

SEX IN THE KITCHEN: THE RE-INTERPRETATION OF GENDERED SPACE  
WITHIN THE POST-WORLD WAR II SUBURBAN HOME IN THE WEST

by

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## ABSTRACT

Sex in the Kitchen: The Re-interpretation of Gendered Space Within the Post-World  
War II Suburban Home in the West

by

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In the decades following 1945, Americans moved increasingly out of cities into suburbs. The migration illustrated the emergence of a new, broader middle class as a result of growing postwar affluence. In the previous half-century, families living in a suburb could claim middle-class status. The emerging class built its identity on the forms and values adopted from this earlier, more affluent Victorian middle class. These adopted values were played out in a home designed around progressive era ideals of the family. Through this progressive filter, the new concept of the home was scaled down, without servants, and ceased existing wholly as the wife's sphere of influence—as in the Victorian version. The progressive impulse also reduced the size of the house to make it more efficient, and through government subsidies shaped the home into a smaller, economically sized package. The financial framework that determined the shape of the

postwar home also influenced the technology placed within its walls. This financially influenced technology particularly affected the shape and content of the kitchen. The new, efficient kitchen did not release women from their duty to provide daily family meals, but it did create a culturally safe space for men to cook as a hobby. In the postwar, suburban kitchen women and men contended with economic pressures and changing social realities which complicated the Victorian values and Progressive ideals. Middle-class women needed to leave the home for work, and—now separated from traditional urban social outlets—middle-class men sought refuge in the suburban home. By examining *Sunset* magazine's "Chefs of the West" column, traditional women's cookbooks and service magazines, men's magazines, building industry trade journals, and census reports, the kitchen demonstrates that women and men reshaped the home in response to changing middle-class values. While financing regulations at first shaped how the emerging middle class lived within the postwar, suburban home, residents reinterpreted the space as a reaction to the economic changes around them. This cycle continued with each new interpretation of the postwar single-family home.

(116 pages)

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I would like to thank my thesis committee for their advice and encouragement throughout this project. Lawrence Culver, Colleen O’Neill, and Leonard Rosenband were always the audience I was writing to. Some portions of this thesis are responses to the questions they posed to me, while other sections attempted to anticipate their questions. The tension between the two was probably only in my mind, but it worked.

Several libraries graciously granted access to their collections. The staff of the Jackson Business Library at Stanford University pulled decades old *Sunset* magazine marketing materials from offsite storage. The librarians at the Zimmerman Library at the University of Mexico dug out microfilm (in spite of a recent fire and flood) of *Sunset*, *Esquire*, *Redbook*, and *Playboy* without blinking—or even a smirk—and permitted me to monopolize a microfilm reader for most of the summer of 2009. The periodicals section of the Merrill-Cazier Library at Utah State University happily endured my requests for the heaviest bound volumes of magazines from the Barn.

Thanks to John Brumbaugh and Carolyn Doyle for formatting assistance in the last days as I scrambled to submit this thesis. Thanks also to fellow graduate students Joe Lamb, Andrew Simek, and Brandon Hone for their patience when I needed to bounce ideas off of someone. I suspect I will not find as supportive and encouraging a place as the Utah State University History Department for what remains of my graduate career. The faculty and the graduate students are a gregarious bunch always ready to discuss history. The graduate student office, I suspect, is a source of continual annoyance, but I was grateful for the camaraderie and sanctuary it provided.

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Philip Lockette

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: A NEW CLASS IN A NEW HOUSE IN A NEW SUBURB

In 1941, the editors of *Sunset* magazine introduced a cooking column aimed at their male readers. For the next half century, “Chefs of the West” invited men into the kitchen and provided a venue for them to discuss cooking. Through *Sunset* magazine, and particularly “Chefs of the West,” we can see the transformation of the interior form of American middle-class home in terms of gender and class. Changing from an enclosed group of segregated rooms to an open space in which household activities determined the moment-to-moment reconfiguration—of the kitchen, living room, dining room, and the patio—the middle-class house reflected how women and men interpreted middle-class ideals and values while also responded to the changing economic demands of American society. Within the home, the kitchen mirrored the post-World War II gender and class struggles of the larger society.

In the two decades following 1945, Americans moved in increasing numbers out of cities into suburbs. For many this migration meant a more comfortable mode of living. Previously, the residents of the new kind of suburb—large, removed from urban areas, and homogenous in design—lived through depression and the mobilization for war. The postwar suburbs promised a brighter future. Socially and culturally, these suburbs were hardly the new beginning they seemed to promise. Suburbs in America had a history, and when people moved into them they brought and acquired a particular form of cultural baggage. With the postwar economic boom emerged a new form of middle class consisting of a broader portion of society than its namesake from earlier in the twentieth



century. In the previous half-century families living in a suburb could claim middle-class status; but the emerging class built its identity on the forms and values of an earlier middle class. A Victorian ideal of the independent household overlaid nicely on the postwar ascendancy of the nuclear family as the new model. The new concept of the household was filtered through Progressive era ideals in which the home was scaled down, without servants, and ceased existing wholly as the wife's sphere of influence as in the Victorian version. The progressive impulse also scaled down the house to make it more efficient, and through government subsidies shaped the home into a smaller, economically sized package.

Into this new progressive home moved the new middle class. This emerging class embraced much of the earlier values but adapted them to the realities of a changing world as well as a new venue—the massive postwar suburb—for the middle-class home. Women were stepping out of the home for employment and social activities in greater numbers while men found themselves somewhat stranded—if not remote from urban social activities—in the home. The home became a shared space between the members of the family compared to the earlier Victorian pattern of the house as a whole being a feminine sphere.

For historians, the archetype of this new type of household and class remains Levittown. Study of the Long Island, New York, community offers much in the way of data, but since it was one of the earliest and largest of the postwar suburban developments it has overshadowed developments elsewhere. Levittown was the earliest and largest of the immediate postwar working-class subdivisions, and located close to the center of media attention in the United States it garnered more attention than any other

project. This particular working-class housing development has also been regarded as somewhat of an evil, because the large homogenous design represented a general flattening of style, taste, and class. The critics saw a decline in culture, but the occupants of the thousands of new Cape Cod and ranch style houses acquired a piece of the American dream. A similar observation may be made of Lakewood, California, in the southern part of the Los Angeles area, but perhaps because of its location in the West and the later date of the commencement of construction it has escaped closer inspection. While both developments today are part of massive metropolitan areas, Lakewood represents a different trajectory.

After the war, the population of the West expanded dramatically. Wartime industry and soldiers and sailors for the Pacific theater flowed into the area bringing a massive new population. The West, always considered a place of individual reinvention, presented a blank canvas for these new residents. With large amounts of available land near growing metropolitan areas, the new suburb easily and comfortably fit right in. In Phoenix, Arizona and Southern California the suburb came to define the region. Lakewood and the Kaiser Community Homes development—part of industrialist Henry J. Kaiser’s western business empire—in the nearby San Fernando Valley garnered much of the press because of their massive footprints, but much smaller builders constructed subdivisions all over the West.

In the individual homes contained in these new communities, women and men applied the Victorian and Progressive values—as they interpreted them—in order to present a middle-class identity. The size of the homes was, at the lower price range, dictated by Federal government regulation regarding subsidized loans, but more affluent

homes —yet smaller than earlier middle-class houses—were shaped around new notions of comfort and class. In either case, this was a new experience; as the wife in a new working-class home learned to run a house, while the wife in the more affluent house learned to run a house without servants.<sup>1</sup>

Onto this stage, set with Victorian values and Progressive ideals, women and men adapted to new economic and social realities. Women were stepping outside the home to work and for social activities. Often this was only part-time employment or transporting children to their social activities, but these additional responsibilities placed a strain on the time set for their household duties. The kitchen became less a center of women's authority in the home and instead became yet another location for work. This was aided by the changes in house design and technology which transformed the kitchen from a separate room exclusively for food preparation into an integrated part of the house. New appliances and processed foods helped women catch up on the time lost to outside activities, but these technological solutions only went so far.

For men the new home in the suburb presented the inverse situation. The remoteness and newness of the suburbs separated men from traditional male social activities. A man's job was probably not near his home because the particular house had been bought for its affordability or the attractions of being separate from the commercial or industrial milieu. Men needed an activity, and cooking was one possibility. This masculine recreation was made possible by the new kitchen. Men did cook on the barbecue because the backyard grill remained free from feminine connotations. The new

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany, New York: State University Press of New York, 1993), 9, as quoted from Alison Ravitz, "The Home of a Woman: A View from the Interior," *Built Environment* 10, no. 1 (1984), 9.

appliances and integration of the kitchen space into the home—which aided women’s leaving the home—reduced the threat cooking posed to men’s masculinity.

