civil Rights Movement.²⁶ While anticommunism led to an increased acceptance of women’s political activity, this open-mindedness really only applied to white conservative women who used this newfound power to suppress progressive and non-white political voices.

²⁴ Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, p. 86

²⁵ Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, pp. 87, 89

²⁶ Ryan, “Women, Gender, and Red Scares,” 15.

The Nuclear Family

The nuclear family is simultaneously one of the most venerated and problematized American creations. Think of the Cleavers from *Leave it to Beaver* or Norman Rockwell's *Freedom from Want*. Both contemporary and later depictions of the stereotypical 1950s family have become as iconic as George Washington crossing the Delaware—and just as significant to the American identity too. June, Ward, Wally, and Beaver may as well have been fighting the Redcoats. In reality, they were fighting a red army from a different country: the Soviet Union.

Popular culture seems to view the nuclear family as the wholesome product of a simpler time. This could not be further from the truth. The nuclear family did more than host backyard barbeques, it defended the nation from the destructive weapons and contagious ideology of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, it also marked an offensive launched by the United States against its own citizens. Americans of color, members of the queer community, and other marginalized peoples were not just excluded from this vision, but viewed as a threat to it. If homogeneity and assimilation bolstered national defense, nonconformity undermined it. The United States projected an image of strength and unity while suffering from an erosive paranoia of “the other.” The following analysis tracks the evolution of the nuclear family while keeping the discrepancies between propaganda and reality in mind.

Several explosions characterize World War II and the early Cold War period. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bikini Atoll, and Semipalatinsk highlighted the finiteness of human life.²⁷ However, one significant explosion from this era did the exact opposite. The “baby boom” displayed humanity's ability to proliferate as populations bounced back from their wartime losses.

²⁷ Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan was the test site of the Soviet Union's first atomic device. The Soviets successfully detonated RDS-1, also known as “First Lightning,” in 1949.

Americans rushed to the alter, and they produced children with a similar sense of urgency. Periods of prosperity followed other wars but did not generate such drastic demographic change. What made the 1940s and 1950s different? If anything, one might have predicted a decrease in matrimony and childrearing. Americans had increased access to birth control and education, plus years of economic hardship and war weakened traditional gender roles. How did these factors fail to disrupt the marriage and birth rates? Why did society seemingly reverse rather than stay on the road towards radicalism? The baby boom was the result of a potent political and cultural ideology forged by catastrophe. The Great Depression and World War II threatened the survival of conservative gender roles. When this wave of discord ebbed, many Americans flocked to reclaim what they had presumed lost.

The parents of baby boomers grew up during the Great Depression. The economic misfortune of the 1930s chipped away at traditional gender roles, reshaping many American homes. It was a period ripe with radicalism. The federal government intervened in people's everyday lives on an unprecedented level, reform movements swept the nation, and traditionalism had to take a back seat. Not every American met these changes with open arms. The damage the Depression inflicted upon the previously conservative and gendered division of labor was especially unpopular. Rather than an indicator of progress, people considered this shift unfortunate but necessary for subsistence.

For conservatives, survival came at a high cost. Saving the family financially endangered it morally. Marriage rates dropped and the likelihood of pre-marital sex increased. The birthrate fell and children grew up in "disorderly" homes. Such homes allegedly suffered from a lack of traditional gender roles since the man of the house could no longer solely financially support his family.

Interestingly, the prejudice against working women endured during the Depression. Women, especially married ones, were always the first to be turned away or laid off from work. Even the radical New Deal government believed “the best way to strengthen the family was to keep women home and give men work.”²⁸ When polled in 1936, 82 percent of Americans surveyed stated that women with employed husbands should not work. Three years later, the number had increased to 90 percent. Unfortunately, this view negatively impacted women without wage-earning husbands.²⁹ The stigma which accompanied working as a married women contributed to the substantial number of wives and mother who chose to stay home if possible. Many felt content to only work as homemakers, viewing it as a privilege. Others were dissuaded from work because of wage gaps and feeling limited to “pink collar” occupations.

Public opinion regarding working wives and mothers improved during the Second World War. However, this progress did not survive in peacetime. In his study, *Children of the Great Depression*, sociologist Glen Elder Jr. reported that when hardship induced parents to abandon traditional gender roles, their children did not view the shift positively.³⁰ This generation kept the disorder of their youths in mind when starting families of their own. The children of the Great Depression became parents of baby boomers. They desired stable homes, meaning ones with the traditional gender roles they were deprived of in childhood. The turbulence of the Depression “created nostalgia for a mythic past,” one in which men provided financially so women could devote themselves entirely to the home.³¹

²⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 49.

²⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 51.

³⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 52. See also Glen Elder Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

³¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 40.

The Second World War impeded the American people's ability to return to such a fabled way of life. The Great Depression resulted in "aborted careers, delayed marriages, and deferred children." Although World War II pulled the nation out of this depression, it "further disrupted traditional gender arrangements and sexual norms."³² At the same time, the waning prominence of conservative norms impassioned traditionalists to preserve them.

The war machine urged women, regardless of marital status, to enter the workforce and even take on traditionally masculine jobs. The country needed Rosie the Riveter just as much, if not more than, June Cleaver. At the end of the 1930s, a substantial majority of Americans objected to married women in the workplace. After Pearl Harbor, only 13 percent of the population maintained that view.³³ However, devotion to the idealized American family did not diminish. Despite the high number of American men stationed overseas and women's increased significance to the workforce, World War II did not have a negative impact on the marriage and birth rates. In fact, the opposite occurred. The conflict pushed women and men towards domesticity, increasing the rates of marriage and parenthood, as well as lowering the average ages for both. Peacetime heralded an era of improved stability for these young families. It also meant the resumption of traditional gender roles.

America's triumph over the Axis powers produced immense joy and anxiety. People feared the technology, courtesy of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project, which achieved V-J Day. Humans could now inflict unprecedented levels of damage upon each other. The United States could not possibly maintain a monopoly on this destructive invention forever. The public understood this. The increasingly tense standoff between the United States and the

³² De Hart, "Containment at Home," p. 125.

