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Middle-Class Housewives: The Unexpected Feminists of World War II

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## **Abstract**

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## Introduction

### World War II Overview:

World War II is considered to have begun on September 1, 1939, when Poland was invaded by Germany under the power of Adolf Hitler.<sup>1</sup> At this time, the United States resisted entering the war and held a largely isolationist view. World War I had ended in 1919, and a call to arms would have meant increased loss of American lives and a shift on the home front to stimulate wartime production. Yet the United States officially entered World War II after Japanese airmen bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii killing over two thousand men.<sup>2</sup> By attacking American soil, the Japanese message to the United States was that they did not fear them. The death toll at Pearl Harbor caused anxiety within the United States of future Japanese actions and furthered existing hatred of Japanese-Americans.<sup>3</sup> This event signaled the end of US isolationism and on December 8, 1941, America declared war on Japan.<sup>4</sup> As Germany continued to expand its power within Europe, a split formed between what was termed the “Axis” and the “Allies”. The Axis consisted of Germany under Adolf Hitler, Italy under Benito Mussolini, and Japan ruled by

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Grun and Werner Stein, *The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events*, New 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 516.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey M. White, *Memorializing Pearl Harbor: Unfinished Histories and the Work of Remembrance* (North Carolina, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2016), 1, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=4459506>; Bernard Rostker, ed., “World War II,” in *Providing for the Casualties of War, The American Experience Through World War II* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 176, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt2tt90p.17>.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton University Press, 2004), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/reader.action?docID=664567&query=japanese+internment>. One could see these bombings as a reaction of growing tensions created after the United States established the Immigration Act of 1924 in which America created quotas for immigrants, the number for the quotas being based on the 1890 Census. At that time little to no Japanese were traveling to America, which severely cut off Japanese Immigration until 1965. Japanese Americans status were lowered within the United States as greater restrictions were placed upon them by law starting in the 1880’s. Japanese American’s growing wealth within the USA increased fear of their growing power and wealth by other races within America after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

<sup>4</sup> Grun and Stein, *The Timetables of History*, 518.

Hirohito while the Allies consisted of America ruled by Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and later Harry Truman, England's Winston Churchill, and USSR's Joseph Stalin.<sup>5</sup>

Within the United States' borders, FDR "signed the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940," which was a preemptive call of war and made men between "21 and 36 register for the Selective Service" in preparation for possible drafting.<sup>6</sup> The number of volunteers and conscripted men increased after the attack at Pearl Harbor when they were increasingly drafted, as age requirements lowered from eighteen to thirty-seven in 1942, and time required of men in the service increased.<sup>7</sup> As time went on, married men were entered into war recruitment and in "October 1943 fathers accounted for six percent of that month's draft quota; by April 1944 they made up more than forty percent."<sup>8</sup> Some men were proud of joining the military, but others with families or other opportunities at home upheld America's expectations of them in the service but with greater disdain. With much to lose these men had hesitancy being on the front lines, unsure of America's interest in the war.<sup>9</sup> While men were sent to many different locations from abroad to places like England and Panama, others remained on the home front, like most American women throughout the war.

### **Women on the Home Front:**

From 1941 to 1945, when the United States fought, women mainly remained on the home front yet were vital in aiding the war effort. As wartime production began to grow and technology advancement lessened the manual labor involved, women increasingly took up

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 518.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Rostker, ed., "World War II," in *Providing for the Casualties of War*, 176.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Oxford, "The Draft," *American History* 29, no. 4 (October 10, 1994): 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; Ansgar Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," November 10, 1942.

employment in previously male dominated fields in the "iron, steel, and automobile industries" to fill the void left by male workers turned soldiers.<sup>10</sup> This served as a temporary vacuum, which women could fill. The creation of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program, Women's Army Corps (WAC), Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR), Army Nurse Corps (ANC), Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), and the Navy Nurse Corps (NNC). These programs allowed women to serve in the military and prove to male counterparts that they could complete the same, if not more dangerous, work than men. However, they remained within US borders almost entirely throughout World war II.<sup>11</sup> The WASP program consisted of all white women as the director, Jacqueline Cochran, persuaded black women to withdraw their applications showing racial prejudice typical of the time. By 1944, all WASPS were out of the aviation program.<sup>12</sup> Those servicewomen were, and are, lionized; but they also stood on a system of privilege from the beginning.

Yet all positions taken up by women proved their potential, changing the image of what a woman could do or be. Women also assumed roles traditional previously seen in the 1930s by remaining in the home, often caring for children of soldiers who left for war. "7,000" women and men also became volunteers for companies such as the Red Cross, "76,000" serving as nurses abroad and within America, or the United Services Organization (USO) who attended as "hostesses and dance partners to soldiers."<sup>13</sup> Some women kept a single role within these

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Householder Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility, 1900-1986*, American Social Experience Series 9 (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 127.

<sup>11</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, American Women in the Twentieth Century (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 31–32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–47.

<sup>13</sup> D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), 68–69; Michael E. Stevens, Ellen D. Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, eds., *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, Voices of the Wisconsin Past (Madison: Center for Documentary History, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1993), 49.



positions, yet others took on multiple positions within society at one time, serving as housewives and workers or workers and volunteers, etc. Women became not only of greater presence in their responsibilities but also gained further access by handling more responsibilities than previously assumed of them.

The World War II period served as a *temporary* expansion of women's power. As soldiers gradually returned home and resumed their positions within working society, women were put out of positions they held in wartime. Many quit to return to the home, while others were laid off or given notices of dismissals.<sup>14</sup> Women who remained employed after the war typically left "male" jobs to return to less paying "feminine" jobs, while "losing the protections of labor unions" which for some companies had provided women with equal pay.<sup>15</sup> These unions allowed some women to have salaries the same as men, not in "equity" but "from a desire to maintain men's wages."<sup>16</sup> The short postwar period of economic instability, during the years 1946-1950, is indicative of its transitional nature as the 1950s saw a greater division of gender roles, like the 1930s but rather with greater economic fortune. The 1940s saw a momentary shift in the options available to women and the greater freedom of choice in how they saw themselves and how others viewed them.

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<sup>14</sup> William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 180.

<sup>15</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> Leah F. Vosko and David Scott Witwer, "'Not a Man's Union': Women Teamsters in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 3 (October 1, 2001): 169-92, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2001.0078>.

## Rose Marie Rodholm: A Case Study



**Rose Marie Jackson (Rodholm)** – *circa early 1941*, Engagement photographs taken before Rose Marie’s wedding in June of 1941.

One of these women was my great-grandmother Rose Marie Rodholm, born in Clare, Michigan on January 19, 1918 to Laurence Jackson and Josephine Cour.<sup>17</sup> After earning honors for most of her early education and becoming Valedictorian after she graduated, Rose Marie attended Michigan State College.<sup>18</sup> She was a member of the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority and graduated with a BS in dietetics.<sup>19</sup> After college, she worked as a dietician at Billings Hospital in Chicago where she met my great-grandfather Ansgar “Rod” Rodholm. They were married on June 21, 1941 with both sets of parents in attendance.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Clare Sentinel — Browse by Title — Michigan Newspaper Collection,” accessed February 13, 2018, <https://digmichnews.cmich.edu/cgi-bin/michigan?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=ClareSENT&e=-----en-10--1--txt-txIN----->, January 24, 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, June 16, 1939.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> “Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence,” Spring 2017-present.

**From left to right: Soren Rodholm, Marie Rodholm, Ansgar Rodholm, Rose Marie (Jackson) Rodholm, Laurence Jackson, Josephine Jackson, - June 21, 1941, At Ansgar and Rose Marie Rodholm's wedding**



**Ansgar and Rose Marie Rodholm – June 21, 1941, Close-up of Rose Marie and Ansgar Rodholm after their wedding ceremony**



When the U.S. entered the war and Ansgar was drafted to the Panama Canal Zone, Rose Marie quit her job and followed him to where he was stationed.<sup>21</sup> Rose Marie returned to the United States after she found out she was pregnant and arrived at the unexpected destination of Tampa, Florida after almost being attacked by U-Boats.<sup>22</sup> Though Rose Marie traveled much at this time, she settled by herself in an apartment in Iowa City close to her brother Bob and his wife Lib. She utilized her own income saved from her previous employment and Ansgar's money to pay rent for "\$46 a month."<sup>23</sup> She delivered Anne Rodholm on November 11, 1942, in Iowa City, Iowa where Rose Marie was living.<sup>24</sup>

**Rose Marie and Anne Rodholm - circa 1942, Mother and daughter taken soon after Anne's birth**



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<sup>21</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," September 26, 1941.

<sup>22</sup> "Clare Sentinel," May 29, 1942. Had this happened I would not be alive today as she was carrying my grandmother Anne Shurtz.

<sup>23</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," September 22, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> "Clare Sentinel," November 13, 1942.

Ansgar, safe from the bombing and fierce warfare but not "the jungles and a few other things" made it home safely in late 1942 or early 1943.<sup>25</sup> He took Rose Marie and Anne to Jackson, Mississippi where he worked at a hospital there.<sup>26</sup> Patricia Rodholm was later born there on July 29, 1945.<sup>27</sup> Once the war was over, Ansgar set up a practice in Corpus Christi, Texas after the job was promoted by a trusted friend.<sup>28</sup> Peter Rodholm was born on May 6, 1947 in Corpus Christi.<sup>29</sup> They lived in Texas even after Ansgar was instantly killed in a car crash on March 20, 1951.<sup>30</sup> Rose Marie returned to work and eventually became the chief dietician at the nearby Driscoll Foundation Children's Hospital. She is known to have housed her children's friends who came from a bad home or had a hard life in the house that she once shared with her husband.<sup>31</sup> She would sometimes cook them dinner after school and let them stay over. These individuals today recollect on the kindness that Rose Marie once showed them.

### **Oral History's Past and Present Methodology:**

Oral history is important because it captures individual voices that often would not be discussed in a larger historical overview of a period. Taking broad trends within a societal group fails to capture the uniqueness of those who lived under the society studied. As an interviewer the process consists of three stages.

Before beginning an interview, it is key to research the interviewee's background and research already completed by historians on the topic before entering the interview, which allows

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<sup>25</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," November 10, 1942.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, January 30, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> "Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "Clare Sentinel", March 23, 1951.

<sup>31</sup> "Mrs. Rodholm Plans Menus by the Dozen," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, December 10, 1961.

the interviewer to direct their questions to their topic. Before an interview is started the interviewer needs to think about the ethical issues that could be involved, create a consent form that the interviewee needs to sign before the interview, and get permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure it is an ethical study.<sup>32</sup> This could take a few weeks to a few months. Getting an electronic recorder is helpful for storing interviews as is ensuring that enough batteries are purchased beforehand to lessen the possible loss of recordings. Though this paper only had one interviewee, who was a family member, an interviewer can also utilize “internet and social media,” “newspapers, archives, community projects, cultural associations or political organizations” or through personal connections to find other individuals to interview.<sup>33</sup>

During the interview, it is key to take into consideration the interviewer’s relationship to the person being questioned, which will shape what is expected by them and what one expects of them.<sup>34</sup> The interview is not about the person doing the recording, but rather what the person speaking should say from their point of view. Patience is key, and going off script to follow an interesting lead scholars attest is commonplace.