The home became a place of leisure and family “togetherness”—a term coined by *McCall’s* magazine during the 1950s to describe the new way in which nuclear families lived in the new suburbs. Men cooking within the home contributed to this togetherness, but portions of society continued to regard not only cooking as a threat to masculinity but suburbs as feminizing. In a way this was true. The nuclear family in the suburb created a new value set in which the feminine was valued over the masculine. Part of this was reflected in “the myth of suburbia” in which homogenous suburbs were filled with young, upwardly mobile, temporary, professional, and educated men and women practicing a hyperactive social life when not commuting distances to employment.<sup>2</sup>

The myth, a creation of the immediate postwar era, has been propagated occasionally by historians. While there was certainly reasonable evidence to support the existence of the elements of the myth—homogeneity of housing, mostly younger residents—the occurrence of these was not universal. Postwar suburbs contained both middle- and working-class residents, and the differences between the two, as they lived adjacent to one another, moderated with the passage of time. Historians have dismissed the stereotypes generated by the “myth” but employed its elements as proof of the superiority of urban life over suburban. In *Crabgrass Frontier*, Kenneth T. Jackson explained how postwar suburbs led to the decline of cities by subsidizing white flight

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett M. Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 4-9.

while inversely denying funds to provide housing for minorities remaining in the cities.<sup>3</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, in *Building the Dream*, described the subsidized suburban tract-home in terms of how families were shoehorned into a pre-existing mold.<sup>4</sup> To be fair, Jackson and Wright published their works on suburbs and houses in the early 1980s; a timeframe in which the postwar development of the suburb was too recent to consider fully. They looked at the formation of the house in the suburbs; not what it eventually came to contain and encourage. By contrast Dolores Hayden, an architect as well as an historian, used the history of postwar suburbs to promote a social agenda towards future housing. In her book *Building Suburbia*, Hayden (building on the work of Jackson and Wright) presented the construction of post World War II subdivisions as an accidental conspiracy in which developers, government, and manufacturers “deliberately planned to maximize consumption of mass produced goods and minimize the responsibility of the developers to create public space and public services.” She characterized these communities as “sitcom suburbs” because “model houses on suburban streets held families similar in age, race, and income whose lifestyles were reflected in the nationally popular sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>5</sup> Hayden’s approach was an attempt to dismiss the significance of the suburb in post-war America. She viewed suburbs as divisive and exclusionary, but ignored the role postwar suburbs had in redefining America and accelerating assimilation for some ethnic groups. She does highlight that the means to this assimilation was unequally distributed to the whites that dominated American culture, and that suburban

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 128.

expansion was a trend driven by government subsidy and the regulations that governed the distribution of that subsidy. Hayden's "sitcom" characterization was meant to explain how the houses in suburbs were marketed to consumers through television programming; a programming dependent on the positive elements of the myth which contained the archetype of a middle-class, white family—with a father in a presumed professional career; a stay at home housewife; and children in a single-family dwelling. Hayden represented this archetype as an unattainable middle-class norm that was forced on consumers.

Hayden considered postwar suburbs visually and primarily in the light of the time they were constructed. She discounted the generations of people that moved in and out of those communities, and ignored how those communities evolved over the next half a century. Hayden viewed the assimilative value of these subdivisions as negative because the developers and the government excluded minorities and ethnic groups from participation. She is correct in pointing out the inequality of such segregation, but this failure cannot condemn the entire enterprise. In contrast, historian Barbara M. Kelly examined how the original residents of Levittown, New York, adapted their homes through later additions and redesigns. By the 1980s, practically no house in the Long Island community remained in the original form it was built in. In living in the Cape Cods and ranch style homes, men and women—husbands and wives—adapted their homes to their needs and desires. Visually homogenous postwar houses contained individual lives and solutions.

Individuals negotiated the new space of the home in reaction to inherited values and emerging social issues. One aspect of the "myth of suburbia" that concerned the

cognoscenti of the era was feminizing effects of the suburban home on men. The idea of suburbs as feminizing (and thus cities as masculine) offers an interesting counterpoint to the approach of Wright, Jackson, and Hayden. Whereas these three historians regarded the expansion of suburbs at the expense of cities as harmful to society, critics in the 1950s viewed the homogeneity and (the perceived) manic lifestyle of the white collar commuter as detrimental to masculinity. As men conformed—married, began a family, moved to the suburbs, toed-the-line at work—in order to fit into corporate life, their manhood diminished. The fear of conformity lurks behind “the myth of suburbia.” In affect “conformity” was an acceptance of the synergy between inherited and emerging values, but the impression that men were ceasing to be their own agents by conforming was misconception. The stable society these critics valued depended on a mass conformity in activities that made up that society—work, family, home ownership. However, while men conformed in their roles as employees and husbands, they engaged in extracurricular activities which preserved their individuality.

One of those activities was cooking, but any number of a myriad of hobbies or avocations could fulfill this need. Often the site of these expressions of individuality was the suburban home. The contradiction is that within the suburban home men shared space and practiced hobbies with or in the midst of the other members of the household—particularly women. The residue of Victorian values held the home as a feminine, civilizing space. Progressive ideals imagined the house as a shared space for the family. The postwar situation placed men in the middle of this tableau. The suburban house was a feminine place and for the most part men (and these are married men) accepted—or were blissfully ignorant of—the home as a feminine place.

Men shared the space of the home with their wives and children because it was a relatively small space; consequently any additional living space was claimed for living. Outside bedrooms and bathrooms most space of the home was by design communal (another Progressive element). This left the kitchen and the yard (and perhaps the garage) as sites for expansion of the communal space—and thus sites needed for hobbies by individuals. Historian Lawrence Culver tied this trend of the backyard becoming an exterior room to a post-war institutionalization of the home as a place of leisure. The suburban backyard with its barbecue and swimming pool became a sort of recreation area, or park, where the middle-class family could create their own resort experience, in privacy, and segregate themselves from minorities in communal, urban parks. The outdoor space of the backyard complemented the space of the new family room—often with the kitchen conveniently attached.<sup>6</sup> With the backyard considered part of the house, men would use the link between outdoor cooking and leisure to minimize the feminizing connotations of the kitchen.

The institutionalization of the integration of house and backyard for living began in the western United States in the first half of the twentieth century. Climate was the primary reason. Warmer weather year round (and lack of affordable air conditioning) compelled people to project their inside the home activities onto the patio or into the backyard. An untiring advocate of this trend was *Sunset* magazine. Published in California, “The Magazine of Western Living” promoted a seven state distribution area—Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington—as the location for a

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 337-383.



new approach to travel, housing, gardening, and food. *Sunset* chronicled and participated in the expansion of leisure as a western phenomenon, and men's cooking was part of this expression of the new western philosophy of middle-class leisure.

In her examination of *Sunset* before World War II, historian Barbara Berglund described the magazine's editors as developing the ideal of "modern western living and who constituted a civilized, modern westerner."<sup>7</sup> In her discussion of how the magazine fashioned a "collective, identity for white, middle-class westerners" Berglund explained the manner by which the editors aided their readers' appropriation of the indigenous Native American, immigrant Asian, and Mexican cultures of the West, and then incorporated that culture into the white, western identity in order to neutralize the perceived threat presented by these minority peoples.<sup>8</sup> In the same manner, a column dedicated to "[t]he Art of Cooking...by men...for men"—titled "Chefs of the West"—helped men appropriate the space of the middle-class suburban kitchen by reinterpreting cooking as a masculine activity. Women were cooks; men were *chefs*.

In historian Elizabeth Carney's examination of how western magazines promoted the development of "outdoor-living culture" after World War II, *Sunset's* "definition of outdoor living echoed mid-century suburban values and attempted to reconcile growth and regionalism into a blending of the old and new, the rustic and the urban...*Sunset* approached the issue from within the context of its suburban values."<sup>9</sup> *Sunset* promoted the backyard as an extension of the space of the home; a private space meant for

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Berglund, "Western Living *Sunset* Style in the 1920s and 1930s: The Middlebrow, The Civilized, and the Modern," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (Summer 2006), 133-134.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Carney, "Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites: Outdoor-Living Culture and Landscapes of Growth," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Winter 2007), 479.

recreation screened from neighbors by plants and garden structures. In essence, pushing the physical boundaries of the home beyond the structure of the house and redefining the space of the home.<sup>10</sup> Into this newly acquired space, the barbecue enabled men to cook within the space of the home without stepping into the feminine space of the kitchen.

Nevertheless, men did step into the kitchen—a kitchen in which with feminine connotations of the space decreased enough for men's comfort. The kitchen, as well as the rest of the postwar suburban home, became the site of negotiation and improvisation regarding the uneasy integration of old and new values. The emerging middle class, cherishing older Victorian values of home and family in a Progressive influenced setting, confronted a new set of realities which required women to leave the home and men to seek refuge within it. The new form of house in an unfamiliar location did not complicate the change required but did shape the response. The smaller, more efficient house in the suburbs inspired its occupants to improvise responses to remoteness from urban attractions and limited space. One of these improvisations, men's cooking, ironically expressed an individuality which challenged society's fear that the postwar requirement for conformity was the feminization men.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 488-490.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSE IN THE WEST

The post-World War II, middle-class, suburban home in the West was the location of cultural production of a new type of middle class. This emerging middle-class, or former *petite bourgeoisie*, found itself desiring the trappings of an earlier middle-class status, which conflicted with changing domestic gender roles for men and women. Unlike the large homes of the Victorian middle-class, this new middle class found itself in smaller houses, where space was newly divided between wives and husbands. This space was also configured differently. The resulting renegotiation of space between men and women was a product of decades, if not a century, of struggle between different ideas of housing. New forms of class, culture, and technology coalesced to create a new form of vernacular housing which was further changed by the renegotiation of gender roles in the greater society as well as in the home. This trend was accelerated in the western United States by a growing population freed of traditional views by relocation from the East, and a climate that led to a more open and leisure based housing design.

Many of these alterations to the traditional house design grew out of the demands of economic and regulatory forces. Entry level housing had to conform to federal government funding requirements, while also fitting within the established ideas of the middle-class home. At the lower, working class level, builders expanded on accepted ideas to limit construction costs and opened the home up with the open floor plan. However, many of the changes in post-war housing were also led by the more affluent members of the new middle-class and the homes they desired. More comfortable in their

identity, they accepted the open floor plan and the home as a communal place of leisure. Progressive concepts of the home were embraced, but (rather than ideologically) because they fit well with smaller families and made for a more efficient house. In turn, Victorian sensibilities in regards to house forms were discarded because they were inefficient and made for an oversized home. This affluent vanguard of the new middle class influenced those of lesser means to follow their lead by demonstrating that the open plan worked and showing that a modern home could preserve class status.

In the post-war era, the urban and suburban West was more affluent and grew faster than the rest of the country. Overall westerners had larger incomes and a higher standard of living than those east of the Rockies. Of course, this relative affluence was limited to those who could qualify for middle-class status. Race, gender and marital status affected membership in this group. One had to belong to a household headed by a white male to qualify safely, but in the West an expanded definition of assimilation began to make cracks in such assumptions. One qualification that influenced (at least male) affiliation with this group was standing as a veteran. As a group, married veterans had a higher standard of living in the West, and since money talks, many veterans with an ethnic background were able to buy into middle-class status. Veterans with ethnic backgrounds often made an appearance as contributors to *Sunset's* "Chefs of the West" column. Looking at census data, *Sunset* readers came out as more affluent, but not separate from the large majority of westerners. It is possible that many readers were veterans and as a group veterans were more affluent than other members of society. Veterans also had a shared experience of not only war but economic depression. The experience of the Depression made them comfortable with improvisation, while it had

given them the experience in group cohesion that allowed them to identify with one another.