³³ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 59.

Soviet Union exacerbated such fears. By the end of the 1940s, each nation possessed great contempt for the other—and atomic weapons.

Economic depression and world war had taken a toll on the country's spirits. Now it also faced the threat of nuclear annihilation. The citizens of the United States needed something which offered stability, both for the present and future. Americans of all races and economic backgrounds grounded themselves in the comforts of domesticity. The baby boom refers to the demographic changes which occurred between 1946 and 1964. As discussed earlier, this period marked a dramatic reversal of the decline in marriage and the birthrate caused by the Great Depression. The name given to this phenomena spotlights the sudden rise in the birthrate. However, this period was also characterized by other demographic shifts.

As the number of marriages increased, the average age at which women and men said, "I do" decreased. The number of divorces also went down. Even so, the United States maintained the highest divorce rate in the world.³⁴ Journalist Mildred Gilman addressed both of these statistics as she discussed teen marriage for *Parents Magazine*. Gilman gathered the opinions of several experts, like marriage counselor and Vice President of Planned Parenthood Dr. Abraham Stone. The doctor attributed the increase in teen marriage to young people's desire "to grasp what little security they [could] in a world gone frighteningly insecure."³⁵ The low age at which teens headed to the altar contributed to the high divorce rate for this demographic. Teen couples were six times more likely to divorce than other groups. Gilman and Dr. Stone theorized that young spouses had children before they were "emotionally or economically ready for them," and

³⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Mildred Gilman, "Why They Can't Wait to Wed: Over a Million Married Teen-Agers... do They Pay a Price for Their Haste?" *Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide*, November 1958, pp. 46-87.

their marriages suffered as a result.³⁶ Regardless of whatever correlation existed between age at marriage and the likelihood of divorce, Americans continued to marry young. In 1961, *Good Housekeeping* reported that more women married at eighteen than any other age.³⁷

Youth was not the only factor which placed strain on nuclear families. The grand expectations which accompanied marriage and parenthood paved the way for grand disappointment. The events of the 1930s and early 1940s made Americans feel powerless. The average citizen possessed no control over the economy, international conflicts, or weapons of mass destruction. Yet these things had a great impact on their lives and the course of humanity. The home was the singular arena in which the average American held total control. It also provided an opportunity to contribute to something greater. A family was supposed to add a sense of purpose to an individual's seemingly menial life. Additionally, devotion to one's spouse and children, when done correctly, could bolster national defense—according to Cold War propaganda.³⁸ Such devotion demanded a delicate balance since too much or too little could cause (nuclear) disaster.

The Cold War was not just an arms race, rather, it was a battle for “hearts and minds.” The U. S. could not recruit members of the developing world nor convert communists if American hearts and minds were not synchronized. The U. S. needed a unified population with moral integrity, and, of course, children were the future. Improper parenting could make the nation's future citizens weak, immoral, and susceptible to communism. Parenthood, since it determined the character of the next generation, gained elevated significance during the Cold War. This connection between proper child rearing and to the nation's ability to endure had roots

³⁶ Gilman, “Why They Can't Wait to Wed,” p. 46.

³⁷ Helen Valentine, “...for the Very Young Wife,” *Good Housekeeping*, July 1961, pp. 18-19.

³⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 16, 24.

in the American Revolution. As a young republic, the U. S. needed to establish a strong sense of national identity, pride, and duty amongst its population—especially white landowners (this same demographic made up the nuclear family). Republican motherhood tasked the nation’s women with fostering these values in the hearts and minds of the next generation. Both republican motherhood and Cold War maternal ideology acknowledged women’s power over and contributions to American society, yet only in regard to maternity.³⁹ The Cold War, however, placed an additional emphasis on fatherhood.

In the nuclear age, marriage and parenthood were supposed to accomplish a number of goals: enhance fulfillment in one’s personal life, improve the quality of the citizenry, and defend the nation from the Soviet Union. Therefore, a spouse and children should have added a sense of great purpose to one’s life. For some, they did. Others, meanwhile, did everything they were supposed to but still felt unfulfilled. Even women and men who considered their home lives happy overall and their partners agreeable experienced this. It simply seemed illogical and caused some to believe they had gone mad. Such disconnect appeared in the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS).

The Kelly Longitudinal Study, wielded by historian Elaine Tyler May in her classic study of the postwar family, extensively questioned three hundred couples on their personal lives and relationships. E. Lowell Kelly and his collaborators collected responses from the late 1930s through the 1950s. The nature of the KLS facilitated frankness and detail from the respondents. May worked intensively with this study because it revealed the incomes, education levels, degrees of marital satisfaction, sexual histories, and more of the (more-or-less) average American

³⁹ Patricia Cline Cohen, “Women in the Early Republic,” *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 2 (2000): pp. 7–11.

couple.⁴⁰ Respondents divulged all sorts of dissatisfaction, regret, and bitterness they may have otherwise kept bottled up (and out of the reach of historians).

A great deal of KLS participants expressed that the personal freedoms and luxuries sacrificed in the name of the family paled in comparison to the fulfillment marriage and parenthood had to offer. The responses from Nora Grey exemplified this. Nora's home life placed her under immense stress. She did all of the housework expected of the average wife in addition to traditionally masculine chores, like lawnmowing and repairs. She reported feeling "physically and nervously exhausted." Her husband, Chester Grey, refused to acknowledge her struggle, even telling her, "you're not human and don't sleep." Chester's apathy caused his wife to periodically lose romantic and sexual interest in him. Of course, Nora never admitted this to him. Although she suffered, Nora believed it was not in vain. She had a "nice home," "lifetime companion," and kids who kept "life from being monotonous."⁴¹ Nora's circumstances reflected the mixed emotions felt by many other spouses and parents. They felt that marriage and parenthood, even when accompanied by high degrees of hardship and dissatisfaction, made their lives better.