After the interview, it is important to save and back up the voice recording. Finding a repository or archive to house the recordings and transcriptions allows it to be kept in a safer and researchable placement if the interviewee agrees for this option on the consent form. Creating transcriptions or a typed version of the interview is conducive when referring to research later but is not required. This can be done through programs that tend to cost money or by listening and hand typing, which can last many hours.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Hajek, *Oral History Methodology* (1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013504183>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Hajek, *Oral History Methodology*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Primary and Secondary Sources:**

Opportunities and limitations are applicable to primary source information and the reliance on oral history. In the firsthand accounts of Rose Marie's story, a variety of source types were used to provide a detailed background of her life with a focus on her experience on World War II. The letters Rose Marie wrote to her husband Ansgar Rodholm and his family through the fighting depicted not only the movement and life accomplishments that she achieved at this time but also the experiences she felt and the life she lived without a husband in the early 1940s.<sup>36</sup> Ansgar's pre-war letters are not utilized as often in this project; but they depicted his character in terms of masculinity, expectations of males as providers and servicemen, and anxiety over school and money.<sup>37</sup> Surprisingly, Rose Marie is not mentioned in these earlier pieces, possibly because it was too early for them to have met, or he wanted to be sure that Rose Marie was the one he would marry before he told his parents about her.<sup>38</sup> His wartime and post-war letters sent to Rose Marie, his parents, and his brother Bram had different degrees of formality based on the recipient, and showed his desire in the war to move up in rank for both personal satisfaction and economic growth.<sup>39</sup> They depicted his job change near the end and post-war world as well as the emotional instability of serving the role expected of him in the army as well as being an absent parent for his first born when she was first growing up.<sup>40</sup> Rose Marie talked about her pre-World War II and war life throughout the two sessions of interviews performed in Spring 2017 in Corpus Christi, Texas. The topics within this interview session were solidified using other

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<sup>36</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters."

<sup>37</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters."

<sup>38</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, April 22, 1941 & May 18, 1941.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, November 11, 1942 & April 12, 1946.

sources such as the local newspaper for Rose Marie's hometown, *The Clare Sentinel*. By being in depth with the town's population, the newspaper recorded Rose Marie's most important events from birth to her husband's death in 1951.<sup>41</sup> Anne Shurtz, Rose Marie's daughter and my grandmother has been helpful in filling in gaps for Rose Marie in the interview and small questions to help understand the fluidity of her life.<sup>42</sup>

Though these primary sources provide greater first-hand insight into the emotions of those that write it, there are limits and biases. The personal connection between myself and Rose Marie adds emotional strength to my argument. The approach for this paper was to state what the primary sources said in relation to the argument made while being backed up with facts of Rose Marie's life confirmed by multiple sources such as newspapers, letters, and other individuals.

Primary sources were also found in the form of bound collections of narratives, organized under categories created by other authors. These books include *Since You Went Away* by Dr. Judy Litoff and David Smith, *Welcome Home* by Ben Wicks, and *Women of the Home Front: World War II recollections of 55 Americans* by Paul Parker.<sup>43</sup> These sources are comparative studies examining different roles that men and women experienced because of the war and allow those without access to personal collections to see them in a collective format. Yet they often are edited for length, so the author can fit a greater number of letters into their book, censoring out important information of the original writer's intent and the interest of the researcher.<sup>44</sup> It also

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<sup>41</sup> "Clare Sentinel," March 23, 1951.

<sup>42</sup> "Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence."

<sup>43</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds., *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ben Wicks, ed., *Welcome Home: True Stories of Soldiers Returning from World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991); Pauline E. Parker, ed., *Women of the Home Front: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*; Bill Adler and Tracy Quinn McLennan, eds., *World War II Letters: A Glimpse into the Heart of the Second World War through the Words of Those Who Were Fighting It*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).



homogenizes individuals' importance for their contributions while lessening the chance for women of the household to give their own distinct importance to the study of history. In limiting housewives' prominence within their books, historians ironically deemphasize the voices of a group of individuals within a history of women these researchers believe need to be seen.

Censorship of original documents traveling in and out of the United States was also common during World War II to prevent U.S. movement from being tracked or tactics from being leaked. This was done by the Office of Censorship, which would look at wartime letters and cut out pieces within the correspondence, or would cause individuals who knew about the censorship to not write about their endeavors to prevent tampering of letters.<sup>45</sup> While it provides further insight into the relationships of individuals within letters, it erases and affects the discussion of wartime experiences of soldiers in the moment. Even though secondary source biases are easier to notice, understanding primary source manipulation is key to options and limits of the period it stems from.

Just as materials a researcher uses is affected through time, the ideas that take shape as it evolves also manipulates how materials are analyzed by the researchers of the present. In relationship to this paper, feminism can be projected backwards without attending to changes over time. As researchers, one is influenced by these past conceptions of feminism, yet must attempt to examine it within its context, which in this case would be the 1940s and 1950s. As readers, one must come to terms with the fact that the 1930s and the Great Depression had normalized the position of white middle-class women in the home, and that increased women in

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<sup>45</sup> "Office of Censorship' – Catalog Search," accessed February 20, 2018, <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=%22office%20of%20censorship%22>; Parker, *Women of the Home Front*, 92; Adler and McLennan, *World War II Letters*, 226.

the service and employment as well as a continuation in the home, were steps forward for women as they entered sectors of society that had never been reached previously.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 135.

## Timeline

**1918:** Rose Marie Jackson is born in Clare, Michigan to Laurence and Josephine Jackson

**1939:** Rose Marie graduates from Michigan State College;

- R.M. starts at Billings hospital in Chicago, Illinois

**1940:** R.M. meets Ansgar Rodholm and they become engaged

**1941:** R.M. and Ansgar marry on June 21

- September Ansgar leaves for Panama to start in the army
- Late October Rose Marie Leaves for Panama

**1942:** May Rose Marie arrives back from Panama being detoured from Louisiana to Florida. She is pregnant, and the baby is later named Anne

- Ansgar remains in Panama
- Rose Marie stops by Clare, Michigan to see her family
- Rose Marie goes to Iowa City, Iowa and leases an apartment
- Anne Rodholm is born in November in Iowa City, Iowa

**1943/1944:** Ansgar returns from Panama and moves the family to Jackson, Mississippi to work as a doctor

- Patricia Rodholm is born

**1945:** World War II ends

- Ansgar begins a practice in Corpus Christi, Texas
- Rose Marie remains as a housewife

**1947:** Peter “Jackie” or “Ansgar” Rodholm is born in May

**1951:** Ansgar Rodholm dies in a car crash

- Rose Marie begins a position at Driscoll Children’s Hospital (DFCH)

**1973:** Rose Marie retires from DFCH as head dietician

**2018:** January 13<sup>th</sup> Rose Marie celebrates her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday surrounded by family and friends

## Chapter 1: Choice

Middle-class non-working housewives chose to be unemployed during the war because they wanted to have direct parental support for their children, had the economic advantage to do so, could no longer rely expediently and directly on their husbands in the service, and enjoyed motherhood.

American women had worked before World War II, yet those numbers increased from 1941-1942 as employment opportunities for women became available for both male and female jobs.<sup>47</sup> Women like Rose Truckey, a housewife whose oral history was recorded, who worked while pregnant had obstacles at her place of employment before she left to start her family. She recalled that “people just did not like to see a pregnant woman behind a counter.” Though individuals treated her with disdain she decided to keep working in the post war period.<sup>48</sup> This example shows the barriers that women faced in trying to take on dual roles as mothers and workers. While she was not a full housewife at the time, she eventually quit after six months to stay home.<sup>49</sup> Though contradictory to present normativity, she was scoffed at by attempting to financially support her future child through working and thus care financially for her child. This time was a period of change in which older thinking of women’s place transformed from singular to multilayered. Women like Rose Truckey pushed through negative encounters, choosing their own levels of comfort in relation to employment.<sup>50</sup>

Occupational choice not only meant that women could choose when to leave work, but the availability of jobs allowed them to choose to return if that was their decision. Historian

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<sup>47</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 110–11.

<sup>48</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

William Chafe discusses how “over 3.7 million of the 6.5 million female newcomers to the female labor force listed themselves as former housewives.”<sup>51</sup> Though specific companies laid off women after the war was over, women still held a high number of job positions. Throughout the month of “October 1946, women’s hiring rate was greater than men for the fifth month out of six, and their layoff rate was down.”<sup>52</sup> This trend displays great contrast to the Great Depression, in which the absence of male occupations lessened the opportunity for female employment. Women not only had choice whether or not to have a job in the war, but to return to wartime work if they had taken time to become a full-time housewife. The notions of the housewife and the worker are portrayed in scholarly books as separate or brought up briefly when they should be seen within a similar vein.<sup>53</sup> However, time and necessity affected what role was best suited each individual. Even though women’s environment and self were affected by change in occupation, be it working for paid or unpaid labor, neither positions were absolute.

Women like Rose Marie Rodholm who did work before the war and had the opportunity to save money had a stake in their own consumer needs.<sup>54</sup> These women were not fully reliant on their husbands as war separated couples both physically and financially. Though husbands typically provided greater financial assistance when they raised high enough in rank or had extra coinage, the increase of independence of women and finance allowed them to make decisions without a husband present as well as the power to act against his wishes. For instance, Rose Marie almost sold her husband Ansgar’s car for money, and her reaction a few letters later creates the educated assumption that he was upset and wished for her to hold off on that

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<sup>51</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 145.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 144; Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 163–89.

<sup>54</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” September 26, 1941.

decision.<sup>55</sup> Though she ended up not selling the car, the possibility for women to advance their own interests economically could be prevalent if it were their choice.

As evidenced above, they were cognizant of the financial options they had, yet were limited by restrictions of rationing and availability. They had to provide for themselves and their children under the individual financial assistance offered to them by family members or their husbands, while government changes provoked anxieties regarding economics.<sup>56</sup> During Franklin D. Roosevelt's time as president, he formed the Office of Price Administration by "announcing a seven-point program that included OPA's price freeze, more rationing, higher taxes on profits and the rich, stepped-up saving bond drives, stabilization of wages at "existing scales," and "legislation to impose price ceilings on farm commodities at parity."<sup>57</sup> Women who lived alone in the home as a housewife chose to support themselves under these conditions, creating multiple layers of uncertainty, while maintaining balance within these boundaries due to the economic foundation they were able to maintain.

When women worked they pushed these limitations be it housework, employment, or applying for the service. Women could choose which position they felt was best suited for their personal needs and how long to stay within that job. For instance, for "every two women workers hired in wartime production factories in June 1943, one quit."<sup>58</sup> Though some women remained stable in their role as a housewife, one's position and economic stability changed with time; not all women were stable in their roles. This movement proves the availability of work for women outside of the home and, seeing the return of mothers with small children to the home, the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, September 30, 1942.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew H. Bartels, "The Office of Price Administration and the Legacy of the New Deal, 1939-1946," *The Public Historian* 5, no. 3 (1983): 14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377026>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 159.

stability that being a housewife contained for some women. American women with families could also apply for jobs. Women like Evelyn Gotzion in Madison, Wisconsin relied heavily on other family members to watch her children while she was at work, which created a system in which “everybody worked.”<sup>59</sup> This reliance on trusted others, not on governmental programs was typical, providing the factors that pushed some women into the home and the motivation of others to find ways around these obstacles to obtain employment.<sup>60</sup> Funding was reliant on local government official’s dependence on “financial reserves” which “seemed a risk too great to take” in a time of war for these childcare programs.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, the choice of becoming a housewife or returning to the home maintained traditional expectations of female’s role as providers seen previously in the 1930s and before.<sup>62</sup> One key reason for women keeping this position was having children throughout the war’s duration. It was believed by these women that increased contact with the child would increase his or her development. This changed, however, in the post-war period when Dr. Benjamin Spock famously contradicted that “behaviorist methods of strict scheduling” promoted that “women were to let the child take the lead.”<sup>63</sup> White middle-class mothers tended to have great focus on the needs of their child during the war, and their desire to take on this role displays that. This direct involvement however was not necessarily for the child’s benefit in its growth, but for the mother’s emotional support as well. With their husband’s gone, their baby could represent the love that they were missing in the absence of the child’s father. Women who worked were diverging from their “biological role” as mothers and may have had to deal with ostracism by

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<sup>59</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>63</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 178.

others for their decision. In contrast, housewives with men in the service avoided that concern, while still having independence in running their household or performing actions independently.