Meanwhile, the Depression had shattered many familiar norms. Survival allowed for a reassessment of what was important and what was not. Only those traditional middle-class ideals of family and home that endured the economic challenge of day to day life emerged from the thirties. Many of those who matured during this period experienced the communal effort of World War II. Men particularly, through military indoctrination and experience, came out of the war with a sense of group cohesion and conformity which led many to discard—at least some of—their prejudices and accept a broader, if not inclusive, definition of the American dream. Also, moving to the West permitted the shedding of an old identity and those values that were no longer valid, as did the shared experience of depression and war. In *Sunset*, ethnic names appear, and while often commented on, were held as equal to others (although deeper racial divisions persisted—the magazine was a reflection of its readers). Asian, Latino, southern and eastern European names and foods appeared in the late forties and after with increasing occurrence. In the West the shared experience of Depression and war eroded some of the lines between different groups entering the emerging, postwar middle class.

### A New Middle Class

Along with a better education and a higher income, the heads of *Sunset* households lived in more valuable housing than the average westerner. The magazine's marketing material focused on heads of households, but presented the picture of a family. Census data often treated both "households" and "families." For the federal agency there

was sometimes a difference, and sometimes not. People in households were not necessarily related, but members of families were. In veterans' data the family designation predominated when counted against households. This difference between a "household" and "families" has bearing on the investigation of gender on the post-war, suburban home.

The difference in the two is related to the change from pre-Industrial Revolution middle-class households into Victorian middle-class families, and finally the emergence of a post-industrial *petite bourgeoisie* emulating earlier middle-class values in order to obtain status in the community. From the seventeenth through a large portion of the nineteenth-centuries, membership in the *middle class* required a household, in an urban setting, containing a husband, wife, servants, and often children. The husband in such a household would have been a merchant, an artisan, or a professional. All other members of the household would have held supportive roles, but would have acted as agents with the surrounding community. The place of the household within the middle class was relative to and defined by its members' interaction with the community around them.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the modern U.S. Census use of the term merely infers a group of people living under the same roof.<sup>2</sup>

The earlier form of a household presumed a married couple with the husband operating a business of some sort from workshops or an office within the house. The house was a multi-room dwelling with each room—workshop, kitchen, bedrooms,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 6-260.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary*, LV; however, the U.S. Census also breaks down information into family units. The analysis later on in this chapter will utilize the family data.

salon—restricted to a specific purpose or group of purposes. As middle-class status was a uniquely urban phenomenon in these periods, the household was normally contained within a single structure. A farmer might produce saleable surpluses, but one may assume that the farm had the possibility of self-sufficiency and not require money to operate. Money was required for the middle-class household to operate within an urban environment. The household would have normally produced a limited number of items, and these products would have been exchanged for money or the production of other households. A household was thus intertwined with the community it existed within.

Interdependency infers that the household produced something. The head of the household was an artisan, a merchant or a professional, but other members of the household contributed to the homes' production. A wife, although on occasion she could assume the lead role due to the death of a husband, managed the domestic aspects of the home, but could also manage elements of production. She could run the household's retail shop, oversee apprentices, and even produce items for sale. Apprentices and servants also contributed to production. Children were a means of ensuring the continuation of the household. A daughter would often be a drain (in the form of a dowry) on the household when she left to join her husband's household, but in turn she was helping to propagate the household she was entering. A son, while perhaps also bringing in a dowry if he himself was not apprenticed out, insured—theoretically—that the household would continue beyond the death of his father. The fear of slipping economically or socially was another component of middle-class status. A middle-class household had to offer, at least, the promise of continuation beyond the current

generation. Striving for improving the family's position was vital to keep from sliding, at least relative to others, below middle-class status.

That status also brought certain civic responsibilities. The head of the household would have some form of formal religious affiliation. Affiliation should not be confused with actual faith; that was separate, and somewhat optional. With affiliation came administrative responsibilities, which demonstrated the head of the household's prominence in the community. Prominence and wealth also brought political responsibilities. These responsibilities could consist of civic governmental duties, or at least qualifying for tax assessment on his property. And household production was replaced with the acquisition of consumer goods. The consumption of luxuries demonstrated an ability to transcend merely surviving in a commercial environment and demonstrated economic success. Luxuries were a means of measuring the household against others. With the Industrial Revolution, this consumption contained the seeds of the older form of household's destruction. With manufacturing leaving the home, the household was left with only consumption to demonstrate its relative position.<sup>3</sup>

The emerging *petit bourgeoisie*, or new middle class, of the mid-twentieth-century was different than the middle class that had existed in the nineteenth-century and before. The older form of the middle class of a large household with production centered on the home—and later consumption controlled by the woman of the house as men removed themselves from the house—was joined by this new middle class based in smaller homes and a less urban society in which women and men shared the space of the home. Beginning with the industrial middle-class home, most men—and this is a male

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<sup>3</sup> Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, 6-260.



centered model as we will see—were employees, and the household was insulated from the community. The removal of production from the home and surrender of economic independence altered the standing of these men and their households in society.<sup>4</sup>

Sociologist Robert Nisbet described this as the difference between class and *status*.<sup>5</sup>

Class in the pre-industrial sense was a semi-immutable division of society into strata. The system of estates in pre-revolutionary France is an example of this static form of society. On the other hand, examining a society in terms of status infers a degree of social mobility within the social system. With the switch to a status model, income took on a greater role for entry into the middle class. The older definition of *middle class* required a minimum set of three somewhat static strata. A middle class has to exist between two other classes.

With the beginnings of an industrial based society in the early nineteenth-century—with men moving production out of the home—the middle-class household was separated from the community. The household's members only participated in the outside world through consumption. Class identity became dependent upon the acquisition of goods that demonstrated a particular level of economic ability to outsiders. The nuclear family, contained within the home, rather than membership within a class in the larger society, became the primary source of identity. Although he meant this to apply to a much broader community, Max Weber proposed that loyalty was reserved for those an individual could identify with inside a group.<sup>6</sup> In nineteenth-century America, religious

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<sup>4</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145-185.

<sup>5</sup> Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 181.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), 356.

and fraternal association was artificial. Only the family, inside the household, provided identity. Add to this a lack of production and other parts of the definition—merged role of consumption and desire to maintain or improve the status of the household—expand into the vacuum left by production. By this time, the earlier privilege of political rights had become universal among all classes in America, and religious affiliation was no longer a defining part of the household. This left the members of the household and the house itself. The outward manifestation of this would be consumption. At this point *status* differentiates the middle class from other social groupings.

With industrialization emerged a changed middle class and a new working class.<sup>7</sup> Each group could now acquire objects of varying degrees of luxury, because as industry became more efficient it could manufacture more objects cheaper. Weber accounted for this as the “democratization of luxury which is the crucial direction of capitalistic production.”<sup>8</sup> In the early twentieth-century the beginnings of a new middle class could demonstrate status by purchasing cheaply manufactured items if they had the money. An example of the formation of a new definition of *middle class* may be found in *Middletown*; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd’s sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, in the 1920s. The Lynd’s divided the population of Middletown—the pseudonym they gave to Muncie—into a “business class” and a “working class.” People in the working class made a living by addressing “their activities in getting [a] living

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<sup>7</sup> Nesbit, *The Sociological Tradition*, 177.

<sup>8</sup> Weber, *General Economic History*, 309.

primarily to *things*” and people in the business class addressed “their activities predominantly to people.”<sup>9</sup>

The Lynd’s business class consisted of men and women, and this class did not consist exclusively of merchants and professionals. This class could be primarily designated as white collar, and even then only consisted of less than forty-five percent of the employed population. Eliminating women and non-professional jobs from that figure would drive the potential middle-class, under the earlier definitions, down to a much lower number than the Lynd’s methods allowed.<sup>10</sup> However, eighty-six percent of the people in Middletown lived in single-family houses, and sixty-six percent of those owned their own home.<sup>11</sup> While this significant level of home ownership would suggest a larger middle class than the employment figures do, the classic definition requires more evidence than just owning a home.

The Lynd’s used six categories of activities to examine the residents’ lifestyle: making a living, making a home, training the young, use of leisure time, religious practices, and community activities.<sup>12</sup> A minimal level of education was universal (at least in white, urban communities) by the 1920s, but any extra education qualified as a luxury. Leisure can also fold into the concept of acquiring luxury. Furthermore, since a majority of the people in Middletown had access to at least the minimal elements of the earlier definitions of middle class as well as the remaining four Lynd categories, mobility

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<sup>9</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 22 [emphasis in the original].

<sup>10</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 93-109; these figures may not agree as the Lynd’s use of the figures are different than my use.

<sup>12</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 4.

between and within classes had become a matter of status.<sup>13</sup> A definition, or rather a measure, of status would take into account relative position in the four remaining original categories and merged category of luxury. The key category would be the method of making a living. To achieve middle-class status, a male head of household, drawing sufficient income to support the other members of the household and acquire luxuries, was required in 1920s Middletown. A significant income would allow for the presumption that the head of the household's job was of sufficient status to establish a minimal middle-class designation. With that income the increased status possibilities of luxury, religious affiliation, civic participation, and an appropriate house became possible, but the key was the source of income.<sup>14</sup>

The household remained a significant part of designation as middle class, but its components could also be found in working-class homes. Consumer credit made the purchase of houses and acquisition of luxury items, such as automobiles and furniture, available to the working class.<sup>15</sup> Middle- and working-class status was essentially differentiated by the level of a person's income and the nature of his job. After World War II, an individual's identification with a particular class could involve a personal assessment. People thought of themselves as working or middle class. External classification of the individual took on a secondary importance when seeking status. In *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia*, sociologist Bennett M. Berger analyzed the make-up of a newly built suburb in San Jose, California, in the mid-1950s. Most of the residents worked at a local Ford Motor Company assembly plant. The

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<sup>13</sup> The Lynds also touched on the issue of race in Muncie, which is outside the scope of my examination.