Although the United States embraced a patriarchal society, mothers were the nuclei of the home and, by extension, the nation. Mothers served as the "guardians of public morality."⁴² They kept the spirits of their husbands high by supporting their careers, maintaining a stable home, and staying desirable. Happy husbands stayed loyal (to wife and country) and strong, therefore, they were supposedly not susceptible to communism. Women held a significant amount of influence

⁴⁰ Respondents were largely white and resided in New England. Therefore, the study is especially helpful when reconstructing the mindset of white middle-class Americans during the baby boom. Consequently, the KLS cannot offer much insight into any other demographic.

⁴¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 179-181.

⁴² Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly," p. 5.

over the men in their lives. A popular school of thought found that when a man's life went wrong, the problem could often be traced back to an overbearing mother. Excessive mothering, or "momism" as coined by Phillip Wylie, became a major concern during the Cold War era. The power invested in women and the limitations also placed on them showcased "the simultaneous glorification and fear of maternal influence within the family."⁴³

Phillip Wylie penned novels and magazine articles relating to gender, politics, and psychology in the nuclear age. The author introduced readers to momism in his 1942 publication *Generation of Vipers*, a compilation of social commentaries. Michael Rogin summarized Wylie's concept as the "demonic version of domestic ideology," identifying its emergence as the result of an increase in maternal power. As the homemakers, women possessed a great deal of influence over the home and its inhabitants. According to Wylie, American wives and mothers had become so commanding that the nation was essentially a matriarchy.⁴⁴ While American women, especially the affluent and white, exerted more influence over society than traditionally recognized, they were by no means the dominant sex. Nevertheless, their power posed a threat.

In 1945, an article in the *Ladies' Home Journal* addressed momism by asking, "Are American Moms a Menace?"⁴⁵ Author Amram Scheinfeld, a cartoonist and science writer, detailed the harms of excessive mothering. His argument could be boiled down to a simple equation: weak father plus overpowered mothers equals "helpless ninnies."⁴⁶ Such sorry sons were a liability to national security. Scheinfeld pleaded for the American father to take a more active role in raising his sons for the sake of the country. He also suggested placing young boys

⁴³ Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly," p. 3.

⁴⁴ Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly," pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Amram Scheinfeld, "Are American Moms a Menace?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1945, pp. 36-36, 138, 140.

⁴⁶ Scheinfeld, "Are American Moms a Menace," p. 36.

in sports and instituting compulsory military service for all men aged eighteen. Men, and potentially the government, needed to take action and protect American masculinity. Women, however, still bore the most responsibility for the quality of their husbands and sons. The writer conveyed this point in a rather controversial manner. He employed the case of a certain (and recently deceased) fascist dictator as an example. Scheinfeld insisted the infamous autocrat's heinous acts could be traced back to his "not-too-bright" mother who coddled him as a child. The writer boldly suggested that had this man grown up with a different mother, history may have unfolded quite differently. Scheinfeld further emphasized women's culpability as he concluded the article with a list of "Don'ts for Doting Mothers."

Wylie and Scheinfeld believed that momism was the result of sexual dissatisfaction, alleging that the overbearing mother treated her son as a substitute for her underwhelming husband.⁴⁷ Like maternal devotion, too much or too little sex compromised the health (at times literally) of the family and the nation. Therefore, attraction and sexuality played major roles in the Cold War's domestic theater. *Parent's Magazine* addressed the importance of sex in 1940 with help from Dorothy Baruch. The writer and psychologist broke down a study which compared the behavior of thirty-three preschoolers to the state of their parents' marriages.⁴⁸ After interviewing the mothers and fathers (separately), the researchers found that tension regarding finances, different leisure habits, and even general criticism of the other did not incite serious conflict. Discord pertaining to the "giving or withholding of affection," however, did. It also cultivated a domestic environment ripe with unfulfillment and irritability. This stunted child development. Out of the twenty-two cases "in which tension over sex was present, only two

⁴⁷ Scheinfeld, "Are American Moms a Menace," p. 36.

⁴⁸ Dorothy Baruch, "Children Need Happily Married Parents," *Parents' Magazine*, April 1940, pp. 30-31, 48, 113. See also May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 111.

well-adjusted children were to be found.”⁴⁹ A balanced sex life between mom and dad helped the whole family—and hindered the communist agenda.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and consequent movements of sexual liberalism have made the 1950s seem sexless by comparison. The article and study described above contradict this characterization. Americans valued balanced sex lives. In fact, a common critique of the Soviet Union fixated on the lack of sexual desire their communist system inspired. While Americans did not advocate for an excessively sexual society, they found the apparent sexlessness of the Soviet Union unfortunate. Sexual containment, not repression, defined 1950s U. S. culture. Of course, this only applied to straight couples. Heterosexual intimacy, within the confines of marriage, was an integral component of a functioning family and, by extension, national security. Homosexuality, on the other hand, was perceived as a threat.

When a man and a woman loved each other very much, and hated communism with equal passion, they had a baby (or several)! Pronatalism and anticommunism defined American culture. In most cases, childless married couples were viewed with suspicion. Such “selfishness” was a red flag, and potentially indicative of allegiance to one (with a hammer and sickle). The importance of conformity at this time should not be understated. Just the stigma which accompanied alternative lifestyles was enough to persuade otherwise hesitant citizens to marry and become parents (hence some Americans remained unfulfilled despite living the domestic dream). Anticommunism further “incentivized” adherence to societal norms. Americans were expected to conform while maintaining an individualist spirit.

⁴⁹ Baruch, “Children Need Happily Married Parents,” p. 48.

In addition to early matrimony and parenthood, a growing number of Americans turned to religion, and reasonably so. They faced the possibility of nuclear annihilation and sought to distinguish themselves from “Godless communists.” Between 1940 and 1960, church membership rose from 50 percent of the total population to 63 percent. Anticommunist frequently employed religion, usually Christianity, to frame America as a divine land inhabited by righteous people. The atheist Soviet Union, therefore, could never beat the U. S. in a game of morality. The decision to add “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance was intended to exaggerate this point of contrast.⁵⁰

Contrast perhaps best defined the nuclear family. The resurgence of traditional gender roles marked the end of the disruption which had accompanied the Great Depression and World War II. The nuclear home, tucked safely away in the suburbs, offered stability and comfort in a world that felt frighteningly insecure. Increasing marriage and birth rates showed the proliferation of love and life in the face of annihilation. As these young families flocked to churches and shopping malls, they demonstrated that capitalism enabled a lifestyle drastically different from communist Russia.