Economic factors also impacted women's choice to remain housewives. Middle-class privilege allowed some women the luxury to stay at home, while others in lower classes did not have this choice and, with husbands gone, were forced to work out of financial necessity. The middle class, however, operated in a grey area in which greater economic stability allowed for options regarding paid or unpaid employment. Here, choice and status were connected. Women had to have either saved enough money before the war to support themselves or, more likely, depend on their husband or outside sources within the immediate family such as extended family members or friends.<sup>64</sup> Though they could be free with their living and working situation to best suit their needs, they were also more inclined to do so. Yet this also placed a restriction on women, counting mainly on others for their financial solidity. These obstacles of women's independence are indicative of the time period's continuation of stable social norms, yet it was a temporary window for which middle-class white women could decide how much, or if, paid or unpaid work was needed to fit their expectations of stability and better define their individual level of economic comfortability.

Even though economics affected where a woman would place herself within society, it ultimately was connected to husband's departure into military service. This altered the way women saw themselves and caused women to form roles previously unexpected. Rose Marie was working at a hospital in Chicago and left when she was notified she could visit her husband Ansgar in Panama proclaiming, "Three weeks from now I will be through with Billings

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<sup>64</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 85 & 89.



[hospital] and I can't say I'm sorry to be leaving."<sup>65</sup> It is important to highlight that she did work near the start of the war when Ansgar was already deployed.<sup>66</sup> His departure, the army's approval of her visit to Panama, and the eventual birth of my grandmother, were key factors that caused Rose Marie to choose the path of a housewife during World War II.<sup>67</sup> Her previous work at the Chicago hospital debunks the myth that women solely took care of the home before the war. By proving women worked in the late 1930s early 1940s, women autonomy in their own occupational placement increased. Though it was more difficult to be placed in a job without discrimination or in positions equal to men, in this pre-war period, women were still active in the workforce.<sup>68</sup>

Government advertising propagated by federal agencies such as the Office of War Information (OWI) whose goal was "to take an active part in winning the war and in laying the foundations for a better post war world", utilized publicity as an attempt to lead married women into the workforce.<sup>69</sup> Though women, may have been affected by magazines, posters, or newspapers made by the OWI and others, these marketing outlets "do[/did] not control women's behavior".<sup>70</sup> There is a separation between what women think about themselves and the actions they perform. Propaganda is therefore "more a reflection of larger society than a catalyst of social change."<sup>71</sup> Government agencies such as the OWI created an ideal to best fit America's World War II's needs, yet marketing allowed women to know their options for work rather than

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<sup>65</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," September 30, 1941.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, September 26, 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," September 30, 1941.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*, Yale Historical Publications 118 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Tawnya J. Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine Advertising*, Lexington Studies in Political Communication (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 31.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 34.

decide their positions for them. Some housewives with the desire to enter employment did so, while others continued to pursue housework, and those with occupational experience before the war could choose to leave or not re-enter having left. Therefore, women had many options as to where to place themselves within society. Women's experience differed in the way they felt and envisioned work; not all were positive or patriotic. Rose Kaminski, a factory worker from Wisconsin recalled that one would feel "like a machine, working a machine."<sup>72</sup> Like Rose Marie, who left her hospital job to travel to Panama to see her husband, Mrs. Kaminski quit soon after learning she would be starting a family.<sup>73</sup> Though outside forces had ultimately propelled them to leave their working positions, distaste of the labor role increased the amount of women's choice to enter as a housewife.

The dislike of work also reveals its antithesis regarding the enjoyment that being a housewife could bring. Though the father figure was absent during the war years, women in the home could be increasingly involved in their children's lives. Even though women devoted more attention to their children, male "social commentators and psychologists" became critical of women and their reactions to the decrease in male involvement.<sup>74</sup> Essayist Philip Wylie created the idea of "'momism' to describe overprotective, overindulgent mothers."<sup>75</sup> The decision by women to follow socially accepted trends of womanhood and motherhood came under attack. What scholars like Wylie failed to understand was the loneliness that women felt while their husbands were away. This is evidenced in multiple letters by different women who repeat within their letters phrases like, "My heart aches for you constantly" or "love you more than life

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<sup>72</sup>Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 11.

<sup>73</sup>Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," October 28, 1941; Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 24.

<sup>74</sup>Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 176.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid, 176.

itself.”<sup>76</sup> Their physical proximity to their families were more constant, yet women were also dealing and reestablishing themselves without their husband to support them. Though women’s increased care for their child can be viewed as a way for them to fill the void of the love and support of their husbands, it could have also been that women chose to focus on the enjoyment that a small child could bring when the world around them is filled with chaos. These male figures who projected their ideas of women’s parenting styles onto women understood the impact on the mother onto the child, while failing to comprehend the child’s impact on the mother. Though this could be examined more accurately in hindsight, it can be argued that women had a better grasp on their relationship to their children versus these essayists. Women chose to stay in the home, at least in part, because of the reward of happiness that came with being a mother.

Therefore, middle-class housewives during World War II could express choice in their connection to the home due to pregnancy, economic stability, less reliance on the husband, and personal fulfillment. Though there were factors that allowed their decision to come to fruition, it ultimately was their discrepancy in the positions they placed themselves.

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<sup>76</sup> Lutoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 94 & 102.

## Chapter 2: Self-Identity

Middle-class housewives began to form a sense of self-identity intertwined within their individual growth during World War II because of the distance and time away from their husbands. While letters kept some communication between couples, they were only a temporary correspondence creating less impact on the female's life than when their husband was physically present. Though not every couple wrote letters to each other and not all correspondence was able to be sustained throughout the war's entirety, increased distancing between couples allowed married women with husbands in the service to establish new roles for themselves as mothers, wives, and women. Each of these characteristics defined housewives individually for themselves, while connecting women together through their shared roles.

The housewife and motherhood were connected during the 1930s as the traditional expectation prior to World War II, specifically that those with children should stay within the home.<sup>77</sup> As women's employment increased after the attack at Pearl Harbor and as the United States entered World War II, some mothers with children changed expectations of what a woman could be and was capable of.<sup>78</sup> Yet in the home, women drew a deeper connection to the pre-1942 view that those with children should not work.<sup>79</sup> The option of choice allowed the women to shape their employment identities in motherhood.

In a study conducted in 12 Chicago suburbs by sociologist Helena Lopata, 80 out of 268 females studied saw motherhood as the most important role they identified with when defining their own sense of self.<sup>80</sup> There was a connection between their identity and raising children. The

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<sup>77</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 135.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>80</sup> Helena Znaniecka Lopata, *Occupation: Housewife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 15 & 48.

1940s were a time of growth in fertility, resulting from an increase in wealth, contrasting with the economic poverty seen in the 1930s. As soldiers returned from war, children were born as wives reconnected with their servicemen.<sup>81</sup> In the 1940s children gave meaning to the housewife's link to the home as the child allowed her to maintain that status. This created more direct parenting with a focus on the needs of the child, creating a connected relationship between the two individuals. Reiterating the distancing of male counterparts, women resultingly placed increased love, care, and focus on their child. In 1946 Dr. Benjamin Spock commented on the negative effects of strict parenting that he recognized in mothers during the war years which he hoped would lead to a more relaxed parenting style in the post-war period.<sup>82</sup> Building a closer role with their son or daughter, women in the home helped solidify the female gender as caretakers; yet women's aid in other sectors such as employment or service during the war exhibited the complexity of this single stereotype for women.

By being more readily available to their child than workers could, housewives felt pride in the emotional and physical closeness to their son or daughter. Father's absence from their child was, for some, a key motivation for them to stay with their baby. Even though they had seen themselves as mothers, they also had to take on the responsibilities of the father, creating more work for them within the home.

Ann Oakley's 1970 study of housewives depicts the lack of assistance of men who were working near home.<sup>83</sup> The women of World War II, however, performed the job of the male and female without the help of a man. This labor within the home was an addition to the anxieties of war felt by women such as rationing, husband's death, and their child's safety. Motherhood was

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<sup>81</sup> Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 92–93.

<sup>82</sup> Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: London: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1988), 187.

<sup>83</sup> Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 138.

important as it created a job for them throughout the war and indicated the attachment of a mother and child as a part of her identity while reaffirming traditional expectations of feminine domesticity.

Yet motherhood individually did not explain the role that women in the home had in their own identity as wives. Though their husbands were off fighting in World War II, women's role as a wife remained vital, showing the connection through separation between husband and wife during the war. The physical removal of the men did not eliminate their importance to the women, proving that while women grew mainly independent from their husbands, they still felt connected to their loved ones.

Housewives' balance between self-reliance and dependency was challenged. Those like Rose Marie who loved and kept frequent communication with their husbands, relied on a man to aid in their emotional and often financial support, yet also supported themselves by deciding the economic choices, maintaining familial and social contacts, and ensuring correspondence was kept in the relationship during the war.<sup>84</sup> These women took on the burdens of not only the home but the factors that went alongside it, performing dual obligations at the same time or, more specifically, the "husband's duties" without much recognition by the government. Housewives showed that women could perform similar tasks as men with little to no need to point out the change in these expectations through government propaganda. Just as women's entrance into the workforce allowed them to perform once seen as "manly" occupations such as welding, building, and management, women in the home were also changing the expectations of housewives' responsibilities and pushing the limits of gender.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," October 14, 1942.

<sup>85</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 137–38.

The internal factors within the home displayed how women took on a “job” without a wage while still performing their duties as a wife and a worker. In Oakley’s study she claims that “the housewife’s hours are among the longest...”<sup>86</sup> Keep in mind this study was completed when men were back from war. Without outside help, a housewife would work much longer due to the lack of male aid within the home and less advanced household technologies. She also would work greater hours than a factory worker as employment hours were restricted, but the housewife’s work was daily.<sup>87</sup> Just because housewives did not directly engage in paid occupations during the war did not indicate that they were unhelpful to American society. Yet, their roles as wives and the domestic associations with the female gender emphasized before the 1940s was still prevalent in their choice within the home.<sup>88</sup>

Under the study performed by Helena Lopata, “wife” was the third self-identified term and under the study by Anne Oakley, “wife” was tied for third as the term most connected to their personality.<sup>89</sup> The similarities between the studies indicate the prominence within of women as wives but also the importance of marriage within society over time, though these sociologists studied housewives in 1970s America and in England at the same time.<sup>90</sup> With men being called to serve overseas and the finalization of marriages that, in the recent past, had been “postponed during the economic crisis of the 1930’s”, the early 1940’s were a pinnacle time with marriage increases or after effects in waiting to have children for economic reasons during the Great Depression, amalgamated with fear during World War II of the future for servicemen in battle.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 158.

<sup>88</sup> William H Chafe, *Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Lopata, *Occupation: Housewife*, 48; Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, 122–29.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 164.

According to the Census Bureau women's average "marriage rate in 1940 was 105 per 1,000 women aged seventeen to twenty-nine" whereas in the late twenties it had been "89.1".<sup>92</sup> For those within this age group, the identity of a wife would have been instrumental not only because of the factors that expedited the marriage process but also the nuances of marriage that were left behind with a soldier's quick send off. Middle-class females new to marriage were both wives and individuals simultaneously, having to understand themselves in this new position without a physical husband.