<sup>14</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 102-105.

workers previously lived in Richmond, California (about 50 miles north of San Jose) and worked for Ford there until the company transferred the workers to the new San Jose plant. In Richmond the workers lived in primarily in government-built housing (Richmond had been the site of a large shipyard during the war) because a lack of other housing options. Berger began his study with the intention of determining if the move from crowded multi-unit housing to newly built, single-family homes, changed the way in which the workers and their families viewed their place in society. For the most part, he found that, other than appreciating the increased level of comfort, the residents of the suburb still regarded themselves as working class and retained the values of that class. They saw nothing wrong with the status of working class. Berger determined that the residents were aware and understood the difference of class and status, and while they hoped their children would do better, they did not expect to ascend into the middle class themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The comfortable situation of the residents of the San Jose suburb was achieved “wholly as a matter of money, and [one would be mistaken] to equate income which permits most of the basic amenities of what the middle class calls ‘decency’ with becoming middle class.” Berger was adamant that these working class residents of San Jose were not “hollow-eyed, mute, unconscious, exploited, and poverty stricken” Okies drawn from the pages of the *Grapes of Wrath*, but a group that—because of the wartime driven industrialization and peacetime economic boom—had established themselves as a permanent class of industrial workers. Berger was of the opinion that mobility “occurs

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<sup>16</sup> Bennett M. Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 20-23.

when an occupational advance or a rise in income permits the mobile family to move out of its social milieu into one or more in keeping with its aspirations and its new economic status.” However, this movement did not happen with the Ford workers, rather the “whole stratum...collectively raised its standard of living simply by buying new homes in the suburbs.” The move to San Jose did not place any of the residents in a higher stratum relative to any other resident.<sup>17</sup> Class remained as static as it ever was, and mobility was an illusion if the entire society’s economic situation improved.

Berger suggested that “these suburbanites [were] not *socially* mobile.” He determined from interviewing the residents that they had achieved a higher standard of living than they had previously believed they could, but that they were convinced that this level was as high as they would ever go. Berger viewed this as contributing to a definition of middle-class status. The reluctance of the residents to believe they had achieved middle-class status required breaking the stratum in two: upper and lower. This classification was complicated by an inability to distinguish between these two new strata. Previously relative stratification could be determined by outward personal presentation, but the 1950s were “a period which financially [enabled] almost *everyone* to clothe himself in symbols previously associated only with a class.” The net result was “that class and status lines [were] being revised upward.”<sup>18</sup> A new suburban home did not necessarily include a change in class status.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 24 [emphasis in the original]

Rather than ascending within the class structure, the Ford workers achieved “a new level of domestic comfort.”<sup>19</sup> Berger found the residents defined themselves as working class because at the Ford plant they engaged in manual labor—they literally worked with their hands as opposed to salaried workers. Their understanding of classes was remarkably similar to that of the Lynd’s in *Middletown*. The Ford workers not only placed themselves in class by the type of work they did, but also by what they did not do and the quality of the possessions they owned. They spoke of themselves as not salaried; they were not “executives”; and they did not “always drive new cars.” The residents defined their status by the nature of their work compared to the work of others, and what markers of status others could provide themselves with. Their perception of status was grounded in the relative quality of their jobs, homes, and possessions to comparable items held by those in other stratum. In a manner the difference was not so much one of quality as quantity—those in the higher stratum could afford more.<sup>20</sup> However, as Becky M. Nicolaides pointed out about the residents of another working-class suburb, in her study of South Gate, California, “their status as homeowners conferred on them an additional source of identity...based on” home ownership, rather than the “form of labor” that purchased the house.<sup>21</sup> The ability to purchase non-productive property for the single purpose of housing demonstrated entry into the middle class.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 82-84.

<sup>21</sup> Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics In the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2002), 61.

### A Growing Region: Wealth and Population

The *Sunset* distribution area reflected a diverse area and populations. While also embracing increasingly urban California, Nevada, Washington and Arizona, it also included somewhat remote places as Oregon, Idaho, and Utah. But even these places reflected the statistical norms found in more urban states. As a group they outstripped the rest of the nation in post-war growth. In 1948, the circulation of *Sunset* had grown to 400,000, 700,000 a decade later, and leveled off at 800,000 by 1965.<sup>22</sup> By the 1960s, the magazine could be found in approximately twelve percent of the homes in the West.

*Sunset's* growth in readership reflected regional, as well as national, growth. In 1950 the United States had a population of 151,325,798 which grew to 179,323,175 (a change of 27, 997, 377 or 18.5%) by 1960. In that decade, the population of the seven states in *Sunset's* West had increased from 16,673,396 to 23,484,362 (change of 6,810,666 – 24% of national growth but a 29% regional increase), and women outnumbered men by less than half a percent. Nationally the median family income grew from \$3,319 in 1950 to \$5,620 by 1960 (a 59% change). In the West median income went from \$3, 376 to \$6,044 (a 56% change).<sup>23</sup> Of course, in the magazine's seven state distribution area these changes varied widely. Utah, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho grew less than twenty-three, seventeen, fourteen, and twelve percent respectively; while California, Arizona, and Nevada surged thirty-three, forty-two, and forty-four percent. However, these percentages hide the actual scope of changes. While Nevada grew by

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Starr, "Sunset Magazine and the Phenomenon of the Far West," *Sunset Magazine: A Century of Western Living 1898-1998 Historical Portraits and Bibliography* (Palo Alto, California: Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, 1998), 52-53.

<sup>23</sup> In this thesis, the West only includes the seven states in *Sunset's* distribution area: Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.



125,000 new residents, California increased by over five million—accounting for seventy-five percent of the region’s growth. As for income, all the region’s states—except Utah—exceeded the national income growth of forty-one percent over the previous decade.<sup>24</sup> However, much of the story of post-war western expansion is a story in which California looms large.

In respect to this, *Sunset’s* readers did even better economically. The ideal reader of *Sunset* was above average. The median income of the readers of *Sunset* was \$9301.<sup>25</sup> The median income in California, during the 1960 census, of \$6726 was almost a third less, and even less in the other six states in the magazine’s distribution area.<sup>26</sup> California stands out in any statistical analysis of *Sunset* readership or of the West, but in the postwar years as California went—as far growth and economics were concerned—so did the rest of the West and eventually the nation. One way in which census data helps demonstrate this trend is through information on veterans.

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<sup>24</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 1, *Number of Inhabitants*, 1-3; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part A, Number of Inhabitants*, 1-4; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-5, 4-76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-57, 6-252; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-13, 14-100; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-5, 30-75; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-11, 39-108; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-8, 46-88; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-8, 49-117; U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Population, Housing Units, Area measurements, and Density: 1790-1990,” Selected Historical Decennial Census Population and Housing Counts Table 2, 2008, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Kroeger, *The Characteristics of the Audience of Sunset Magazine* (Menlo Park, California: Lane Magazine Company, 1962), 7.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-252.

When compared to census data, *Sunset's* figures place its readership well above the median income in its seven-state distribution area. Although *Sunset* did not identify which households contained veterans, their data—when compared to census data—suggests the possibility that most *Sunset* homes contained veterans. In the 1960 census, veterans in the western states did seven to fourteen percent better in income than their fellow residents which in turn was regionally higher than the national median.<sup>27</sup>

In 1960, across the West, veterans made-up forty-two percent of the population. In each state resided a similar number ranging from thirty-seven (Idaho) to forty-seven percent (Nevada); with California falling in the middle with forty-four percent. More than half these men had served in World War II, but of the remainder half had served in the First World War, Korea, or multiple conflicts. In peacetime they made up significant parts of the work-force. More than eighty-nine percent of these former servicemen across the region remained in the work force in 1960. This group conceivably made a significant portion of *Sunset's* readership, and (as will be discussed later) their identity as veterans affected their attitudes and reactions to gender changes in the home.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-76, 4-157; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-252, 6-538; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-100, 14-104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-75, 30-137; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-108, 39-198; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-88, 46-167; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-117, 49-224.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-61; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-237; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United*

*Sunset* readers had higher incomes than the general populace, and those male readers in the \$7K to \$10K range were likely to be veterans.<sup>29</sup> Of the families that subscribed to *Sunset*, seventy-one percent of men and ninety-eight percent of women read the magazine regularly.<sup>30</sup> In a 1962 marketing study, a large portion of the heads of households were employed in the white collar work force—in excess of seventy percent (71.1)—than in blue collar jobs. These positions included managerial, executive, sales, and clerical, as well as ownership of firms. According to the census, thirty-nine percent of western veterans were white collar workers.<sup>31</sup> The distribution of higher income of

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*States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-85; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-60; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-93; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-73; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-102.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-76, 4-157; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-252, 6-538; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-100, 14-104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-75, 30-137; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-108, 39-198; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-88, 46-167; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-117, 49-224.

<sup>30</sup> Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 45.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-157; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-538; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-137; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-198; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-167; U.S. Bureau of the Census,

*Sunset* households is clearer in this context. Male *Sunset* readers also had a higher level of education. In 1960, less than twenty percent of the general population in the West had completed some college. Veterans in 1960 had completed a median of 12.4 years of schooling compared to more than 55% of male *Sunset* readers who had attended some amount of college.<sup>32</sup> Since many veterans had qualified for G.I. Bill education benefits—fifty-one percent nationally—this high level of education among *Sunset* readers is reasonable.<sup>33</sup>

This emerging form of household with its popular, modern conception of middle-class status resting on relative economic affluence, and especially the acquisition of diverse consumer goods, was very different from the earlier eighteenth and nineteenth century household that centered around production and later consumption. After the war a form of housing based on the evolving middle-class values became widely available. “Veterans’ Housing” conferred middle-class status on their new owners although in reality this entry-level housing was basic and shaped by decades of evolving concepts of minimal housing.<sup>34</sup> Also, because all housing of this type was purchased with a Veterans

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*The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-224; Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-157; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-538; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-137; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-198; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-167; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-224; Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Suzanne Mettler, *Soldier to Citizen: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>34</sup> “\$3,995 Buys a Veteran a Home,” *American Builder* 70, no. 1 (1948): 73-74.