The nuclear family also evoked a contrast in another manner. The reality of American households differed, at times greatly, from the domestic dream portrayed in propaganda. This disparity came across in responses, like Nora Grey’s, in the KLS. While magazines tended to depict the rosier side of domesticity, they could not ignore their audience’s grievances. Some articles subtly acknowledged that their readers needed help by offering advice. Often, these implied discontent was a self-inflicted wound. Titles like “How to Keep a Husband Happy: Ask

⁵⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 29, 224.

Yourself” framed marital bliss as largely the wife’s responsibility.⁵¹ Essentially, if mom felt unhappy, she needed to try harder. Other articles addressed domestic discontent directly. In 1960, *Redbook* asked readers to write in with their own experiences for the article “Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped.” They were inundated with 24,000 replies.⁵² Truly, “the home was an arena of work for women and leisure for men.”⁵³ To make matters worse, the mental toll all of this took on wives and mothers led to substance abuse.

Regardless, some Americans (men and women alike) did not want to hear that the nation’s housewives had it hard. The country had recently experienced history-making hardship, so middle-class homes nestled in the suburbs did not seem reasonably comparable. One man vented to *Redbook* that he could not, and would not, listen to his wife complain about housework since she had all “kinds of push-button machinery to do her [it] for her.”⁵⁴ Many agreed with the disgruntled husband and insisted that the nuclear housewives enjoyed immense privilege. She did not have to hold a job (outside of homemaker), modern technology eased domestic labor, and the country’s department stores were brimming with luxury consumer goods. Allegedly, no one had ever had it so good. Nearly every American believed their nation’s women fared better—far better—than Soviet ones. In fact, American women needed to live better lives than their Soviet counterparts, or at least appear to, for the sake of the propaganda war.

The American way of life needed to appear superior to both U. S. citizens and Soviet ones. Washington could reasonably proclaim it won the battle of the housewives and consumer

⁵¹ Clifford R. Adams, "How to Keep a Husband Happy: Ask Yourself," *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1961, p. 16.

⁵² Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 41. See also Jhan Robbins and June Robbins, "Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped," *Redbook*, September 1960, pp. 27-29, 84-88.

⁵³ May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 176.

⁵⁴ Robbins and Robbins, "Why Young Mother Feel Trapped," p. 27.

goods. Nonetheless, it lost in the category pertaining to racial relations. Moscow took advantage of its competitor's major flaw. Race was one of the factors which determined whether or not wives and husbands could establish their own picturesque nuclear family. It was much harder for Americans of color and the lower class (and basically impossible for homosexual citizens) to do so. Much of America's Cold War propaganda centered around "the triumph of capitalism" which was supposedly "available to all who believed in its values." However, not everyone who believed in such ideals could access their rewards. Morals, labor, and time invested did not seem to matter as much as skin color. The suburban paradises which characterized the nuclear family were usually racially segregated. Even though marriage and babies defined the postwar years, over 90 percent of Americans—in both the North and South—disapproved of interracial marriage as of the 1950s.⁵⁵ As much as the nation prioritized family values, it sometimes seemed like it valued racist beliefs more.

Achieving national conformity entailed attacking those who did not fit neatly into the nuclear family mold. There was no room for depressed mothers, queerness, or radical racial change. One could reasonably view the Cold War as a high-stakes game of public relations. The U. S. knew what image it desired to put out: a nation brimming with individualistic spirit, yet bound by shared morals. Family, capitalism, and God were the three pillars which held up U. S. cultural nationalism. The emphasis placed on these three elements was intended to unify the country, fortifying it against the Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear annihilation. In the process, however, America fixated on potential internal threats to an extent which fostered polarization. The nuclear family was one part reality, two parts fantasy. Gender roles made up the cores of both the fantasy and the reality. Understanding the nuclear family, discrepancies and all,

⁵⁵ May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 8, 11.

and how gender influenced it, establishes a solid foundation for analyzing how the U. S. imagined Soviet women.

Depictions of Soviet Women

Historian Robert L. Griswold argued that Americans during the Cold War imagined Soviet women as fitting into one (or all) of three stereotypes. This paper employs and corroborates his findings through analyses of the era's periodical literature. Many of the works from these publications simultaneously depict multiple, even contradictory, imaginations of Soviet women.

Western authors of literature concerning life behind the Iron Curtain often gathered information by visiting, or already living in, the Soviet Union themselves. Spouses Vera and David Mace were two sociologists, specializing in marriage and family studies, who did just this. They traveled across the Soviet Union investigating its families. The Maces spent the years between 1960 and 1963 researching for and writing their book, *The Soviet Family*.⁵⁶ In its preface, the couple detailed the difficulty which often accompanied studying the Soviet Union in the midst of the Cold War. If they did not "explicitly condemn" the Communist system, Americans interpreted it as sign of approval. Whereas the absence of explicit praise offended the Soviets.⁵⁷ Other scholars and writers undoubtedly encountered this conundrum when producing their works. Therefore, any analysis of such literature must keep this dilemma in mind.

The first stereotype Griswold identified "functioned to discredit Communist women and, more important, Communism itself."⁵⁸ It portrayed Soviet women as overworked, unrefined, and

⁵⁶ Vera Mace and David Mace. *The Soviet Family* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc. 1963), p. 2.

⁵⁷ Mace, David, and Vera Mace. *The Soviet Family*, p. xi.