Though the impact of the wife's identity indicates her idea of herself within society's physical settings such as the home, supermarket, sporting events, etc., 1940s' scholarship on housewives or lack thereof, indicates the important aspects and the individuals within the specific historical context. Government programs such as the Office of War Information (OWI) formed under an executive order in 1942 to regulate propaganda, and the renaming of the Office of Price Administration (OPA), which controlled housing prices, wages, and rationing during the war and the economic instability in the immediate post war world, were aimed at working and non-working individuals to control the home front's perception of World War II and the United States role within it.<sup>93</sup> Yet the historical narrative places greater focus on the women who served or worked during the war, and housewives with children are rarely or insignificantly mentioned. Though women conformed to previous notions of society, keeping a traditional role, their strong commitment to upholding societal stability shows their beliefs in their identification as wives and a chosen disobedience from the shifting trend of women at work during war.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>93</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information*, 1; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 159.



Therefore, housewives did not lack power in their position because they identified as a wife within the home setting, but rather used their newly established status to take on responsibilities previously assigned to the husband. In continuing traditional domestic roles of women seen in the 1930s, housewives worked longer than those in jobs without economic rewards and asserting choice in this role.<sup>94</sup> Though they were impacted by outside influences by private corporations and the government through propaganda and economic changes, they remained firm as a wife and mother, ignoring the calls to patriotism through employment and defying the morphing conception of women.<sup>95</sup>

As the need for women in new positions in the workforce grew and women served as housewives, their self-identity in womanhood influenced how they interacted with society and how the world around them perceived them. Marriage was one of the key events in a woman's life that transformed her from a "girl" to a "wife".<sup>96</sup>

Weddings and the physical event and act of marriage's transition to womanhood shaped them based on the importance that was placed on girls at a young age. According to Lopata, "The wedding ceremony officially converts the "girl" into a "married woman," which was "institutionally regimented for economic and procreative purposes."<sup>97</sup> Though that is a very strict interpretation of the results of marriage ties, the act did serve to greater connect two people into one identity. While a more stable role of the traditional family, it bonded women's self-growth through their connection with men and not in their individual selves. World War II, however,

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<sup>94</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Lopata, *Occupation Housewife*, 82.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

disrupted the family unit, causing a separation of couples and allowing for individual growth, while still holding on to the hope of re-establishing the relationship in the post war period.

The war brought about uncertainty in the social stability of families and within women themselves. A great push to reaffirm the domestic family importance is illustrated by the vast consumerism by women and post-war establishment of “nuclear families” (though this had a lot to do with increased layoffs of women at World War II’s end and propaganda pushing pre-1940s ideals of women in the home).<sup>98</sup> Although not all women followed this trend, like Rose Marie who returned to work when her husband died in 1951, the 1950s served to contrast against the 1940s, reverting to 1930s trends of women in the home.<sup>99</sup>

Some women who took on World War II jobs within factories also performed once considered masculine occupations, such as toolmakers, construction workers, airplane service, and road maintenance, temporarily changing the attachment of gender to tasks.<sup>100</sup> Women in the home chose to maintain feminine domestic duties previously promoted throughout American society. This maintenance and expansion of women’s work exemplifies the 1940s as a demonstration of women’s potential regardless of gender. Women entering different fields and settings connected women holistically, proving that they could have choice and was a temporary precursor toward feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, which placed emphasis on “greater equality in education, the workplace, and the home.”<sup>101</sup> Though historians fail to include the 1940s into the three waves of feminism, it proved that womanhood was not restricted to one place within

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<sup>98</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 179.

<sup>99</sup> “Clare Sentinel”, March 23, 1951.

<sup>100</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 137–138.

<sup>101</sup> Martha Easton, “FEMINISM,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 99.

society, and that women within different sectors could interact with each other to keep both the economic and familial needs afloat during the war's disruption of normativity.

Women learned how to take care and understand themselves better by the roles they decided to adapt to within society, during and after 1942, in places such as the home, military, employment, and volunteering. The contradiction of "patriotic femininity" was produced, where women contributed to aiding their country, often stepping into once male roles, to gain economic increase while portraying "a heightened sense of heterosexuality."<sup>102</sup> Women like Rose Marie had to control managing finances and affording places to live.<sup>103</sup> Certain areas of the United States, typically within large cities (this was due to factory establishment in said cities) had housing shortages which resulted in "doubl[ing] up" with others.<sup>104</sup> This illustrated the larger transportation to cities, which had more factory jobs and would later lead to the migration of the white middle class to suburbs in the 1950s once men returned from war.<sup>105</sup> When a housewife's identity of womanhood was connected to the home, their endurance to retain those traditions was apparent.

Just as men were unexpectedly drafted into the military, women were forced to carry the problems of a typical dual parent household on their own while lacking the emotional support of their husband. These too were thrust upon housewives without notice, and while they were not dying for the war, they received little to no recognition for these sacrifices.

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<sup>102</sup> Phil Goodman, "'Patriotic Femininity': Women's Morals and Men's Morale During the Second World War," *Gender & History* 10, no. 2 (July 1998): 278.

<sup>103</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," June 21 & September 22, 1942.

<sup>104</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and beyond*, 166.

<sup>105</sup> Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility, 1900-1986*, 98.

Sacrifices to women's clothing, and thus their sense of self in relation to their gender, were also rationed under the War Production Board.<sup>106</sup> Historian Melissa A. McEuen discusses how *Women's Wear Daily* argued "to dress well and smartly with charm and color" was women's "patriotic duty."<sup>107</sup> This serves as just one example of how magazine propaganda promoted rationing while appealing to women's desire to aid in the war. Ad's like the one describes previously used the war to push their financial agenda, ironically making sacrifice profitable for themselves as marketers. Though these rationings made women follow stricter guidelines as less fabric was used in clothing than in pre-war years, it also allowed women to express their bodies with fewer restrictions. Religious sects pushed back against these changes, such as when the Catholic Group, Catholic Action Girls, having desired more conservative clothing berated those who were more comfortable with their bodies.<sup>108</sup> However, as clothing was reduced and lack of nutritional products became higher in price due to rationing, women's bodies were increasingly critiqued as propaganda promoted "the shrinking female body" as the main "image of femininity" slowly changed women's expectations of themselves as females through the constructions set by magazines, newspapers, and consumer culture.<sup>109</sup> Although women were taking charge of their womanhood in terms of their bodies, media outlets promoted an ideal that fit the standards required of war, putting the needs of war rationing and America's economic pressure toward the effort overseas at the expense of women's self-identity and criticisms. The war period increased the focus on material goods through propaganda, which started shaping women's identity through their experiences while forming an acceptance of self

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<sup>106</sup> Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 138.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>108</sup> McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 174.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

through the expectations of what a woman should be. Ironically, most of the important private company advertisers and government programs such as the Office of War Information were men forcing their idealism of women at war onto citizens, morphing the way women saw themselves.<sup>110</sup>

Yet middle-class housewives still created their sense of self through their roles as mothers, wives, and women throughout World War II. They sacrificed much with their husbands away at war, yet still managed to thrive and push the limits of what housewives had undergone pre-war. Wives affected by increased propaganda during wartime shifted how they saw themselves yet remained true to their core beliefs.

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<sup>110</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 31.

### Chapter 3: Support

Although the assistance of families and friends is mentioned within secondary source material on women, this aid typically revolves around female workers and not housewives. The lack of secondary source evidence reiterates the stereotype of the unhappy housewife who is so involved with her life within the home that she fails to find comfort or happiness from elsewhere. The reality was that much of these scholarly works did not discuss this topic because the stories of women going to and taking interest in hobbies both inside and outside the home were unique to the experiences of individual women. Though they relied on friends and family to care for their children so they could experience the satisfactions of America in a time when the world was in disarray, they also depended on those around them for self-enjoyment.

Friends, new or old, were the key to happiness. Socializing, for married women with children, revolved around updates on their life and their husband's situation in the service in the war.<sup>111</sup> It was a time of reflection and 1941-1945, became a period of support and connection between housewives trying to adapt to the challenges of war. It was a way for others to show direct investment in their lives. Besides the radio and phonograph, technological items that brought people together were limited.<sup>112</sup> Individuals were more connected to the direct interest in other's lives, especially within their local community, in which local calls would lead to face-to-face socials.<sup>113</sup> Often close friends would stop by unannounced, which was accepted and created

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<sup>111</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> H. Lacohee, N. Wakeford, and I. Pearson, "A Social History of the Mobile Telephone with a View of Its Future," *BT Technology Journal* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 2003): 203–11, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025187821567>.

<sup>113</sup> Dominic J. Capeci, "'Never Leave Me': The Wartime Correspondence of Peg and George Edwards, 1944 to 1945," *Michigan Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (2001): 101, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20173929>.

long lasting conversations.<sup>114</sup> They shared tips, ideas, and products like “clothes and baby equipment” that would aid in women’s lasting strength throughout World War II.<sup>115</sup>

In Iowa City, Iowa, Rose Marie Rodholm wrote to her husband Ansgar about her friends, brother, and sister-in-law saying, “Last night Al & Margaret, Bob [her brother] & Lib came for dinner...I had a real roast beef...that was so tender.”<sup>116</sup> Here friendships formed that would last many years. Ansgar knew about these individuals, so the couple must have known them for some time.<sup>117</sup> These dinners served to maintain and build upon friendships. Dinner, conversation, and games were typical ways of spending time with others. It was common for Rose Marie to play bridge or have friends over, even from the early age of 15.<sup>118</sup> Throughout her youth she was an energetic person who could be responsible enough to create an event, while enjoying the company of those around her. Again, this was made possible by the status and wealth that she could maintain somewhat steadily throughout her life, from her father’s butcher business to her own job as a dietician to her husband’s income as a doctor.<sup>119</sup> She could throw these parties because of her class, but it also was a sign of power and control over the fun she had and importantly the amusement of others. This relaxed social form with friends raised her own significance while making others happy.

Social circles were also an informal method of bringing women of certain similarities together in a community-based atmosphere, consisting of smaller local gatherings of individuals. Jean Lechnir from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin described how they would “read [their]

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<sup>114</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” November 27, 1942.

<sup>115</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 89.

<sup>116</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” October 10, 1942.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., October 12, 1942.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.; “Clare Sentinel,” January 13, 1933.

<sup>119</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” February 10, 1933 and September 12, 1941.

husband's letters or tell all the stuff that went on and [they] got very close..."<sup>120</sup> Serving as a form of support, the groups aided each other when a loved one died in battle or was sent off to war. This showed that they were not alone and had other fellow women within their community, who were going through similar traumatic experiences. Ties between these women were evidenced in the lasting relationships they maintained in the post war period, demonstrating how a friend could become a type of family.<sup>121</sup> Relationships of wartime housewives extended past their anxiety and hardship of being alone without their husband's care (though it was a part of it). It proved that this attention was aimed not only for their children, but for other women to create and maintain strong and stable ties of support.

One of these women was Grace Bracker from Hazelton, Iowa whose "sewing club" eventually became a "Baby Club" after the attendees began to have and raise children.<sup>122</sup> These non-governmental or company clubs "didn't have any dues," which allowed for increased participation and emotional support no matter their economic standing.<sup>123</sup> By creating their own circle, they showed agency in their desire to support others and therefore proved emotional maturity. Physically, these groups assisted by helping each other get supplies, give parenting advice to new mothers, or teaching them new techniques to assist with childcare.<sup>124</sup> Though propaganda displayed women as needing to aid in the war effort through volunteering, working, or serving, individuals in these groups assisted with lowering the cost of the war.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 84.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>125</sup> "Powers of Persuasion - Poster Art of World War II," National Archives, August 15, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/wwii-posters>.





**World War II Poster:** 1944, shows housewives longing, and a push for married women into the World War II labor force<sup>126</sup>

Though it is not shown through statistics and outward service, these women did their part, no matter how small, to help themselves and their country in the raising of future generations by empowering other housewives around them to seek strength in other women, lifting each person up through the shared experience of World War II.