Administration (VA) loan, and these funds were only available through G.I. Bill benefits, which for the most part were denied women, this housing had male connotations.

Throughout the Truman years, entry-level housing was characterized as “veterans’ housing” in the building trade press. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and VA loan regulations framed this designation. The size of a house was shaped by the maximum area and minimum number of rooms that would qualify for a VA insured loan. Although located in the East, Levittown, New York, is the archetype of veterans’ housing. The first set of these homes were priced at \$7500; reflecting “[t]he rule of thumb for a standard ratio mortgage to annual income in the 1940s was generally set 2:1,...The houses of Levittown were therefore geared to families whose income ranged up to \$3750.”<sup>35</sup> With a national median income of \$3,319 (and \$3,376 in the West) in 1950, a significant portion of the population could afford to purchase a new home.<sup>36</sup> This price, with a loan limit of \$1800 a room, limited the size of these homes to four rooms: kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. Historian Barbara M. Kelly has commented that Levittown houses: “As officially approved architecture, their [internal] environment

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 45-47.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-252; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-100; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-75; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-108; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-88; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-117 .

reinforced and conveyed the dominant American social values of the period.”<sup>37</sup> In essence, the regulations favored small families, in an economical house, in homogenized neighborhoods, that promoted conformity as a value.

In the years immediately after the war, the home building industry locked onto the rhetorical value of “veterans’ housing.” In Massachusetts, the state legislature changed the law to allow municipalities to use public resources to subsidize builders of veterans’ housing.<sup>38</sup> Trade publications used the veterans’ housing frame to discuss all sorts of innovations that really had nothing to do with vets.<sup>39</sup> Through the late forties, most new house construction was characterized as veterans’ housing even though it was outside the VA’s regulations regarding house values. In 1948, in Glenview, Illinois, a group of “solar” houses (built with large windows on a north/south axis) and priced at over \$15,000 received the “veterans” designation from its developers as “the first all-solar G.I. housing development in the country.”<sup>40</sup>

Legitimate veterans’ housing was minimal and inexpensive by design in order to conform to FHA/VA funding regulations. One of the earliest forms and the archetype of this type of home was the Cape Cod as built by Levitt Brothers. The Cape Cod design, essentially a house on a square concrete pad with four rooms of relatively equal size (kitchen, living room, two bedrooms) were endemic after the war; not only in Levittown, New York, but in California and even in the rural community of Logan, Utah. Veteran’s housing was considerably cheaper than previous basic, single-family housing, subsidized

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<sup>37</sup> Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 45-47.

<sup>38</sup> “Holyoke Builds ‘Precision-Built’ Homes for Vets,” *American Builder* 69, no. 8 (1947): 98-99.

<sup>39</sup> “Oak Meadows: A development Featuring 1200 ‘Lockweld Houses’,” *American Builder* 69, no. 5 (1947): 82-87.

<sup>40</sup> “Old Sol Gets Another Job,” *American Builder* 70, no. 2 (1948): 82-87.

by federal and local governments, and built in uniform subdivisions. Even the inclusion of such design elements as curvilinear streets (in place of a grid) did not fend off criticism of cookie-cutter sameness of these new neighborhoods. Other than as a marketing rhetoric or as a political fig-leaf for builders receiving subsidies from local government or in the form of FHA loans for their customers, veterans' housing was little different than any other form of low-income, entry level housing. The difference lay in the amenities available for these new homes. Before this time, builders did not necessarily include kitchen appliances in the construction of a home. That often fell on the purchaser who might haul their old stove and icebox with them or purchase new ones independent of their contract with the builder. Veterans' housing came with range, fridge and increasingly a clothes washer (and later televisions and other "built-in" appliances) which were included in the price of the home and allowed under FHA financing regulations.

In the West, the veterans' housing trope played out quicker—if it ever existed at all. In the West a long time booster strategy, developed originally in Southern California, as a place of leisure and progress dominated. Post-war housing developments, such as Kaiser Community Homes, were framed as technologically progressive with a focus on the efficient building techniques used. In some cases, these new building methods differed little from those employed by Levitt. Many of the large developments in Southern California sprung-up in the fifties after the veterans' trope had faded nationally. When the term was utilized it was for smaller projects built by local builders. In addition, Southern California had a longer history of working class suburbs such as the city of South Gate in the greater Los Angeles area. However, both housing for veterans and

homes marketed as places for family leisure were selling to the desire for middle-class status.

### The New Form of Houses in the West

The homes these folks purchased often irritated architects. While the works of architects—such as *Sunset* contributor Cliff May, Frank Lloyd Wright, and others—dotted the landscape of the West, and influenced the designs of the merchant builders—Henry J. Kaiser, Del Webb, and even Levitt Brothers on Long Island, New York—designs for suburban tract homes were usually taken from a set group of patterns that proved marketable within a set price range. Architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour characterized these types of homes as “the merchant builder’s vernacular.” They claimed that architects understood “the symbolism of Levittown,” and that they found the “middle-middle-class [*sic*] social aspirations [that tract housing represented] distasteful.” However, Venturi, et al., held that symbolic forms inherent in the vernacularly designed homes supported “the individualism of the owner.” The design of those houses, whether it was colonial or Cape Cod, communicated the identity of its owner. Thus the ranch house of the West transmitted a sense of regional ideals and values—individualism, home ownership, and middle-class identity. Architects saw the political, cultural and social in the buildings they observe and design, but the owners of



vernacular suburban homes primarily saw the outward manifestation of their own identity.<sup>41</sup>

The other end of the spectrum from the Cape Cod was the architecturally designed home which was consciously modern. Modern-style houses were often designed for “professional people [doctors, lawyers] with moderate incomes.”<sup>42</sup> In Southern California, the style was pushed to the limits with the Case Study Houses—built from the late 1940 into the 1960s in order to push the envelope in housing design. These homes were extreme projects meant to demonstrate architectural ideals that could (theoretically) be transferred to lower cost housing.<sup>43</sup> Emulating the modern style of the Case Study Houses but internally more traditional domestic spaces were houses built by Eichler Homes. Eichler constructed homes were several notches above the entry-level houses of the late-forties, and often appeared in *Sunset*. These homes in the modern idiom would become the subject (biennially beginning in 1957) of the American Institute of Architects-*Sunset* Magazine Western Home Awards. The houses featured by the Western Home Awards had a sleek modern profile, often fitting uniquely into a site and the surrounding landscape, with copious windows for light, but with interior divisions that retained certain aspects of older house design. Particularly, the kitchen remained a separate, and usually, galley style, room. Dining rooms were in space borrowed from a

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (1977; reprint, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), 153-154.

<sup>42</sup> Esther McCoy, “Arts and Architecture Case Study Houses,” in *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, ed. Elizabeth A.T. Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas S. Hines, “Case Study *Trouvé*: Sources and Precedents, Southern California, 1920-1942,” in *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, ed. Elizabeth A.T. Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 83.

living room, or a family room if there were both.<sup>44</sup> The kitchens were sequestered—almost as an afterthought. Architects designed these homes for individual clients who desired simplified living with an outdoor focus.<sup>45</sup> These homes were considerably more expensive than standard tract homes, but they demonstrated ideas that would become practical in later decades as costs came down and incomes increased across the board.

Some *Sunset* subscribers could afford these homes, but not necessarily all. In 1962, the median value of the home of the ideal reader was \$19,715 compared to that of \$11,900 nationally and \$12,386 regionally as reported in the 1960 census.<sup>46</sup> In addition to a refrigerator and stove, almost half had a clothes dryer (which seems to presume a clothes washer) and thirty-nine percent owned a separate freezer beyond any that might be built into the refrigerator.<sup>47</sup> Nationally 61.9% owned their own homes and regionally 65.5%, but 89.9% of *Sunset* readers owned their own home, and more than ninety-two percent of these lived in single family homes.<sup>48</sup> In a *Sunset* marketing study published in 1962, more than sixty percent of these houses were built after 1950, almost all were single-family homes, forty-six percent had at least three bedrooms, and had a median value of \$21,600.<sup>49</sup> Three quarters of these homes had patios.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “On the Following Pages...28 Outstanding Western Homes,” *Sunset*, October 1957, 41-61.

<sup>45</sup> Although one floor plan still retained a “maid’s room”; “Announcing the Award Winners in the Second Biennial Round of the American Institute of Architects-Sunset Magazine Western Home Awards,” *Sunset*, October 1959, 64-85.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Home Values,” Historical Census of Housing Tables, 2004, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/values.html>

<sup>47</sup> Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Homeownership,” [sic] Historical Census of Housing Tables, 2004, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/owner.html>; Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Kroeger, *Home Building and Appliance Study of the Readers of Sunset Magazine* (Menlo Park, California: Lane Magazine Company, 1962), 3-4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

The affluent nature of *Sunset* readers' homes reflected the age group of the predominate readership at the height of their income earning years. In 1960, a third of veterans' families across the West were in the same home they occupied in 1955. In comparison, forty percent of *Sunset* households were in the same house as five years earlier.<sup>51</sup> Subscribers were more stable as a group. Their income, higher to begin with, had maintained itself, but *Sunset* readers had less reason to move up to a better or larger house. Veterans' homes and *Sunset* readers' homes were not necessarily comparable. In homes containing three people with the adults between 35-54 years of age—the core of the magazine's subscriber base—both veterans and *Sunset* readers averaged around eighteen percent of the total. Otherwise the size of families did not compare. Whereas two person *Sunset* households made-up only eight percent of the readership, twenty-four percent of veterans' households contained only two persons compared to forty-percent of the general population; but at the other end of the spectrum—four or more members of the household—the two groups once again agree at 36.5 percent (42% in the general population) except in the 35-54 years of age group. In this age group, veterans with four or more members in the household jumped to a significant sixty-two percent of total veteran households. Forty-one percent of *Sunset* readers had moved to a new house in the

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<sup>51</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-157, 4-171; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-538, 6-569; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-104, 14-186; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-137, 30-146; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-198, 39-210; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-167, 46-177; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-224, 49-240 ; Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 15.

previous five years (reported 1962), and eleven percent had bought a “new” home in the previous twelve months.<sup>52</sup> Part of *Sunset* readers’ affluence may have resulted from smaller family size.<sup>53</sup> Thus many *Sunset* readers who were veterans did not have large families.