⁵⁸ Robert L. Griswold, "'Russian Blonde in Space': Soviet Women in the American Imagination, 1950-1965." *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (2012): p. 881.

sexless. Much of this was attributed to the absence of traditional gender roles within the Soviet Union. Americans believed that women who labored like men would eventually resemble men too, especially when they also lacked access to nice dresses and makeup. The blurred divisions between sexes and the inability to purchase goods other than necessities likely reminded Americans of the Great Depression. The influx of women in the workplace did look like progress to most of the United States. Instead, they viewed it as the unfortunate consequence of economic hardship. The high number of working Soviet women did not impress Americans. They perceived it as proof that the communist system failed its families. A majority of the U. S. did not think the average Soviet citizen could thrive under communism. It appeared that the system inhibited individual success for everyone but elite government officials. Westerners also understood that Soviets labored intensively, and for little compensation; therefore, men could not be breadwinners. Since women had to work, they could not solely be fulltime homemakers. Of course, they still cooked and cleaned, but in addition to their careers. This “double burden” was incredibly unattractive to America’s housewives.

Unlike Soviet women, ladies in the postwar United States enjoyed “special privileges” made possible by capitalism. The American nuclear wife and mother lived in single-family house fitted with a variety of high-tech gadgets intended to make her daily routine easier. She always had access to modern fashions and beauty products galore. The light labor load combined with an abundance of consumer goods positively impacted her appearance and attitudes, so she was agreeable in all aspects. The nuclear husband found his wife very attractive, and, thanks to his role as the breadwinner, she had enough free time to invest in his happiness. Therefore, the nuclear family was (supposed to be) in tip-top shape and unlikely to succumb to communism anytime soon. Perhaps this was the origin of that famous phrase “happy wife, happy life.”

Of course, the reality of American families was not so sanguine nor so simple. Regardless, the United States employed this imagery as it sought to distinguish itself from the Soviet Union. Women took center stage in the propaganda wars since their “performance of gender roles symbolic of national health or sickness.”⁵⁹ Some Americans considered married women in the workforce to be a “disease,” whereas feminism was a “deep illness.”⁶⁰ According to these diagnoses, the Soviet Union was debilitatingly diseased. The doctor’s orders: capitalism.

American writers traveling to the Soviet Union frequently remarked on the lackluster commercial experiences the Soviet Union had to offer. These included long lines, high prices, a lack of variety, and a limited quantity of most consumer goods. Americans abroad recorded their horror at this sorry state. They also expressed their gratitude that they did not have to endure such commercial hardships. Surely, any American woman reading such a description would have been glad to hold the citizenship she did. She would have likely been alarmed that communists, international and domestic, sought to introduce such a system to her country.

One article, published in the December 1959 edition of *Better Homes & Gardens*, perfectly encapsulated this mix of horror and thankfulness. Anne Anderson, author of the piece, worked as the senior demonstrator of the Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. She was the daughter of Russian parents who immigrated to the United States a few years before the Russian Revolution in 1917. She considered herself “very lucky to have been born an American.”⁶¹ Anderson reiterated this point when recalling she passed by “several highway crews where women ‘manned’ steam rollers.”⁶² Although Anderson was a

⁵⁹ Ryan, “Women, Gender, and Red Scares in the Modern United States,” p. 1.

⁶⁰ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, pp. 34-35.

⁶¹ Anne Anderson, “The Thought Still Haunts Me: I Might Have Been One in That Russian Crowd,” *Better Homes and Gardens*. December 1959, p. 54.

⁶² Anderson, “The Thought Still Haunts Me,” p. 94.

working woman, she did not have to endure such drudgery. Anderson, along with her sister, actually demonstrated the exhibit for Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Here the two leaders engaged in their famous “Kitchen Debate,” in which Nixon stated, “in American we like to make life easier for women.”⁶³ This comment succinctly summed up the intention of the exhibit and Anderson’s opinions regarding life in the United States compared to her parents’ homeland. The senior demonstrator concluded that the exhibition was a success and called for more cultural exchange in this manner.

In the spirit of cultural exchange, Beatrice and Robert Gould, the editors of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, traveled to the Soviet Union in 1957. They published an article for the magazine which chronicled their trip to Russia. The couple wanted to see how the average citizen there truly lived. The restrictions for tourists, especially Western ones, proved a major obstacle. Their Intourist guide insisted they would be unable to visit any average factories or homes, let alone talk with the workers and residents. Determined, the Goulds did not let this stop them. One night, free from supervision, the couple explored an apartment building, asking the residents if they could get a glimpse of a typical Russian home. One woman agreed and showed the Americans her apartment. Three families (thirteen people total) resided in it, sharing three rooms and one kitchen.⁶⁴ This was a dreary sight, especially for the editors of a magazine which covered the ins and outs of the modern American single-family home and its accompanying gadgets. In terms of the average Russian worker, the pair could only observe those whom they passed by or happened

⁶³ Khrushchev, Nikita and Nixon, Richard. “The Kitchen Debate.” July 24, 1959. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1959-07-24.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Beatrice Gould and Robert Gould, “We saw how Russian Live,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, February 1957, p. 176.

to encounter. The Goulds claimed they observed women working the hardest while their male coworkers sat back, offering little help.⁶⁵

Beatrice and Robert Gould did not find the Soviet Union entirely vapid. Mrs. Gould claimed Russia was “returning to a sense of pride in its own culture,” as she and her husband witnessed the restoration of elaborate cathedrals and visited museums which contained priceless works, some Russian and some unexpectedly from famous French impressionists.⁶⁶ Communism had not completely robbed Russia of culture after all. Perhaps the Goulds were witnessing de-Stalinization in action.