But, family sometimes helped to lessen these expectations. Not every man was sent to serve, and women stayed in America so housewives often could create a support network

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<sup>126</sup> "Powers of Persuasion Intro Page," accessed May 14, 2018, [https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers\\_of\\_persuasion/its\\_a\\_womans\\_war\\_too/images\\_html/longing.html](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/its_a_womans_war_too/images_html/longing.html).

through family members.<sup>127</sup> Even though blood family, living in the home or nearby, could assist with the care of housewives' children, extended family or family by law were also a part of allowing women to spread their daily life past their home walls. For Rose Marie, relations with her parents were not as simple as on the surface. Right before Rose Marie was about to have her second child, Ansgar asked if his mom, Marie Rodholm, could come as saying "Rosemarie would prefer to have her" come to help deliver over her own mother by blood, Josephine Jackson.<sup>128</sup> This example shows the imperfections of families in the middle 1940s. Rose Marie knew her mother's character and decided against her assistance. The closeness that family through marriage could create, as well as the choice of women in the childbearing process is demonstrated. Marriage was not only a connection between husband and wife, but the interweaving of their respective families and the familial help that was attached to it. Women then entered a liminal space in terms of child rearing. The absence of the husband led them to be primarily on their own, but frequently have extended family over as well to help with or care for their children.<sup>129</sup> Though family eased the burdens of motherhood, societal normativity of women's work continued to enforce women's labor in this setting.

The assistance of family was prevalent in housewife Virginia Ott's narrative in which her "parents lived in a small town in upstate New York and [she] decided to go there."<sup>130</sup> Though her husband served within the United States, they were still separated from each other for parts of the war.<sup>131</sup> Distance was a factor in the level of anxiety women faced and the way in which

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<sup>127</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife between the Wars," *Women's Studies* 3, no. 2 (January 1976): 157.

<sup>128</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," May 26, 1945.

<sup>129</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 85-86.

<sup>130</sup> Pauline E. Parker, ed., *Women of the Home Front: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans*, 178.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

couples could speak to each other. Those within the United States borders could call, hear their significant other's voice, and resultingly feel a more in-depth connection than those overseas, who would have had to utilize letters as the main form of communication. While family typically could help ease the separation of a wife to a husband, it also allowed women to do more outside of their motherhood duties. For women like Mrs. Ott, volunteering was a way to aid in the war effort while also getting out of the home. She and her mother used to "make bandages and dressings" for the "Red Cross."<sup>132</sup> This reinforced government propaganda asserting that women should do their part in direct action of World War II.<sup>133</sup>

Yet, parents were not the only form of aid that women used during World War II to display their individual freedom from the home. Lunette Mulkey recalled how her sisters worked collectively to take care of their kids.<sup>134</sup> Though she was from the South, their communal care of the children displays World War II as a time of coming together, to make it through wartime. To "keep [themselves] busy, and pool [their] resources," they made "slip covers and drapery."<sup>135</sup> Jobs could therefore be found within the home as well as outside. By creating their own small business from home, the sisters proved that women could uphold traditional roles while still making money to support themselves and their family collectively. The increase of women in one household allowed less individualistic care between a mother and child, while establishing greater availability for the needs of the child. It too gave the Mulkey's the option for easier access to caregiver's due to the number of siblings and their proximity within the home.

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<sup>132</sup> Parker, *Women of the Home Front*, 179.

<sup>133</sup> Mei-ling Yang, "Selling Patriotism: The Representation of Women in Magazine Advertising in World War II," *American Journalism* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 318.

<sup>134</sup> Parker, *Women of the Home Front*, 176.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

As previously argued, women could not socialize and take part in increased individual interests without stable and planned financial situations. Marjorie Kenny took on the budgeting expenses for her family in Massachusetts.<sup>136</sup> This not only displayed the restrictions that women were placed under with rationing and rising prices implemented by the Office of Price Administration in 1942, but the power of women in determining both her family's financial success over time, as well as her own desires for how she saw the money to be best placed.<sup>137</sup> Women like Marjorie kept the family unit steady in the present and future by taking on this task when their husband was serving. Housewives' intelligence were reinforced by the careful planning and organizing of the family budget. They not only knew their family's needs but attempted to predict their family's economic situation based on the way they were impacted by the outside world. Wartime financial issues caused emotional as well as physical stress to the middle-class family unit. The decrease in husband's salaries in the military in comparison to pre-war income added to the anxiety of their safety.<sup>138</sup> If a housewife solely relied on her husband, their finances and health were tied together. Therefore, reliance on family was important in case their husband's monetary support fell through. Women ensured their families status each day because their class rank could be hindered by the war instantaneously.

While women maintained the household budget, they formed social circles and their own individuality through hobbies and interests inside and outside of the home. For middle-class women, films or shows were a form of entertainment that was typically enjoyed with others.<sup>139</sup> After the Office of War Information's (OWI) formation by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1942,

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<sup>136</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds., *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front*, 104–5.

<sup>137</sup> *Rationing in World War II*. (Washington, D.C., 1946), 2.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015036908583>.

<sup>138</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," October 28, 1942.

<sup>139</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," October 29, 1942 and December 10, 1942.

it began to hold power over the film industry and, by 1943, “had convinced every studio except Paramount to let OWI read all their scripts instead of selected ones.”<sup>140</sup> Though movie attendees may or may not have realized it, the government was controlling most of the movies produced at the time to promote work towards the war effort on the home front, reforming the views of the USSR into a positive position when they became America’s allies, and minimizing the violence and gore associated with war.<sup>141</sup> Those that frequented the movie theater would have been susceptible to these integrated themes throughout the war years, prompting a call to action for those in the home. These films helped to shape audience’s political viewpoints as well as censor the violence and hardship of war to ease the anxiety expressed about loved ones abroad. In about a year’s time span Rose Marie wrote about attending three movies, one of which was when she and her friends “went to the show and saw *Road to Morocco*.”<sup>142</sup> Though this movie was a comedy, and not related to the military, it demonstrated the different forms of cinema that women experienced, were influenced by, and wanted to see.<sup>143</sup> These forms of entertainment served as a reliever of stress, taking the mind off of the troubles and hardships of daily life, while the OWI had a large hold over the control of Hollywood’s film propaganda.<sup>144</sup> Women and men therefore assisted in the spread of wartime propaganda. Because middle-class and upper-class women could afford the extra expense that a movie cost, they were the ones being targeted in greater numbers. Middle-class housewives who attended these showings proved that women’s actions were not fully restricted to the home. Women like Rose Marie had people to rely on but

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<sup>140</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945,” *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (1977): 103, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888275>.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 95 & 98–99.

<sup>142</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” October 10, 1942.

<sup>143</sup> David Butler, *Road to Morocco*, Adventure, Comedy, Family, 1943, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035262/>.

<sup>144</sup> Koppes and Black, “What to Show the World,” 1.

could still do as she pleased as an independent adult woman. Having visited the theater to watch *Road to Morocco* one month before Anne was born depicts the acceptance of pregnant women in public spheres, the confidence in Rose Marie in going to a theater eight-months pregnant, and the level of social involvement women engaged in outside of her duties as a housewife is prevalent.<sup>145</sup>

For Rose Marie, Jean Roberts from Oregon, and other women and men on the home front, dinner parties or get togethers and the card game bridge were ways to pass the time between friends.<sup>146</sup> The creation of this space allowed for intimate discussion between the members that would not have been possible in public areas. Here, women could learn about new events of the war and get updated on each other's lives, developing a deeper connection and building close friendships of emotional support. By hosting these get togethers in planned or short notice, women grew greater accustomed to the flow of others coming and going, establishing a relaxed atmosphere in which the company assisted in the creation of their contentment.

With others around, the home may have felt less lonely, but going out was also an option for housewives who had someone to watch their children. Housewife Jean Lechnir recalled that she would "go out to eat at one of the local nightclubs or restaurants."<sup>147</sup> For the meal she would typically buy dinner for "\$2.50" plus extra for a "cocktail or a glass of pop."<sup>148</sup> Women did more than the roles assigned to them and needed to enjoy entertainment for self-satisfaction. Even though father figures were not a significant part of women's everyday life in the early/mid

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<sup>145</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," October 10, 1942.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid; Parker, *Women of the Home Front*, 194–95.

<sup>147</sup> Stevens, Goldlust-Gingrich, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945*, 84.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 84.

1940s, it did not mean that they could not find excitement and acceptance through the friends around them, separating women's happiness levels from their romantic associations, and proving that love expands beyond that of just the spouse.

Therefore, women's placement in society extended past the boundaries of the home. It was the support of other women, which helped build the strong networks of mothers who lived alone in World War II. Family members and friends were advantageous to the growth of female individuality and amusement regarding hobbies and interests, which shaped their character and permitted greater freedom of self-expression.

## Chapter 4: Consumer Economy

During World War II, women could decide how to contribute to the consumer economy while frequently relying on their husband's military salaries, based on rank, for assistance. Women had choice in *how* their income was spent under the pressures of rationing by the United States government supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs and offices.

The Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act, created in 1942, had a primary goal in "protecting the families of fighting men in time of war."<sup>149</sup> How the monetary system worked for the army in particular (which Ansgar was a part of) was that those in the lowest four categories of, "private, private first class, technician fifth grade, corporal, technician fourth grade, and sergeant" were given "family allowances to the dependents", and the top three grades were given "government quarters or \$37.50 a month."<sup>150</sup> In correlation to today, that would be between \$500-\$600 per month.<sup>151</sup> In terms of salary that was low even for soldiers in higher positions. It also divided the salaries based on number of children the soldier had, if they were married or divorced, and if they had a parent as a dependent.<sup>152</sup> Men like Ansgar Rodholm therefore entered the army and worked hard to rise their way through the ranks, both as a sign of personal accomplishment and as a way to make more money for their family back in the United States. When his position changed he felt his "rank meant nothing" because he had "duties and responsibilities equivalent."<sup>153</sup> Yet as a doctor, even he had trouble as he could return money to

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<sup>149</sup> Harry Grossman, "Family Allowances for the Dependents of Servicemen," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 11, no. 1 (1943): 66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1597655>.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 66–67.

<sup>151</sup> "Inflation: How Much It Costs - Then and Now - CNNMoney," accessed May 1, 2018, <http://money.cnn.com/calculator/pf/inflation-adjustment/>; "Inflation Calculator | Find US Dollar's Value from 1913-2018," accessed May 1, 2018, <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

<sup>152</sup> Denzel C. Cline, "Allowances to Dependents of Servicemen in the United States," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 227 (1943): 2.

<sup>153</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," October 28, 1942.



his creditor, but this hadn't given "[him] much left for surplus" with "zero income which [would] follow the end of the war."<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, women had to take care of both of their finances, not only during the war but also making it last until the soldier returned. Women were put in a crucial point of balance, having to understand an increase in economic freedom while still being reliant in keeping family finances intact. This, in addition to the responsibilities of caring for a child, ensuring the cleaning and repairs of the home, managing budget concerns, and maintaining a social circle were all problems housewives had to face with the loneliness of the husband's absence lingering before them.