Much of the late 1940s veterans’ housing and later newly constructed middle-class housing—especially architect designed homes—was designed with two or three bedrooms. While doubling up of young children in a bedroom in a Cape Cod was expected in entry-level housing, it can be expected that more affluent people could afford the extra bedrooms for extra people.<sup>54</sup> And as seen earlier, almost half of the households polled by *Sunset* contained as least three bedrooms. While expecting children would double-up in a bedroom in the post-war years is a reasonable question, the size of the families in relation to the size of a house does demonstrate how space in a home might be negotiated depending on occupants’ affluence. However, most published floor plans did not go beyond three “bedrooms,” and often the third bedroom was designated as a “guest room.

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<sup>52</sup> Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-157; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-538; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-137; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-198; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-167; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-224; Kroeger, *Characteristics*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 104-105.

In one way technology altered the dimensions of the home, but technology was not the agent of this change. Older housing depended on interior walls to bear the weight of the structure above it (particularly the roof). In addition to the weight of the structure, roofs—by extension the load bearing walls—in the eastern and northern United States had to support loads of snow in the winter. Houses in places like Southern California and Arizona did not need to consider “snow load.” This allowed for a lightweight roof and contributed to the development of the modern ranch house. The open plan of the ranch house expanded into more temperate locations with the post-war introduction of low cost roofing trusses. A truss could support more weight, over a greater span, with less material. This made open plans more practical, but also cheaper. But trusses were at first only built into the opposite poles of the market; architecturally designed modern homes and the cheapest vernacular tract housing. The issue was one of status. The homes designed by architects were for the more affluent that had different status desires, and the tract homes were for those for whom status was a minor consideration. The homes and owners between these two extremes were especially conscious of maintaining or developing their middle-class status. Whereas in the open plan home a great space could encompass the living room, kitchen, and dining room, buyers regularly made it clear they desired separate spaces that reflected an older set of values that for them framed the idea of being middle class.

More on the relation of kitchen and dining room to status will be discussed in chapter three, but the changing shape of the floor plan demonstrated that middle-class identity was closely tied to the form the single-family home took. While a completely open plan home could provide cheaper housing, the older value system in which class

status was grounded demanded a form that reinforced traditional gender roles within the home. The new, emerging value system worked within the confines of this older domestic footprint. In the struggle that took place in this venue, women would feel the need to defend traditional command of space in the home, while at the same time pushing out of the home. Men—now ensconced in the new, smaller, and somewhat remote suburban home—would begin to challenge women for use of space, but not in order to assume responsibility for the traditional uses of that space. Care of the home and responsibility for feeding the family would remain with women.

## CHAPTER 3

## WOMEN, CLASS IDENTITY, AND THE KITCHEN

Women in the 1950s faced the paradox of working outside the home and feeling, at the same time, the need to defend the home, and particularly the kitchen, as their sphere. This situation was paralleled by the expansion of communal, or public, space in the newly partitioned house which increasingly included the kitchen. Gender and class ideals and desires played out in this struggle. Peg Bracken characterized this frustration in the introduction of *The I Hate to Cook Book* when she stated the book of quick recipes were "...for those of us who want to fold our big dishwasher hands around a dry Martini instead of a wet flounder, at the end of a long day."<sup>1</sup> Bracken was commiserating with women pulled in multiple directions by the changing expectations and values in the postwar suburbs. In this new age, women had to cope with conflicting sets of values which were complicated by technology which was marketed as value laden. Well established Progressive values of the role of women conflicted with nostalgic reminiscences of Victorian values. With new technology, the construction and shape of the home reinforced and even structured these values in a concrete way. Part of this was an economic story. These values were literally sold through consumption—consumption as a means of buying a better status. On top of all this change, a set of values had emerged in which economic desire, and eventually necessity, required women to leave the home for production.

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<sup>1</sup> Peg Bracken, *The I Hate to Cook Book* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1960), ix.

By the 1950s, Progressive values had been well established for several decades. While these values called for a world in which the home was simplified for household duties, vestiges of the earlier Victorian house hung on as confirmation of class status. Progressive ideals applied a scientific and socially conscious approach to the home. These ideals still placed women in the home, but more as a manager of the family enterprise than the Victorian concept of the house as the woman's sphere of influence. The archetype of Progressive housing was the bungalow. Bungalows were designed to minimize the size of the floor plan for efficiency. The smaller floor plan forced a sharing of space by the family which contributed to the blurring between spheres.<sup>2</sup> Historian Janet Ore suggested that the bungalow design was interpreted differently in middle- and working-class situations. Whereas the middle-class house attempted to restructure previous claims each gender had on the space, working-class occupants defied the intentions of design and reverted to a life centered around the kitchen "where feminine production centered a household under patriarchal control."<sup>3</sup> In her study of bungalows built in and near Seattle in the first part of the twentieth-century, Ore determined that working-class occupants made the form of the house adapt to their way of life much the way the new post-war middle class did with their housing. In the Seattle of 1912, the old, more affluent middle-class (which were for their time also a new group) chose the progressive form of the bungalow because they wanted to make a statement; the working class chose it because it was an affordable form of housing.

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<sup>2</sup> Janet Ore, *The Seattle Bungalow* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.



### Changing Values

While Progressive values led to the institution of many positive changes to homes (sanitation, ease of cleaning, more economical buildings to build and run), the downside of this change transformed the post-war suburban kitchen into the embodiment of an ideal. Women would remain in the home, but in postwar America those values conflicted with the emerging notion and reality of women working increasingly and pursuing other activities outside the home. Progressive values had been generally accepted decades earlier, and were a reaction to the severe and judgmental attitudes of the Victorians.

These older values were accepted by the emerging, post-war *petite bourgeoisie*. These members of the new, expanding middle class looked to women's service magazines and traditional cookbooks for instruction in these older social principles, while at the same time living in a culture that was in many ways new and very different from the ones espoused by the Victorians and Progressives. A major site of this struggle was the kitchen, a space laden with not only ephemeral Victorian and Progressive attitudes, but literally a product of a design evolution based on those attitudes. It was also a heavily gendered space.

For women, the kitchen was the center of production within the home, and in that space cooking was seen and promoted as a duty. In women's service magazines—such as *Ladies' Home Journal*—cooking as presented in articles and advertisements constantly advocated the preparation of meals for the family as the primary activity of wives and mothers. Writers and editors framed this discussion in terms of efficiency, thriftiness, and family nutrition. During the war, while retaining the efficiency trope, thriftiness morphed into “making do” with rationed foodstuffs, and the emphasis on nutrition moved from

one's husband and children to those members of the family participating in the war effort. After the war "efficiency" gave way to convenience. Nutrition and thriftiness remained but were subsumed in the desire for convenience. The emerging middle class viewed this as right and reasonable, and at first embraced the ideal. The discussions in women's cookbooks and magazines made a connection between "domesticity, cooking in particular, and personal satisfaction" for women, although "cookbook rhetoric often exaggerated" this connection.<sup>4</sup> While magazines moved forward emphasizing the freedom an easier recipe or a better stove gave homemakers, cookbooks seemed to hang onto the older ideals of pleasing the family through food. In traditional cookbooks, personal satisfaction was secondary to the responsibility owed to family and home.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1930s and beyond household duties, such as cooking, were framed as a means to communicate love by women to their families—in magazines, cookbooks, and advertising.<sup>6</sup> The "quality" of a food was emphasized in advertisements selling convenience and preserved foods as a means of pleasing a woman's husband and family. In a 1936 advertisement for Campbell's Soup, mothers were reminded of the importance of "...a nourishing lunch..." for their children.<sup>7</sup> Another approach was of careful management of the home and the family budget through planning "...of family meals that [were] palatable and attractive, nutritionally adequate...and respectful of the [household]

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<sup>4</sup> Erika Endrijonas, "Processed Foods from Scratch: Cooking for a Family in the 1950s," in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, ed. Sherrie A. Innes (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 177.

<sup>7</sup> "For a nourishing lunch..." *Ladies Home Journal*, February 1936, 35.

budget.”<sup>8</sup> Advertisements for appliances cleaved to the efficiency approach. An ad for Hotpoint electric ranges claimed their stoves cooked food quickly and with a minimum operating cost.<sup>9</sup> When style of appliances was discussed, describing the look and design as “modern” signaled the reader the machine was efficient.<sup>10</sup>

The Depression drew families closer together, and this reinforced women’s role in the kitchen and at the table.<sup>11</sup> Historian Katherine Parker has commented that: “American culture in the twentieth century bound women, food, and love together. American society, and advertising in particular, saw the preparation and consumption of food in distinctly gendered terms. While everyone ate food, society held women responsible for its purchase and preparation.”<sup>12</sup> With the advent of war women were charged with making sure their families were not only provided with meals, but that it was done properly and nutritionally. The Federal government’s “Basic Seven” nutrition guidelines stated that “[I]t was a woman’s duty as preparer and server of family meals to account for her family’s nutrition.”<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on nutrition, while not new, replaced calls for “quality.” Careful budget planning and thriftiness translated into requirements to “make do” with the foods available under the wartime rationing regime, while continuing to

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<sup>8</sup> Louella G. Shouer, “Biscuits, Bonnets and Budgets,” *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1936, 42.

<sup>9</sup> “Soil and Toil Banished from the Kitchen Range,” *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1936, 69.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s, stoves were available in colors beyond white.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Parker, “Campbell’s Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles,” in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, ed. Sherrie A. Innes (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 52.