The existence and prominence of Griswold’s first stereotype, “graceless, shapeless, and sexless,” was corroborated by the article “Young Women of Moscow,” published in 1962 by *Cosmopolitan*. The author, British-American journalist Geoffrey Bocca, sought to debunk the common belief that Russian women were as unattractive and uncultured. He was on a mission to show an alternative type of Russian woman, one which understood and embraced her femininity and sparked desire in the hearts of men—Russian and American. For part of the Cold War, especially early on Americans imagined Soviet women as victims of a harsh Communist government which left them overworked and undersexed. The utter devastation inflicted by the Second World War exacerbated this condition. To contradict this image, Bocca described and interviewed four Russian women: Galina, Irina, Sonia, and Ilse. He credited his success in meeting “so many attractive Moscow women” to his Russian friend Boris. As an artist, “tall, good-looking” Boris knew plenty of young Muscovites whom he introduced to the visiting journalist. Bocca meticulously detailed his interactions with each woman, recording her interests,

⁶⁵ Gould and Gould, “We saw how Russian Live,” p. 60.

⁶⁶ Gould and Gould, “We saw how Russian Live,” 61.

vocations, and level of attractiveness. Galina, twenty-four, studied cinematography at the University of Moscow. She had a round-face, blue eyes, and dark hair. The journalist described her as “pretty,” but believed “Irina was prettier.”⁶⁷ She, twenty-two, had a penchant for erotic poetry. Sonia, on the other hand, was “a big woman, about twenty-seven years old, and worked as a chemist.” She did not believe Bocca’s too good to be true description of London, denying that the city was anything other than rainy, “poor and dirty.” The final woman Bocca met was Ilse, a Latvian he described as “short, pert, and wore her hair in rather silly bangs.” At one point Ilse told Bocca “I would not like you to leave the Soviet Union...under the impression that this is a free country.”⁶⁸ In addition to their personalities, Bocca ensured his readers grasped each woman’s degree of attractiveness. After all, he intended to convince Americans that Russian women were not as masculine and sexless as they had thought.

Supplementing his descriptions of these young women, Bocca made several general observations regarding the condition of women and womanhood in Russia. He conveyed these remarks as facts (like many of his fellow Western writers and travelers); therefore, his article may appear informational, almost academic. One, however, should not mistake his observations as wholly accurate.

Bocca informed his audience Russian girls and women could be attractive in spite of Communism. While Bocca wrote a largely positive (excluding the blatant and at times disconcerting objectification of women) description of the evolving Soviet Union and its female population, he did not shy away from addressing the categories in which it fell behind. He equally combated and reinforced a variety of existing Soviet stereotypes. He briefly recounted

⁶⁷ Geoffrey Bocca, “Young Women of Moscow,” *Cosmopolitan*. December 1962, p. 58.

⁶⁸ Bocca, “Young Women of Moscow,” pp. 60-61, 63.

the Soviet Union's five-year plans and its losses during the Second World War. Such devastation, coupled with Stalin's "ruthless determination" to "sublimate sex into tractor-worship," woefully deteriorated Russian women's "sexual sophistication." As a result, the nation's women had to fight "a constant battle to stay attractive in the face of the most depressing odds."⁶⁹

According to Bocca, although the most attractive Russian women often came from privilege, "they [were] not the exception" since "thousands of pretty girls...and many beautiful women" lived in the country. Moscow's parks during the summertime provided the best opportunity to see just how false the prevailing view of Soviet (lack of) femininity was. Viewing Russian women clad in bikinis, in Gorky Park for example, would "kill forever the idea that Moscow girls are shapeless."⁷⁰

The journalist also examined the lives of older Moscow women. While the average elderly woman in America "would be sitting in her rocker or, at most, making deep-dish apple pie," Bocca claimed the Soviet grandmother engaged in work "hard enough for paratroopers." Such a descriptive and dramatic contrast would have likely shocked American readers, reinforcing the dreary image of the Soviet Union in their heads. Bocca stated that even Premier Khrushchev "himself has protested against" old women working in such conditions.⁷¹ Here the journalist hinted at de-Stalinization taking place behind the Iron Curtain.

While exploring Russia, the journalist got the impression that Soviet women were "hungry to catch up...and at long last they [were] beginning to." An acquaintance of Bocca's, an Australian diplomat, had recently returned to the Soviet Union after ten years away. Upon his

⁶⁹ Bocca, "Young Women of Moscow," p. 57.

⁷⁰ Bocca, "Young Women of Moscow," pp. 57, 63

⁷¹ Bocca, "Young Women of Moscow," p. 57.

return, he noted how significantly the manner and culture had improved. Here again, the article provides insight into the degree the Western world was aware of de-Stalinization. Bocca concluded his piece with the following statement: “Khrushchev is finding it increasingly difficult to sell young Russian women on the glamor of collectivism;” therefore, “their feminine demands are being met more and more with every passing day.”⁷² American journalist Harrison Salisbury made a similar observation three years earlier. He stated, “neither puritanism nor emphasis on heavy industry is going to divert the Russian woman much longer from the heritage of her sex, the right and opportunity to look just as pretty as she wants to.”⁷³ Bocca’s observations, corroborated by Salisbury’s, suggested Soviet women could be just as good-looking as Western women when in possession of the proper information and tools. Obviously, such things were most available in capitalist nations.

Many Westerners, like Bocca and Salisbury, addressed this topic. They explored the idea that American women and Russian women were inherently similar to each other, bounded by gender. Only the absence of capitalism distinguished the two. Its presence enabled American women to truly be women. In the American imagination, communism forced Russian women into a sort of “male” state of being. Americans believed Soviet women had been robbed of the items and lifestyles which characterized womanhood.