Dependent	Old	New
Wife.....	\$50	\$50
Wife and 1 child.....	52	50
Wife and 2 children.....	72	100
Additional children (each).....	10	30
Child but no wife.....	42	42
Additional children but no wife (each).....	10	20
Wife divorced.....	42	42
Wife divorced and 1 child.....	62	72
Additional children wife divorced (each).....	10	30
1 parent (dependent for chief support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	37	30
Where there is class A dependent.....	20	30
1 parent (dependent for substantial support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	37	37
Where there is class A dependent.....	20	37
2 parents (dependent for chief support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	47	68
Where there is class A dependent.....	30	68
2 parents (dependent for substantial support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	47	37
Where there is class A dependent.....	30	37
1 parent and 1 brother or sister (dependent for chief support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	42	68
Where there is class A dependent.....	25	68
1 parent and 1 brother and sister (dependent for substantial support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	42	37
Where there is class A dependent.....	25	37
Additional brothers or sisters (each):		
Dependent for chief support.....	5	11
Dependent for substantial support.....	5	0
1 brother or sister but no parent (dependent for chief support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	27	42
Where there is class A dependent.....	10	42
1 brother or sister but no parent (dependent for substantial support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	27	37
Where there is class A dependent.....	10	37
Additional brothers or sisters (each):		
Dependent for chief support.....	5	11
Dependent for substantial support.....	5	0
Limitation on allowance to a family consisting of parents, brothers or sisters (dependent for chief support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	72	None
Where there is class A dependent.....	35	None
Limitation on allowance to family consisting of parents, brothers, or sisters (dependent for substantial support):		
Where there is no class A dependent.....	72	37
Where there is class A dependent.....	55	37

*Changes of the Servicemen's Dependent Allowance Act from 1942 ("old") and 1943 ("new")<sup>155</sup>*

<sup>154</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," October 28, 1942.

<sup>155</sup> Grossman, "Family Allowances for the Dependents of Servicemen," 71.

The government helped slightly when they amended the Servicemen's Dependent Allowance Act in 1943 when wages increased. However, it was much harder to get funds as they were not given at time of entry into the military, but after the revision, when servicemen had to file "an application on an official form" provided by the Office of Dependency Benefits or ODB.<sup>156</sup> As the war continued, government spending on dependents grew as requirements for incoming soldiers became tighter. Notice how the income for dependent wives, who had divorced, and wives, who were married to their husbands but without children, received the same income in 1942 as in 1943, but those with children's incomes grew.<sup>157</sup> Babies' input into the family dynamic changed the way that government saw the need to aid women on the home front. Women on their own had the option to work, especially when men (and some women) were being sent off to war, and were in an easier position to care for themselves. After having children though, women were less likely to go to work or less likely to rely on government childcare facilities, costing more time and money on ensuring children had safe places to stay.<sup>158</sup> For women at home, this cut off a potential salary she could have been making without a child. It also reinforced women to have children and stay home. They would have had more money from their husband's service salary if they had been a housewife with a child than if they did not have one, providing the option to work or have a child with similar economic benefits for the short term.

One factor that would have affected how much a woman could add to the consumer economy was if she were reliant on her husband's military rank. For men with wives as housewives, rising up in rank was crucial for their traditional male role as practiced in the 1930s

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<sup>156</sup> Grossman, "Family Allowances for the Dependents of Servicemen," 73.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>158</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 162.

as the main (if not only) contributor to the family system. In his writing, Ansgar mentioned alongside his promotion to captain that “the change in pay voucher [was] most welcome.”<sup>159</sup> This was the only way he could contribute to his newborn daughter, displaying the big first moments that men at war did and, in the present, miss while serving -- like first steps, first word, and even their birth. The high birth rate that occurred right before and after World War II served as a disservice for the soldiers; as more women became pregnant and more men requested leave to be present at the birth, the more they were rejected due to high demand.<sup>160</sup> For instance, Ansgar thought he had a “slim chance” of seeing Rose Marie give birth to Anne and admitted that he had “already been accused of lack of patriotism for even wanting to go,” showing how much American nationalism and strict guidelines involving overseas travel had increased even by 1942.<sup>161</sup> The greater competition within the military for high ranks, and ultimately increased pay as more men entered, also provided incentives for determination to improve their status quicker.<sup>162</sup> Men like Ansgar went from a higher wage, working in a hospital as a doctor/surgeon to a field doctor/surgeon with less pay, hurting the Rodholms greater than a family that was very poor before the war.<sup>163</sup> Though the GI Bill, formally known as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 would provide “education and training” for veterans in the postwar period, this would have been nonexistent for men prior to 1944, increasing their anxiety regarding postwar prospects and future during that small window.<sup>164</sup> Though wages differed based on location, their

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<sup>159</sup> Rodholm, “Ansgar Rodholm’s Wartime and Post War Letters,” September 21, 1942.

<sup>160</sup> Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility, 1900-1986*, 92; Rodholm, “Ansgar Rodholm’s Wartime and Post War Letters,” November 11, 1942.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, November 10, 1942.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, September 21, 1942.

<sup>163</sup> Rodholm, “Ansgar Rodholm’s Wartime and Post War Letters,” October 28, 1942.

<sup>164</sup> John B. White, “The GI Bill Recruiting Bonus, Retention Onus,” *Military Review* 84, no. 4 (August 7, 2004): 83.

position in the branch of the military was affected by background experience and race; better ranks allowed for higher income and greater aid to the home front family.<sup>165</sup>

The assistance provided by the servicemen's wives to buy items, particularly food, on the home front during the restrictions of wartime rationing made it more expensive for women to purchase goods. Rationing mainly affected "sugar, coffee, processed foods, meats, fats, canned fish, cheese, and canned milk," with each product being rationed off at a different time.<sup>166</sup> Prices were controlled by the Office of Price Administration, but checked and stabilized by the War Labor Board.<sup>167</sup> Every "civilian" received a ration book no matter their age, but allotments for rationing also came in the form of "stamps and coupons, tokens, certificates and ration checks."<sup>168</sup> Eventually "Verification Banks" were established after "stamps, coupons, and certificates" began to be counterfeited in greater numbers, which undermined the system.<sup>169</sup> There were also four main types of rationing. "Uniform coupon rationing" was used for one person for a specific amount of "sugar, coffee, and shoes," "point rationing" allowed coupons to be amalgamated for certain "points" on "processed foods," "differential coupon rationing" involved giving one item to different people "based on their needs" of "gasoline and fuel oil," and "certificate rationing" provided individuals "tires, automobiles, typewriters, bicycles, rubber footwear, and stoves" to those who filled out a proper "application."<sup>170</sup>

For housewives, rationing meant they would either buy other food options that were cheaper, yet regularly lower in nutritional value, or purchase better quality food like meats and

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<sup>165</sup> Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 168.

<sup>166</sup> *Rationing in World War II*. (Washington, D.C., 1946), 2.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015036908583>.

<sup>167</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 3.

<sup>168</sup> *Rationing in World War II*, 4.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 2–5. Terkel, *The Good War*, 168.

cheeses at higher costs. This shows the correlation between class wealth and nutritional intake. Restrictions as well as improper education about vitamins and nutrition to the public lead to “five out of ten leading causes of death among Americans” to be “heart disease, stroke, certain cancers, diabetes, and atherosclerosis” as doctors were not cognizant of the dangerous effects of “excessive amounts of fat and salts in people’s diets.”<sup>171</sup> Though it would aid in those employed in medical industries, wartime rationing proved disadvantageous to American’s health over time. Rationing effected the lower and middle classes especially. Rose Marie was able to buy meats with good cuts, but was affected by gasoline rationing, having no car and having to take trains and busses to travel by 1941.<sup>172</sup> Cars in the pre-war were common by World War II, but by 1942 when gas was rationed and “more than 90 percent of America's rubber supply was cut off” automobile usage decreased.<sup>173</sup> Men like Ansgar’s father, Søren Rodholm, who owned a car could not or had a harder time driving it.<sup>174</sup> Therefore wartime rationing of food was not the only commodity to be cut back. A dent was made into the middle-and upper classes who could afford automobiles and gasoline, but when rubber factories from Japan stopped importing tires, and gas prices rose to support war machines, transportation brought economic classes into the same settings in buses, trains, and boats.<sup>175</sup> Women who traveled with their husbands in the service within the home front or women like Rose Marie, took busses, trains, and boats to get to Panama to visit her husband at the start of the war.<sup>176</sup> Housewives interacted with the food rationing at a

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<sup>171</sup> Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>172</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” May 23, 1942 & October 19, 1942.

<sup>173</sup> Tom Downey, “The Situation Has Been Badly Fumbled’: South Carolina’s Response to Gas Rationing during World War II,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 95, no. 2 (1994): 167.

<sup>174</sup> Ansgar Rodholm, “Ansgar Rodholm’ S Letters to Marie and Soren Rodholm,” December 15, 1936. In this citation, Ansgar warned Soren about the unsafe conditions of automobiles, chastising him for buying a car. Ironically, Ansgar himself would later die from a car crash in 1951.

<sup>175</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 166.

<sup>176</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” September 26, 1941.

higher rate than with restrictions of items of transportation and could more easily conform to the restrictions on non-food items like stoves and rubber footwear.<sup>177</sup>

With prices rising and rationing being put into effect, the selection from stores began to change, as they diminished the quality of the products they sold. As families prepared meals “only three-fifths of American wives answered yes” to having enough food to support the health of their family.<sup>178</sup> Families began to eat parts of animals that were used less before the war, and as restrictions increased, “two-fifths of housewives were buying meat substitutes, and one-fifth were using ‘stretchers’, preparing meat differently, and making greater use of leftovers.”<sup>179</sup> These shortages had greater influence on those in poorer classes, but it impacted middle and upper-class women as well, though not as severely, drawing economic standings closer than before World War II. The forced deviations to Americans’ diets created change to more natural products like fruits for sugar and vegetables, but it also created deficiencies in nutrients, the lasting effects of which are apparent today. In a “U.S. Public Health survey” in 1945 “one-fourth of white children showed signs of vitamin A deficiency, 16 percent” had a lack of vitamin D and “9 percent” had an insufficiency of iodine.<sup>180</sup> Rationing restricted not only the food itself, but the options available for women to choose from within their price range. Women still could decide what to purchase, but they needed to conform to governmental restrictions in wartime. How Americans viewed nutrition morphed as scientific knowledge grew about the human body, but the greater focus on nutrition and vitamin necessities increased and remained an important part

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<sup>177</sup> *Rationing in World War II*, 2.

<sup>178</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 180.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

of health expectations. This would impact Rose Marie's employment after the war, causing a greater need for dieticians and was a factor that impacted her desire to return to work.<sup>181</sup>

These standards placed on women in food preparation was evidenced in the cookbooks produced in the 1940s, though they do not provide evidence of the extent that these books were utilized. Cookbooks as ways to create dishes for the housewife's enjoyment became a type of "food advertising" to address women's part in helping the war effort.<sup>182</sup> What once could be understood through the perspective of housewives as enjoyment and care for her family, during wartime became a duty as if housewives were the soldiers within the home. This alongside other expectations of women, which were mass-mediated through propaganda, clothing rationing, calls for volunteering, and working, put pressure on wives to place much of their energy into aiding with the war. But cookbook writers tried to ease this anxiety by inserting rationing guides to aid in the process of using rationing books, tokens, and coupons when at the store.<sup>183</sup> Some women and men could get around these government restrictions by purchasing meat on the black market with "over one half the public" claiming they were aware of the black market's existence; and those items that were more expensive allowed only those that could afford it to buy. One man, "James Beard," recollected that "it was considered chic to circumvent rationing."<sup>184</sup> That some individuals would go against government regulations to continue food consumption they were accustomed to, rather than fill patriotic duty established through government and company advertisements, proved that while this government propaganda and rationing efforts convinced a majority of America to change their lifestyles, they were not completely effective.

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<sup>181</sup> "Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence."

<sup>182</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore, UNITED STATES: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 106, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=3318631>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>184</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America* 181; Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking*, 108.