<sup>13</sup> Amy Bentley, “Islands of Serenity: Gender, Race, Ordered Meals during World War II,” in *Food in the USA: A Reader*, ed. Carole M. Counihan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180.

serve dishes that were interesting and enticing.<sup>14</sup> Food manufacturers fell in line and showed how recipes using their processed foods stretched the household's rations.<sup>15</sup>

Women entering the workforce during the war complicated the situation. As women replaced men in the workplace, social scientists and journalists "warned that women in the public sphere led to distortion of values, irregular family routines, promiscuity, lack of respect by men [for women], and rejection of feminine roles."<sup>16</sup> These issues ebbed with the end of the war, but reappeared within a few years as women began to fill the demand for workers in an expanding economy. With women pursuing activities outside the home, "convenience" began to eclipse "nutrition." Campbell Soups still trumpeted nutrition but now it was "...only four minutes till 'soups on.'"<sup>17</sup> With the end of wartime production limitations, appliance manufacturers picked-up where they had left off touting the efficiency of their stoves and refrigerators; here too efficiency was beginning to take second place to convenience.<sup>18</sup>

However, while the rhetoric from magazines gave respite to women, traditional cookbooks addressed housewives in a serious, clear-cut manner. Whereas magazine recipes had "try this" attitude, cookbooks were in a sense kitchen management manuals. Historian Jessamyn Neuhaus has commented that while "many cook books emphasized the art and science of food prepared by the mistress of the house, popular magazines and other cookery books often noted the important role of home cooking in making a home—

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<sup>14</sup> Ann Batchelder, "For Hungry Night Owls," *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1944, 34-35.

<sup>15</sup> "New Dinners with Star Pork Sausage," *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1944, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Bentley, "Islands of Serenity," 174.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Marshall, "Soup in Summer," *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1950, 60; in reality "Soup in Summer" was an advertisement for Campbell's Soup.

<sup>18</sup> "Out In Front with Everything—New Hotpoint for '50 Worlds most Convenient Refrigerator," *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1950, 31.

and a husband happy.”<sup>19</sup> The discourse of traditional cookbooks instructed neophytes when necessary, but assumed their readers dedication to the family and the household. Unless meant for a newlywed, cookbooks in the 1930s addressed their audience as generally knowledgeable about the kitchen, but ready with information when needed.<sup>20</sup> After the war cookbooks returned to this approach and continued assuring women that the enclosed recipes had been tested and were dependable, but traditional cookbooks aimed at housewives both before and after the war were thick compendiums of recipes.<sup>21</sup> They did not offer much in the way of encouragement and point blank advice. This changed in 1950 with the publication of *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*. With step by step photos and detailed planning advice, the staff of the General Mills kitchens provided help to women managing homes and feeding families while juggling various activities outside the home. In the 1950s, Americans feared social disintegration, and women leaving the home to work fueled this fear. In reacting to this fear “they helped focus and formulate [a reinforced] domestic ideology.”<sup>22</sup> This was a conservative reaction in which constraints that kept women at home before the war had been taken for granted. In response “white middle-class Americans, in search of security, turned to an idealized vision of home and family that domesticated and subordinated women.”<sup>23</sup> *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book* offered a how-to-manual for at least coping with some of

<sup>19</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 72.

<sup>20</sup> The Home Institute of The New York Herald Tribune, *America's Cook Book* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 1-57.

<sup>21</sup> Dorothy B. March, ed. *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949), 3-936.

<sup>22</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 30.

<sup>23</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, “Introduction: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3.

the fallout from this idealized domestic pressure.<sup>24</sup> The new style of women's cookery instruction built upon the messages of the caring 1930s and 1940s in which love and duty characterized the message to women, but added an idealized domestic world—contained in the home—of which women were to embrace.

These fears were not unfounded. Historian Amy Bentley has noted that “[t]he home management of meals symbolizes family solidarity” and that the availability, “variety and quantity of food symbolizes economic status.” The idealized world women in the new middle class were reacting to was not a recent invention but “traditions and customs of long standing” that represented a world—no matter how temporally remote—they desired to emulate and be accepted by.<sup>25</sup> Some commentators, particularly Betty Friedan, found the message cookbooks and magazines advocated “represented a repressive force, imposing damaging images on vulnerable American women.”<sup>26</sup> However, other women, notably Peg Bracken, confronted the idealized world presented in cookery instruction. Bracken's *I Hate to Cook Book* was a manifesto of resistance. Compared to Friedan's careful examination of the issues surrounding the lives of suburban housewives, Bracken offered a—at times—subversive, suburban survival guide.<sup>27</sup> *The I Hate to Cook Book* approached the problem of getting meals on the table with practicality and humor. Bracken commiserated with her audience and let them know that: “It is always nice to know you are not alone.”<sup>28</sup> In a humorously sarcastic manner,

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<sup>24</sup> General Mills, *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: General Mills, 1950).

<sup>25</sup> Amy Bentley, “Islands of Serenity,” 178.

<sup>26</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 231.

<sup>27</sup> Bracken's book was published three years prior to the release of Friedan's.

<sup>28</sup> Peg Bracken, *I Hate to Cook Book*, xii.

she criticized the ideal world that traditional cook books and women's magazines portrayed. In that world they "considered everything a leftover, which you must do something with," while Bracken suggested that—in spite of the cook books' dictum—maybe the original meal was not all that good anyway.<sup>29</sup> By the late 1950s, the façade of Victorian and Progressive values was riddled with cracks. Women approached cooking and the kitchen practically. They still had to cook for the family, but they had other commitments as well.

### Technology

Technology piggy-backed on older values and gender role expectations. It reinforced women's claim on the kitchen and the home in general. This social change was supported by technological change which went back and developed along Victorian, middle-class attitudes and Progressive reform efforts. The placement, form, and content of the kitchen changed in each of these movements and adapted new technology to their needs and attitudes. This included not only stoves and iceboxes, but food as well. Throughout the kitchen remained a place of production, of not only food but also of values. In the urbanized middle-class home men ceased to participate in this production and the space was left to women. The adoption of technological replacements for men's labor in the kitchen altered the nature of the space in the home.

In the nineteenth century, the kitchen was a separate space from the rest of the middle-class home. In frontier houses the kitchen was part of a unified space which often included social and sleeping areas as well. Aspirants to the middle-class segregated the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26-30.

kitchen from the social space of the home.<sup>30</sup> It did not help that cooking was also a smelly and hot business. The introduction of cook stoves to replace open hearths introduced an element of safety and more control to cooking, but did not change the basic nature of meal preparation. Making supper was often a communal activity. Men provided the energy for cooking by bringing and loading coal or wood for the stove, children fetched water and helped with food prep, and women cooked. The introduction of stoves that used chemical energy freed men to go outside the home for work and children to work or attend school.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has characterized energy as an architectural organizing principal. As advancements in technology created machines that utilized chemical energy sources—gas, electricity—less labor was needed in the kitchen. However while “...stoves were labor-saving devices...the labor they [saved] was male.” Stoves brought more work for women because they allowed for more complicated meals than a hearth did with one-pot cooking.”<sup>32</sup> Cowan identified what would become in the twentieth-century a set of interlocking household technology systems: food, clothing, health care, transportation, water, gas, electricity.<sup>33</sup> Advancements in each of these would consume more and more of women’s time as the century progressed. Whereas each was communally—or at least on the household level—a shared responsibility in the mid-nineteenth century, the transfer of the masculine portion of these duties to machines placed the entire human burden on women. This transfer in a sense industrialized

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<sup>30</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 250-255.

<sup>31</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 66.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



women's work in the home; but, while men were paid for industrial work outside the home, women were not paid for comparable work in the home. Housework was unpaid, isolated women in the home, and stigmatized them as unspecialized workers. The kitchen utilizing non-human energy sources created a "dependency on a network of social and economic institutions" which alienated women from the tools that made their "labor possible."<sup>34</sup> However, Cowan suggests that this entrapment in the kitchen was historically a transitional phase. As kitchen appliances were developed to take advantage of the new sources of energy, dishwashers and washing machines, and convenience foods expanded women's time to do other things. Cowan characterized this use of chemical energy as a catalyst for "married women's participation in the workforce," in which the mechanical helpers "acted, in the same way that chemical catalysts do, to break certain bonds that might otherwise have impeded the process" of women taking up activities outside the home.<sup>35</sup>

Technology also altered the relationship to food. Households began replacing raw foods with processed foods, and new foods coupled with new mechanical technologies increased the need for cookery instruction. Although "cookery books" had existed for centuries, these collections of *receipts*, or recipes, were not much more than lists of ingredients and vague directions regarding preparation which assumed a minimal level of cooking expertise. The combination of stoves (replacing hearths) along "with the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 209-209.

introduction of baking powder and new kitchen gadgetry provided an ongoing need for guidance and instruction.”<sup>36</sup>

Into this technological mix came a further complication: an increasing lack of servants. This led to a decrease in the size of the kitchen, and thus a decline in women’s authority within the home. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright has proposed that small kitchens were acceptable because the decreased use of servants, increased use of appliances (and less home preservation of foods), smaller families, shorter meals, and more outside the house activities for women (with children in school longer), and eventually employment.<sup>37</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century the intersection of technology and dearth of servants would, when full automation of the kitchen negated the need for service personnel—such as ice men visiting the home—completely isolate women in their kitchen.

Even if they could have afforded servants, use of hired household help was a decreasing trend in postwar America. In 1950 there were 137,463 private household workers in the West compared to 662,867 in the South. By 1960 the number of servants had increased to 219,216 and 822,255 respectively, but in relation to the overall population in the West the percentage of household workers was decreasing. In the 1970 census the number of servants in the West had almost dropped back to the 1950 totals. In the commentary that accompanied the 1960 census “[m]uch of the recent increase” was accounted for by an increase “in the number of baby sitters” over the previous decade.

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<sup>36</sup> Ellen Plante, *The American Kitchen 1700 to the Present: From Hearth to Highrise* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 128.

<sup>37</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 171-172.