The second stereotype furthered explored this connection between Soviet and American women. It focused on a major responsibility women living under communism and capitalism had in common: motherhood. In general, criticism from Americans tended to target the Soviet system rather than Soviet mothers. They sought to find the humanity in their enemy by through

⁷² Bocca, “Young Women of Moscow,” p. 64

⁷³ Griswold, “Russian Blonde in Space”, p. 885. See also Harrison Salisbury, *To Moscow - and Beyond* (New York, 1959), pp. 46-48.

resonating with Russian mothers. The first lady of the Soviet Union embodied received a lot of this attention. The American people imagined Nina Khrushchev as “a way to defuse Cold War tensions.”⁷⁴ The media portrayed her as a devoted stepmother and grandmother who just happened to be married to the Soviet premier. During her visit to the States in 1959, *The Globe and Mail* reported, “she may be the wife of the Russian premier, but she seems first and foremost a grandmother.”⁷⁵ Stories which followed Mrs. Khrushchev shopping for children’s clothes and nylon stockings in American department stores reinforced the idea of a sort of universal womanhood. She was Communist, born in Poland, and married to one of the most powerful men in the world. The manner in which she cared for her family, however, resonated with the average American woman. Rather than exemplifying Communist womanhood, Nina Khrushchev simply embodied womanhood.⁷⁶

Mrs. Khrushchev received plenty of praise, even from stars like David Niven and Frank Sinatra.⁷⁷ The U. S. public found her so comforting, they hoped she could influence the politics of her less-liked, more-feared husband. Some news outlets reported “Mama K” actually held “the reins of the Khrushchev family power.” This narrative gained enough attention that Mrs. Khrushchev had to clarify her husband made his own decisions regarding both politics and their household.⁷⁸ A couple years later, in 1961, Senator Margaret Chase Smith called upon the Russian premier’s wife to talk some sense into him. She wanted Mrs. Khrushchev to ask her husband to cease nuclear weapons testing and tear down the Berlin Wall.⁷⁹ Americans still tasked

⁷⁴ Griswold, “Russian Blonde in Space,” p. 881.

⁷⁵ “Mrs. Khrushchev Shops like Grandmother,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 22, 1959.

⁷⁶ Griswold, “Russian Blonde in Space,” p. 887

⁷⁷ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, (New York: Norton, 2006). p.233.

⁷⁸ “Mama K Says Papa K Sits at Head of Table.” 1959. *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1959, p. 1.

⁷⁹ “Sen. Smith Says Soviet Wife Should Talk to Husband,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 18, 1961, p. 1.

Nina Khrushchev with reigning her husband in, even after she insisted this was not how her marriage, or Russian ones in general, functioned.⁸⁰

Despite her apparent lack of control over the Russian Premier, respect for the first lady of the Soviet Union remained fairly high. The American media particularly admired her response to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. At a Moscow service for the late president, Nina Khrushchev paid her respects with tears in her eyes.” Later, she met with U. S. Ambassador Foy D. Kohler and his wife Phyllis. There Mrs. Khrushchev expressed sympathy for First Lady Jackie Kennedy, as both a wife and head of the American-Soviet Friendship Society.⁸¹

President Kennedy was also relevant to the third form Soviet women took in the American imagination. After he appointed Dr. Janet Travell as his personal physician—the first woman to ever hold the position—a writer for *Good Housekeeping* pondered why it took so long for the U.S. to achieve such a milestone. “In Russia, more than half the doctors are women. Why can’t we do as well?”⁸² This debate simultaneously symbolized massive failure and great possibility for America.

Depending on who one asked, the image of Soviet women working as physicians, engineers, and even cosmonauts either represented where the United States had gone wrong, or what it had gotten right. Advocates of gender equality in the U. S. often employed this stereotype to push for change. Others, however, desired minimum modifications to prevailing gender roles, yet they desperately wanted to win the Cold War. If America was to fully compete with the Soviet Union, it should likewise utilize all its national brainpower—male and female. While

⁸⁰ "Mama K Says Papa K Sits at Head of Table," p. 1.

⁸¹ "Mrs. Khrushchev Leads Muscovites in Tribute: Weeps during Visit to U.S. Embassy; Russians View Kennedy Funeral on TV." *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1963, p. 2.

⁸² Valentine, "...For the Very young wife," p. 18.

some found the idea of female doctors and engineers distasteful, they did not invoke the outrage images of female street sweepers and construction workers did. In other words, the United States needed to (further) weaponize its women's brains without jeopardizing the home.

In June 1963, *The Christian Science Monitor* published "U.S. Women Ask: Why, Why, Why?"⁸³ It discussed the milestone made by Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, that very month. This brief piece presented the opinions of an anthropologist, a record-breaking pilot, and a former ambassador. All three were American women. The interviewees conveyed the varying reactions to the cosmonaut herself and the larger debate regarding Soviet-style gender equality. They also revealed general attitudes regarding American gender. One such attitude held that Tereshkova's actions should not be considered an accomplishment. Anthropologist Margaret Mead elaborated, "Russians treat men and women as interchangeable," so a Soviet woman in space was no more impressive than a Soviet man doing so. Mead advised against assuming gender in Russia functioned the same as it did in America. Of course, the anthropologist's stance was not wholly accurate and most certainly clouded with bias. Former U.S. ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce expressed a very different view. She found the Soviet Union to be the more advanced nation, in terms of gender, since "they knew how to get ahead of [the United States] by letting women assume an equal share in society." Additionally, pilot Jerrie Cobb believed American women would inevitably go to space one day and lamented the fact a Russian one got there first.⁸⁴

Female brainpower became a focal point for members of the government and public who feared falling behind the Soviets, especially in the arms race. Much of the nation was incorrectly

⁸³ Neal Stanford, "U.S. Women Ask: Why, Why, Why?: Propaganda?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1963, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Stanford, "U.S. Women Ask," p. 1.

informed on the state of the arms race, believing the U. S. severely dragged behind the Soviet Union. In reality, the U. S. outperformed the U. S. S. R. in most fields. However, Khrushchev's (strategic) rejection of the Open Skies proposal kept this fact hidden. Furthermore, many powerful American people and industries benefited from "the gap."⁸⁵ Women who worked in, or sought to join, defense related industries also profited from this narrative. Cold War competition produced the National Defense Education of 1958 and encouraged more women to enter science and technology. Regardless, of whether or not the U. S. needed to catch up to or stay ahead of the Soviets, it had to better employ its women. Acclaimed American women did not have to work, and for the sake of the family probably should not; however, if they were to, they could contribute just as much to their nation as Soviet women did to theirs, if not more. The dramatic extent to which the Soviet Union utilized its female brain power posed a threat to the United States. It simultaneously served as a guide, indicating exactly where the capitalist superpower lagged behind.⁸⁶

American media portrayed Soviet women as simultaneously overworked, sexless, maternal, oblivious, artistic, attractive, neglected, and advanced. Clearly, Soviet women did not exist in just one form in the American imagination. Each of these characterizations satisfied a "cultural need" of the American people.⁸⁷ Griswold's first stereotype made the Soviet Union look weak by ridiculing its women. A nation that could not provide for its female population could not possibly beat one which housed its wives and mothers in suburban paradises laden with consumer goods. This depiction reinforced the country's superiority complex and ensured American women felt grateful they were citizens of the United States rather than the Soviet

⁸⁵ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, p. 258.