Those housewives who gravitated toward aiding persons at home and overseas used their location to build victory gardens or homegrown food to cut down the cost of their own spending and send food to others, creating a communal connection to agriculture.<sup>185</sup> Propaganda for the creation of victory gardens was aimed primarily at black Americans, and, in Dallas, only “40 percent of white families had gardens,” but white Americans planted these gardens as well.<sup>186</sup> Increased gardening in times of war was not a new concept. World War I saw the start of victory gardens, and “by 1944, there were an estimated 18 million” in the United States.<sup>187</sup> The name itself reveals the dominant role they played in American society, growing food to feed those in need and the role it established with women and femininity even when agricultural labor was typically associated with male work. *Victory* gardens were created to express American patriotism, people’s support for the war, and America’s successes within it. For those who did not work, these gardens allowed women to feel valued through the work of gardening they did, contributing to the conservation effort regarding food while caring for and growing life in a time when death and darkness was a reoccurring theme in the world. These gardens served as a reminder of the belief of the war as temporary and the confidence in America and the soldiers fighting. The United States civilians’ positive thinking is therefore reflected in the creation of the Victory Garden.

However, there were also limitations to these creations. The availability to make Victory Gardens depended on the previous social normativity established regarding gardening methods, locations to garden, and government propaganda efforts towards this cultivation. Those unfamiliar with gardening techniques would have had a harder time understanding the different

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<sup>185</sup> Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 120.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>187</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 171.



necessities of the project, such as how the soil should be, what type of plants to grow in different environments, and watering schedules. Location was another factor that impeded gardens' creations. Those living in larger and smaller cities were prominent in planting gardens, as land was not as limited or built over as today. Even in tighter spaces, civilians cultivated crops.<sup>188</sup>



**Washington DC, June 1943.** Provided by the Library of Congress.<sup>189</sup>

Those in apartments during the war faced challenges. Without a plot of land behind a home such as in the picture above, individuals could not live up to governmental propaganda and its expectations, so they grew what they could in the spaces available. In terms of Rose Marie, who lived in an apartment complex in Iowa City, Victory Gardens were not mentioned within her letters, leading to the conclusion that she did not partake or that it was not significant in her

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<sup>188</sup> “Washington, D.C. The Slope between These Homes in the Southwest Section and the Street Is Planted in Small Victory Gardens,” image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017861307/>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

experience.<sup>190</sup> Ironically, the Midwest, where she lived, and the South produced the most gardens throughout the war years.<sup>191</sup>

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) played an important role in advertising for Victory Gardens utilizing “advertisements, radio programs, and newspapers and magazine articles.”<sup>192</sup> People also helped shape the spread of Victory Gardens through word of mouth, seeing other gardens come to fruition. Ultimately the expansion of the war effort proved America’s ambition to prevent food waste and provoke American nationalism.



**“Lick the Platter Clean. Don't Waste FOOD.”** 1944, Propagated by the War Food Administration<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters”.

<sup>191</sup> Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 118; Rose Marie Rodholm.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>193</sup> War Food Administration, “Lick the Platter Clean. Don't Waste FOOD,” War Posters - World War II, 1944, <https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/speccoll/exhibits/show/poster-collections/item/243>.

Canning, like Victory Gardens, was a way to save foods for longer periods of time without them going bad. Unlike gardening, canning was affected by sugar rationing, due to it being a key restricted ingredient. Women primarily took up this task, again showing how responsibilities commonly associated with housewives were with cooking and home care. Canning was even more connected with women than men than were Victory Gardens as it took less manual labor and more time which middle-class housewives did as their job.<sup>194</sup> Themes associated with canning included patriotism and “battlefront imagery.”<sup>195</sup> Canning revolved around preservation of food, which not only concurred with propaganda against food waste, but also can be seen as how American culture tended to collectively argue that preserving freedom and democracy on the home front is what would help win the war and remind soldiers what they were fighting for. Canning was a way in which housewives served to preserve the more traditional view they chose as their lifestyle.

Women’s daily lives were impacted by the rank and promotions that their husband received as the war progressed. The Serviceman’s Dependent Allowance Act helped to solidify aid to women on the home front but was more economically beneficial if a child was involved, showing the importance of family and emphasis on children over wives in society.<sup>196</sup> The wages that women received from their husbands established what they could afford after rationing, morphing the way that American families ate and traveled. Victory Gardens and canning were prominent ways that people could cut back on these costs and show support for the war simultaneously. Women formed a sense of accomplishment aiding in the war effort and showing,

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<sup>194</sup> Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 131.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>196</sup> Cline, “Allowances to Dependents of Servicemen in the United States,” 71.

like women working, that they too could play a part in helping soldiers fighting overseas and the United States in its goals.

## Chapter 5: Loneliness and Loss

Women's sacrifices throughout World War II displayed evidence of emotional strength. Loss and loneliness were strong feelings that were felt by women who could not rely on family or friends, handle the separation from their husbands, or was alerted of a loved one's death or status as a missing person. Having to adapt to these individualistic circumstances is what forced women to be adaptable and strong for their family, while internally anxious from the uncertainty that came with war.

For many women, friends and family could be depended on for help with children to step out of the home for enjoyment or work, but some were not as lucky. Rose Marie had her brother Bob and his wife Lib close by and neighbors, who would, at moments, assist with watching Anne; but after almost a year and a half of marriage to Ansgar, Rose Marie remarked to her husband saying, "The more I see and hear of your family the better I like them."<sup>197</sup> Later that year she remarked, "It won't be long before I have met you all."<sup>198</sup> By concluding that she had not met all his family, while still having their child, expressed that Rose Marie was not close physically by direction or relationship to *all* of the Rodholm family, which limited Ansgar's family's involvement with Anne and the support that could offer her. While this did not mean that they did not care about the child, as evidenced by the gifts and letters that the Rodholm family sent Rose Marie, it put more pressure on her to raise the child with less help, lacking daily support from her in-laws.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, Rose Marie would have had to rely on friends and her brother Bob and his wife Lib who also lived in Iowa city.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters."

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, December 3, 1942

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> "Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence."

While it was uncommon, Rose Marie did fair better than women without family to support them. This lack of family connection could also be due to the fact that Søren and Marie Rodholm, Ansgar’s parents, had 12 children with one miscarriage, in total, which was a lot of people for Rose Marie to learn and meet over a short period of time.<sup>201</sup>



**Søren Rodholm and Marie Rodholm (Ansgar’s parents) wedding photo, circa 1901**<sup>202</sup>

Correspondence and transportation were also inhibitors of frequent interactions. Mail moved much slower than today, and even though the telephone was invented, it was not used in daily practice.<sup>203</sup> During 1942, Soren became very ill which lead him to be bed-ridden, and gas

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<sup>201</sup> “Ana Shurtz (Anne Rodholm) Correspondence.”

<sup>202</sup> “Soren Damsgaard Rodholm and Marie Kjølhedede,” Museum of Danish America, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.danishmuseum.org/explore/danish-american-culture/viewed-through-the-lens/soren-damsgaard-rodholm-and-marie-kjelhede>.

<sup>203</sup> H. Lacohee, N. Wakeford, and I. Pearson, “A Social History of the Mobile Telephone with a View of Its Future,” 204.

rationing meant that driving by car would be costly.<sup>204</sup> While these were legitimate reasons why the Rodholm's could not assist Rose Marie, she still received less help than if her in-laws were present.

Another struggle that women faced was housework. Before World War II and “after World War I, housework was no longer considered a chore in American society but an expression of the housewife’s personality.”<sup>205</sup> This advertising normalized women with housework and the expectation of it as a part of a woman’s natural role. Yet, advertisements did not control to what degree women performed housework and how much or which tasks they liked or disliked to a greater or less extent. Women could decide what work to do, when, and how much should be accomplished. But by changing advertisement tactics for what the product could offer to how women should feel about housework and items; it placed more guilt onto women, who did not live up to these expectations.<sup>206</sup> This tactic was expanded upon and used in greater number and more fiercely under the Office of War Information during the second World War.<sup>207</sup>

A housewife’s work in the 1930s put more burdens onto women in terms of the duties they performed for the family, which would increase in weight as restrictions were tightened and women stayed in the home to serve as stability to the pre-war female roles and expectations. For instance, the *American Home Magazine* in 1931 asserted that “from the preparation of company dinner to the routine of family meals, [housewives] will know that prime rib roast...is a

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<sup>204</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” October 29, 1942-December 18, 1942.

<sup>205</sup> Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night.” 150.

<sup>206</sup> Mei-ling Yang, “Selling Patriotism: The Representation of Women in Magazine Advertising in World War II,” 308.

<sup>207</sup> Tawnya J. Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine Advertising*, Lexington Studies in Political Communication (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 9.

wonderful stimulant to family loyalty...”<sup>208</sup> Even before the 1940’s, were expected to cook, and consequently perform, through their cooking, and please those she served all while performing the task alone. Women cooking turned from an option to a habit to a social norm. It allowed women to be more independent in the kitchen, but formed the assumption that women lacked agency or individual feeling regarding household duties. This is debunked by Ann Oakley’s study of how women feel about housework with 50% of those studied saying they did not like house work.<sup>209</sup> Rose Marie Rodholm displayed a dissatisfaction with the daily work as a housewife in her letters to Ansgar, discussing how she “worked like mad all day scrubbed the bathroom, cleaned the whole apartment thoroughly, and even waxed all the floors on my hands and knees and then topped the evening off by doing the washing.”<sup>210</sup> Just because a women chose to perform the work of a housewife did not mean it was not an exhausting process.

Before the war, and for those whose husbands remained on the home front, women were expected to cook what was appealing to their husband’s appetite.<sup>211</sup> With husbands away, housewives had more freedom in what they chose to eat while under the guidelines of rationing set by the Office of Price Administration. Soldiers abroad were sent most of the good meat, so civilians had to rely on previously undesired food types.<sup>212</sup> For instance, “as the availability of restricted meat (beef, pork, and lamb) decreased at the butcher shop, the availability of organ meats increased.”<sup>213</sup> Yet, women got to decide how they ate as well as how their child ate. They

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<sup>208</sup> Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night,” 151.

<sup>209</sup> Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, 126.

<sup>210</sup> Rodholm, “Rose Marie Rodholm’s Letters,” December 7, 1942.

<sup>211</sup> Brian Wansink, “Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front: Lost Lessons from World War II Research,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 21, no. 1 (2002): 92.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 94.



could elect what they wanted over the need of others and put themselves first in what food they consumed.

After the war, Ansgar Rodholm discussed how Rose Marie “seemed[d] to have gotten the burden of raising both our girls throughout their infancy without help from their father.”<sup>214</sup> Though this was written post-war, themes of guilt and shame are apparent. Men often had to sacrifice raising a family for patriotism and the draft, missing many milestones and leaving the position of a traditional male figurehead empty for many children. Though they could not help being dispatched, this example displays the regret rather than pride that service could bring. Unfortunately, Ansgar could not change his situation, showing the need to serve his country while also being present for his child. Though he entered the war before he knew he would have a child, (he knew a year after entering the service) the change that having a family made morphed his desire to stay in the service with his family taking precedent. The regret in Ansgar’s tone reveals how both the partners were negatively affected through their separation while simultaneously growing their love for each other. Ultimately, Ansgar felt a lack of self-satisfaction in the development of himself in the father role. Wallace E. Zosel from Oregon wrote to his son while at war that it “hurts women the most. They sit at home not knowing what is happening to their loved ones, and they imagine all kinds of exaggerated horrors that really don’t exist.”<sup>215</sup> It not only proves that he was sympathetic to the emotional distress of women at home while understanding his own role in making those close to him experience the same turmoil.

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<sup>214</sup> Rodholm, “Ansgar Rodholm’s Wartime and Post War Letters,” April 12, 1946.

<sup>215</sup> Adler and McLennan, *World War II Letters*, 79.