⁸⁶ Griswold, "Russian Blonde in Space," p. 890.

⁸⁷ Griswold, "Russian Blonde in Space," p. 890.

Union. The second stereotype, epitomized by Nina Khrushchev, eased American minds. Russia may have been a fearsome rival armed with atomic weapons, but it also was a nation of mothers and grandmothers. When Mrs. Khrushchev shopped American department stores for gifts for her grandchildren, she showed Americans that Soviet women were far more concerned with their maternal duties than wiping the U. S. off the map. Lastly, the third stereotype indicated what the United States could do better, for the sake of its women and its security. The number of female doctors and engineers in the U. S. S. R. offered American women a valid argument to justify why they should enter such fields. When Americans wrote about Soviet women, they were identifying what the U. S. had gotten right and where it could improve. Therefore, analyzing the ways in which Americans produced and interacted with depictions of Soviet women reveals the nuanced nature of culture, gender, and family in the United States.

Women's Roles during the Cold War & Conclusion

The greatest battles of the Cold War were not fought on a battlefield. Rather, the fight for hearts and minds occurred in magazines, department stores, wedding venues, hospital beds, and suburban homes. The nuclear family replaced soldiers as they inspired patriotism domestically and envy abroad. While the offensive against communism enlisted every member of the family, it tasked mothers with the most responsibility. The nuclear family formed the center of Cold War propaganda, and the family revolved around mom. This was especially apparent in U. S. women's magazines which depicted both American and Soviet women.

Representations of American women typically showed an idealized version of domesticity, yet they also acknowledged the struggles which accompanied marriage and motherhood. These articles offered all sorts of advice for how women could make their lives better. One way women could help themselves and their families was by participating in politics.

Even fairly conservative publications like the *Ladies' Home Journal* encouraged wives and mothers to get political.

The most acceptable and accessible avenue through which women could join politics was anticommunism. Communist ambitions posed an active threat to the country and all its families. Women tended to be the most active parents and consumers, and they also benefitted from “special privileges” capitalism made possible. In theory, therefore, they had the most to lose from a Soviet-like system. This made women exceptionally qualified anticommunist crusaders. However, if homemakers were careless, they could leave their families—and the nation—susceptible to communism. Unfulfilling wives and overbearing mother weakened the men in their lives, and such vulnerability could provide an opening for subversive agents. Consequently, maternal power needed to be wielded with great caution.

Depictions of women also had the potential to influence the war's outcome. Images of idealized American women were put out domestically and internationally to muster support for the desirable lifestyles (and women) made possible by capitalism. Depictions of Soviet women, produced and consumed by Americans, were often employed for the same purpose. Articles and photographs often portrayed Soviet women as the victims of a “double burden” inflicted upon them by a cruel communist system which sought to eradicate gender. Women in the U. S. S. R. worked fulltime and still assumed all of the domestic responsibilities. Such stories were intended to highlight the virtues of capitalism, especially as they pertained to women. The juxtaposition of the Soviet woman's double burden with the American woman's special privileges also functioned to instill a great sense of gratitude in the latter. Representations of Soviet motherhood, on the other hand, soothed worried American minds. The maternal charms of Nina Khrushchev balanced out much of the fear inspired by her husband. While the first lady humanized the Soviet

Union, women like Valentina Tereshkova made it look superhuman. The high number of Russian women in skilled positions, like doctor or engineer, encouraged the U. S. to rethink its stance on women in the workplace.

The postwar housewife has been remembered as little more than a cook and cleaner. Even other contemporary women contributed to this misrepresentation. In 1963, Betty Friedan asked the readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, "Have American Housewives Traded Brains for Brooms?"⁸⁸ The feminist icon did not intend to belittle the homemakers themselves. She sought to critique how the role often oppressed women whether they realized so or not. Contemporary and modern views like this one, while they contain much truth, tend to ignore the ways in which the wives and mothers of the atomic age exercised autonomy in and outside of the home. Some women, like Friedan, outwardly spoke out against the oppressive system. Others took advantage of it and joined conservative politics. Some women fervently believed that conservative gender roles greatly benefitted them, viewing the ability to be a fulltime homemaker as a privilege. These varying responses influenced and were influenced by the Cold War.

Juxtaposing the manners in which Americans viewed Soviet women with the depictions of family and gender in the United States attributes greater significance to women's roles during the Cold War. This is important because the field of Cold War studies suffers from a lack of female-centric narratives. Historians like Elaine Tyler May, Robert Griswold, and Diana Cucuz have done admirable work correcting this. Unfortunately, their studies are often categorized first and foremost as works of women's history. This is not overtly problematic, but it does imply that Cold War history is not concerned with women. There is not a field of men's history, it is just

⁸⁸ Betty Friedan, "Have American Housewives Traded Brains for Brooms?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1963, pp. 24, 26.

considered history. The separate field of women's history has provided scholars with an area of study dedicated to the narratives and trends of a traditionally overlooked sex. However, too often analyses with a substantial focus on women are categorized primarily as women's studies rather than histories of a specific event or era. In the case of the Cold War, the lack of diverse historical analyses combined with inaccurate popular representations have culminated in an enduring and misguided nostalgia for the era's "good old-fashioned" family values. It has also misrepresented the nature of and the driving forces behind the conflict. An incredible amount of nuance is lost when the actions of half of the population are cast aside. Therefore, this thesis is first and foremost a work of Cold War studies.

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