It is understandable that the 1950s saw a greater return to the binary masculine and feminine roles in the household as men returned home and women left or were fired in increased numbers after the war.<sup>216</sup> Male entrance back into the work force meant that “85 percent of the workers fired or rehired for inferior positions were women” employees due to the notion created at the start of the war that they would hold their jobs temporarily and that if women returned to work, it would be in a lower paying position.<sup>217</sup> Men like Ansgar could have gone back to work to financially support their family and exemplify to their wife and children that their absence during the war could not be made up in the postwar years. The attempt to relieve their wartime guilt, shows the care for their family as well as the internal desire for veterans to conform to the expectations of a male-dominated civilization.

As the war continued, women also felt a pull within themselves between what they were and what societal normativity expected them to be. They had to be productive during wartime, while maintaining respectful and proper standing.<sup>218</sup> Women were to be seen with “innocence, gentleness, idealism, continuity, and safety” with little respect to their roles changing.<sup>219</sup> This portrays women as stagnant when they were, in fact, in a place of transition. Women grew individually from their husband as the war continued, which is evidenced by the high divorce rates at the end of the war. Once men returned from war in “1946” there were “600,000 divorces, a record number.”<sup>220</sup> The assumption of the 1950s was that men and women did not change while away, but now that women were introduced to the possible options that were open for them, it is not surprising that they would fight for greater freedoms in the 1960s and 1970s

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<sup>216</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 206.

<sup>217</sup> Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 149.

<sup>218</sup> Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 129–31.

<sup>219</sup> Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 7.

<sup>220</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 165.

during second wave feminism, which promoted “greater equality in education, the workplace, and the home.”<sup>221</sup> World War II and the options in work, service, volunteering, and housework were foundations for the fight for changes to women’s rights.

While some men felt like this throughout and after World War II, housewives with husbands overseas tended to feel intense longing and loneliness. Just because women could decide their place within wartime society did not mean that bored or dismal moments did not occur. The act of choice does not change what emotions can come as an outcome of the choice. Men played an important part in women’s lives for their own emotional and physical happiness, but women were not reliant on them for survival. They could feed their family, take care of the home, join clubs, volunteer, and enjoy society on their own terms. Women saw war and their greater presence in US society as temporary and had hope of an end to the war and that their loved one would return alive, but in those 4 years some were able to grasp more power and agency than they had previously experienced.

Yet increased self-reliance did not diminish the care that women had for their husband. The anxiety in the unknown of spouses and loved ones presented a constant and consistent worry, putting greater stress on women. Correspondence was one method that women could use to reduce this pressure. Because the telephone was not as advanced as today, it was rare to call someone out of the country.<sup>222</sup> Thus, letters were the main form of communication between individuals. Under the War Powers Act of 1941, which allowed for censorship of “international communications,” Bryon Price became the director in charge of the Office of Censorship.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Easton, “FEMISNISM.” 99.

<sup>222</sup> Lacohee, Wakeford, and Pearson, “A Social History of the Mobile Telephone with a View of Its Future,” 203.

<sup>223</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 36–37.

Journalists self-censored during the war due to the dire situation that the war was fought for, but letters were hand censored under the War Department.<sup>224</sup> Because censorship was done by hand, and mail increased along with more soldiers going to war, letter recipients got their mail as expected or much later in one large bulk. Ansgar noted when talking to his mother that the letters she sent him had arrived “a month after it was mailed.”<sup>225</sup> Though it was hard for servicemen who saw the correspondence as a distraction from the unfamiliarity of war, wives not hearing from their family members were frightened, fearing that they would get a notice that their husband was missing in action, a prisoner of war, or dead. Women took greater action to ensure that correspondence was written in a somewhat scheduled format to ensure their husband’s safety. Rose Marie is known to have been a convincing force, which is accurate when Ansgar complained to his parents regarding the “tri-weekly weekly letters Rose Marie exact[ed] or rather expected of [him]”.<sup>226</sup> This was a way in which women used their own voice to request increased correspondence and resultingly soothed their own internal discomfort through control. It was also one of the only ways that they could connect to soldiers and feel emotionally connected to them. Kay McReynolds, when addressing her future husband wrote how women had “all been worried sick and lonesome for years.”<sup>227</sup> While married women like Rose Marie and single women like Kay McReynolds, living in Missouri, lived without their husbands or lovers throughout World War II, the separation served as a lesson on how to deal with loss and separation, maturing them through not the aid of a male figure but rather the absence of one.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 20 & 33.

<sup>225</sup> Rodholm. “Ansgar Rodholm’s Wartime and Post War Letters,” August 9, 1942.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, September 21, 1942.

<sup>227</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” *Historian* 57, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 357.

Therefore, housewives and women whose family were a part of the overseas military faced many obstacles that caused them to struggle throughout the war's duration as well as strengthening them, pushing the limits of what they could have anticipated to accomplish previously. Greater self-reliance in housework and childcare, lack of close dependence on their husband, and fear that their loved ones would not return from war necessitated resilience of women at the time.

## Conclusion: “Remember Me”

Women of World War II displayed a temporary yet influential part in opening options for women within American society. Labor workers and servicewomen played a significant part in the changing expectations of women, but housewives are often left out or insignificantly mentioned within historiography. Housewives helped lay the foundation for 1960s and 1970s feminism, which promoted changes within places of employment and the home and the options that women could have in both arenas.<sup>228</sup> They faced sacrifices and hardships, without a husband present, with little to no help from family and friends, and without government rewards. Lack of recognition to the housewives of World War II minimizes the importance of these women to the American society and their children, the baby boomer generation.

These impacts had to do with the option of choice available and grasped by women. Therefore, the first chapter had a focus on woman’s selected placement within society. While government propaganda promoted primarily white women into the labor force, these individuals chose to stay in their traditional roles as seen in the 1930s.<sup>229</sup> Acting against governmental pushes illustrated a maintenance of societal norm as well as a drive against the growing needs of the war effort. The choice to be a housewife proved that some women had options as to when to leave and enter the workforce, adding variety to where and when they would enter new positions. Therefore, women were not just stable in one area of American society but decided what they wanted their identity to be one which changed over time.

Their self-identity, though not limited to this, can be traced to their image as a mother, wife, and woman. In the second chapter, using Helena Lopata and Anne Oakley’s studies

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<sup>228</sup> Easton, “FEMINISM,” 99.

<sup>229</sup> Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 84.

regarding housewives in England and America, there is a finding that women were affected by government restrictions and propaganda.<sup>230</sup> Individually, what they believed about themselves factored into how much of the advertising they believed and applied. It was partially through the connection to others that impacted how women felt about themselves. The link to the child in the home and husband abroad created a need for women to self-label as a mother and wife. Yet housewives were ultimately women, and through rationing changed how America saw nutrition and clothing styles, they also could be women, both interwoven and separate from other roles.

To expand upon their individual selves, women relied on family and friends still on the home front to develop their own happiness during wartime disarray. Explored in chapter 3, the impact of dinner parties and the causal nature of friendships helped aid women when communications technology was less advanced.<sup>231</sup> Bridge and poker were popular games played that went alongside dinner and chatter.<sup>232</sup> Women could stay close to home and complete the motherly tasks associated with being a housewife while still feeling self-enjoyment through interactions with friends. Though family reliability differed across individual situations and proximity, women too relied on others to care for children so they could enjoy personal time. This time was spent watching films, playing the card game bridge, going out to eat, etc.<sup>233</sup> Having activities for pleasure outside of the home debunks the myth that housewives saw the home as the only form of happiness during the war.

However, the fun did not distract them from managing the household. In chapter 4, evidence supports the economic factors that impacted women, which forced them to be more

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<sup>230</sup> Lopata, *Occupation: Housewife*; Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*.

<sup>231</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters," October 10, 1942.

<sup>232</sup> "Clare Sentinel," January 13, 1933; Dominic J. Capeci, "'Never Leave Me': The Wartime Correspondence of Peg and George Edwards, 1944 to 1945," *Michigan Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (2001): 104–5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20173929>.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 104–5.

cognizant of their expenses. Again, specific histories changed how housewives saw, received, and spent money, but for those with soldiers away, it typically depended on their husband's salaries. As the war progressed, rationing of items like rubber, gas, stoves, meat, sugar, and coffee made these products more expensive, to be used sparingly, or only for military purposes.<sup>234</sup> The system created for wartime necessity increased prices, which also impacted what foods and items were bought. Besides these products that were rationed, women had choice in what to purchase, shaping their economic prosperity. They relied mainly on their husbands for this income, and the higher his rank the better they did financially. Food purchasing and decision as to what dishes were consumed were under the discretion of the housewife.<sup>235</sup> Though an increase in fats and salts were common, the negative nutritional impact was caused by governmental restrictions that women had to adapt to.<sup>236</sup> They managed the family with governmental changes and pressures, all without a husband.

That is why for many women loneliness and longing were evident in how they felt during the war. In chapter 5, it was apparent that though they had power of choice within different areas of society, women also maintained relationships with their husbands, usually by correspondence but minimally by phone.<sup>237</sup> Women utilized mail to soothe their uncertainty regarding their husband's health, location, and safety. The continual letters sent meant that their loved ones were still alive. Helping children also soothed their emotions, focusing their attention on them and keeping themselves busy. Yet husbands were impacted too. Many came back negatively affected by the war physically and emotionally, and some felt regret over not being present to help raise

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<sup>234</sup> *Rationing in World War II*, 2.

<sup>235</sup> Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," October 28, 1942.

<sup>236</sup> Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 69.

<sup>237</sup> Rodholm, "Rose Marie Rodholm's Letters"; Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters."



their child.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, correspondence served as a distraction for men from the toils of war, while reminding them of what they had left behind.<sup>239</sup> Loss and longing were felt through letters, especially by women, but also by men.

Rose Marie Rodholm was one of these women who felt longing and loneliness, yet had greater freedom to develop herself while also dealing with hardships resulting from the war like Ansgar being drafted and therefore more work on her part to keep their family stable, while also dealing with rationing, travel restrictions, emotional worry, etc. However, Rose Marie made it through the war; but Ansgar's passing in 1951, forced her to take on greater challenges and leave behind a legacy through her kids Anne, Patricia, and Peter<sup>240</sup>.

Rose Marie's kids are now grown and living their own lives both close and far from Rose Marie. Anne and "Ansgar" (Peter) live in California with grandchildren of their own, and Patricia who was a pioneering woman in STEM at IBM is retired and living in Texas. Rose Marie Rodholm is still alive in 2019, having celebrated her 101<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 19, 2019 in Corpus Christi, Texas where she still resides at the same house her children grew up in all those years ago. She lives alone with a caretaker who visits and ensures her safety and health daily. She still makes it to Sunday mass and gets her hair done with the hairdresser she has had for over 40 years. Even though she suffers from dementia and is losing her memory, she still manages to smile when she sees the family, and give her famous kisses and "love you, love you, love you" as we leave. During and after World War II, Rose Marie's action showed the strength that women are forced to construct in times of hardship.

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<sup>238</sup> Wicks, ed., *Welcome Home*, 96; Rodholm, "Ansgar Rodholm's Wartime and Post War Letters," April 12, 1942.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, September 21, 1942.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, April 11, 1951.

Therefore, feminism as a choice was understood in the 1940s as women entered different areas of society, pushing stereotypes of housewives. Rose Marie Rodholm, chose to remain a housewife through World War II but had worked previously, showing the complexity of women, the value placed on family, and the strength that women had while their husbands were away. Primary sources, such as the letters written by Rose Marie were affected by war through censorship by others and herself, but still display the significance of correspondence and the couples love. Yet, distance was ultimately a large factor in the way that couples changed and began to define themselves as they grew independently throughout the war. This perpetuated women's individuality and freedom.



***Rose Marie and Serena Rodholm: January 13, 2018, Rose Marie's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party in Corpus Christi, Texas surrounded by friends and family***

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