The increase in working mothers made apparent the need for child care, which changed the desire for a maid or cook into the necessity for baby sitters. Even if the housewives of the emerging middle class could afford them, servants were less and less available for hire.<sup>38</sup>

### Consumerism and the Kitchen

The ways in which kitchens were designed, built and sold reinforced traditional values and male hegemony. Men designed the new kitchen which women then bought. This was nothing new. Early in the century “[m]anufacturers and advertisers needed to convince women that electric appliances would make cooking pleasurable, changing the image of cooking as drudgery into cooking as play.”<sup>39</sup> Thus women were conditioned to believe that when they bought “kitchen equipment, they are also buying a vision of their relationship to cooking and their correct gender roles.”<sup>40</sup> As a result “[m]illions of women were encouraged to believe that their satisfaction should stem from the sparkling, brand-new electric devices that they could buy, which would make cooking into a glamorous task, rather than merely unappreciated drudgery.”<sup>41</sup> By the 1930s advertisers had discovered that housewives “made the crucial decisions in allocating up to 90 percent of

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<sup>38</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 1*, 1-389, 1-395; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 1*, LXXII, 1-709, 1-715; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Nineteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1970*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 1*, 1-454, 1-455; Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 153-161.

<sup>39</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

the household's disposable income."<sup>42</sup> In effect, woman were recognized as "the manager of the domestic realm, with the home as the site of commodity consumption... [and women as wives and mothers negotiated] between the husband's wage and the material world."<sup>43</sup>

After the war, home builders also discovered woman as important to the sale of houses, and the kitchen became the particular focus of sales efforts. Even the basic homes of Levittown featured a kitchen with a brand new Bendix washing machine, but these were houses designed by men for women. Women had other ideas. They, or at least society, regarded the culinary space—including the dining room—as the foci of their authority within the home and as evidence of their claim to middle-class status. The home itself ceased to be a place of production and became a consumable. As a result of the home becoming a product, the kitchen merged—at least in practice if not physically—with the social, semi-public areas of the house: the living room and the patio. The decentralizing of the kitchen within the home was aided by a confluence of designs based on older values, technology, desire for consumer objects, and the need to cope with the changing social landscape of the 1950s and 1960s.

The social and technological landscape of postwar America was radically changed by prosperity. Construction of single family housing was a priority. Affluent or "comfortable" women were expected "to shoulder the burden of housework alone" due to the dearth of servants and technological improvements to the home.<sup>44</sup> On the other end of

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<sup>42</sup>Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> George Wagner, "The Lair of the Bachelor," in *Architecture and Feminism*, eds. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 194.

<sup>44</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 192.

the spectrum, working-class wives now had homes they needed to care for. Within the next couple of decades their two worlds would merge as the kitchen changed and merged with the rest of the home.

Kitchens after the war vaguely resembled kitchens built before the war. At first, it remained a separate room sequestered from the rest of the home, but technology altered that. This was not a new story.<sup>45</sup> Technology had been altering the kitchen's relationship to the rest of the home for nearly a century. As a result "[t]he notion that women would do housework was almost literally cast in concrete—or rather, in brass pipes and copper wires." The implementation of household technology assumed operation by women.<sup>46</sup> Technology, rather than easing life, placed more responsibility for care of a home on housewives. Between 1900 and 1950 the number of servants in proportion to households dropped one for every fifteen households to forty-two.<sup>47</sup> During this time Americans adapted to the diminishing availability of servants by replacing them with technology. One study reported that in "80 percent of all the affluent households that were studied by market researchers in thirty-six American cities had vacuum cleaners and washing machines." A decade later, Robert and Helen Lynd—in their study of Muncie, Indiana (*Middletown in Transition*)—found that 40% of all houses worth over \$2000 in Muncie had a refrigerator.<sup>48</sup>

As the war ended, builders were making plans. In 1945, home builders were polled as to their postwar plans. They reported that the kitchen was going to be a primary

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<sup>45</sup> "Progress 1926-1946: Kitchens-Laundries: Equipment Transforms Kitchens," *American Builder* 68, no. 10 (1946): 130-133.

<sup>46</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 152.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

focus and that appliance and cabinets would be added to the kitchen according to sale price of a home.<sup>49</sup> FHA/VA veterans' housing literally did not exist yet. The industry had struggled through the depression and had redirected its energies to public housing during the war, but they already knew the new kind of home they were going to sell. When the FHA regulations did kick in, government policy shaped the form of the kitchen, but could not determine how the space would be used.

For the most part builders and designers after the war were men, or at least that is how trade journal *American Builder* portrayed the situation. *American Builder* only viewed *women* in the home and the kitchen as *wives*, and at the beginning of the “veterans’ housing” cycle these women belonged to working-class families. There was no talk of servants. Also, the new suburban home was a place of efficiency. Men redesigned and confirmed the kitchen as a feminine space all the while claiming to know what women wanted. Kitchen design was primarily concerned with eliminating “wasted effort in preparing and serving food [as] the main objective in kitchen planning.”<sup>50</sup> Kitchen designers concerned themselves with the traffic patterns of cooks between sink, stove, and fridge and the optimal placement of cabinets and doors in relations to appliances.<sup>51</sup>

The builders also justified the placement of the kitchen within the plan of the home. In Levittown, the kitchen was placed at the front of the house—and actually shared the space of the entryway in the Levitt version of the ranch house—and several justifications were proffered for this, not the least being that the new location allowed

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<sup>49</sup> Sterling H. Albert, “Postwar Homes will be ‘Equipped-For-Sale’—Not Just ‘Built-For-Sale,’” *American Builder* 67, no. 9 (1945): 84-86.

<sup>50</sup> “Planning—Kitchens and Bathrooms,” *American Builder* 72, no. 7 (1950): 90-91 and 134-136.

<sup>51</sup> “Time and Motion Studies Develop New Concepts in Planning,” *American Builder* 70, no. 7 (1948): 80-81.

women to supervise children playing outside while they toiled in the kitchen.<sup>52</sup> In fact in Levittown, the placement of the kitchen facilitated access to water lines in the street and the septic tank in the front yard (power ran along the rear property-line). Another justification was that “[t]he new location of the kitchen in front of the house was a postwar innovation [and appeared] to be related to the shift in women’s work roles...women were reluctant [after the war] to return to...the ‘backstairs’ kitchen.”<sup>53</sup> An interesting claim, considering that many of the new residents of basic postwar housing previously never had the option of which stairs to use before.

However, builders were pursuing a valid line of reasoning. In colonial and frontier homes the hearth functioned as the “center of the home.” Levitt Brothers innovation was “to introduce it in the setting of a basic four-room house.” In the basic Cape Cod floor plan (of four rooms divided out of a square foot-print) this was not so clear, but in the secondary phase of construction ranch houses contained a compressed fireplace structure separating the kitchen from the living room. With the kitchen serving as the transition from entry to social space of the living room, the hearth returned to the center of family life, and “paralleled the transition of housework from backstairs to public space, and the concomitant acknowledgment of the housewife as an important actor in America’s new commercial villages.”<sup>54</sup>

The inclusion of the kitchen in the social space of the home imitated an older housing form, but imposed “middle-class geography” upon working-class households.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 82-84.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-219.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

This was a result of progressive era values that had been encoded into government housing regulations over the previous couple of decades which promoted a middle-class existence as ideal. With this standard enunciated in FHA/VA regulations, new homes would take shape as middle-class structures that would shape Americans into a new middle-class.

In 1950, *American Builder* sponsored a competition in which the kitchen was considered from “the woman’s angle of home design.” The instructions carefully laid out the parameters entries were to follow: provide “play areas for small children, easily supervised by the wife from kitchen or some other central work area...Through [a] layout of rooms that provides excellent circulation to the various zones of household duties... [and] By providing greater freedom in the kitchen area through multiple use rooms, including dining and laundering. Where a separation occurs between kitchen and dining area a ‘pass-through’ at counter height [should be] employed.”<sup>56</sup> However, women were more concerned with what the new open plans communicated about their class status than they were with efficiency. In 1956, women testifying before the Women’s Housing Conference made it clear they found the open-plan home unacceptable, and “that they considered kitchen counters and combination living-dining rooms poor replacements for real dining rooms.”<sup>57</sup> In addition, women stated they would “cut back on the space allotted to the living room in order to provide what they considered essential space in the kitchen” because the kitchen was “the only space appropriate to productive work in the four-room” basic house. This conflicted with FHA goals and Levitt designs as a larger

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<sup>56</sup> “American Builder Prize Home Competition,” *American Builder* 72, no. 4 (1950): 72-79.

<sup>57</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 209.



kitchen “would be considered lower-class, worker housing.” A kitchen with equal or less space, compared to the living room, “was middle-class.”<sup>58</sup>

Women architects actually attempted to enforce these desires, but were overruled by male designers. A floor plan submitted to the *American Builder* competition by architect Elizabeth Graham Bell with an enclosed kitchen was redesigned by an appliance manufacturer to demonstrate how their refrigerators and stoves would integrate with the design. The manufacturer removed the door (and adjacent wall) leading to dining room; replaced with a “snack bar” framed with short cabinets above and a counter and stove below—completely rearranging Bell’s floor plan.<sup>59</sup> *American Builder* published a series of these redesigns by manufacturers of floor plans originally conceived of by women architects. The manufacturers seemed to know best with *American Builder* commenting that the “[p]roduction line arrangement of completely automatic appliances cut the housewife’s work to a minimum.”<sup>60</sup>

This insistence on what was correct did not stop with manufacturers. As far as aesthetics were concerned, male builders insisted they knew women’s minds. L.C. Earle, President of Earle Kitchen Unit Co. (of NYC) took exception to the practice of placing the sink and appliances on the wall under the window. He insisted women wanted a bigger window where the table could be placed: “Let’s make the kitchen a gay and colorful room of many uses, instead of a mere cooking space.”<sup>61</sup> With the integration of the kitchen into the rest of the social space of the home, the space came to be a decorated

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<sup>58</sup> Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 94.

<sup>59</sup> “Kitchen redesigned to Harmonize with House,” *American Builder* 72, no. 9(1950): 110-111.

<sup>60</sup> “Hotpoint Designers Altered Placement of Equipment, Relocated Laundry,” *American Builder*, 72, no. 7 (1950): 28-79 and 218.

<sup>61</sup> “Letters to the Editor: Kitchen Suggestions,” *American Builder* 70, no. 10 (1950): 39.

space. Just as old values applied to the marketing of appliances, the charm of past days was evoked in the presentation of the kitchen to those in the public area of the home. In a sense this affect, too, established a household's status. Older decorating styles— colonial, western, country— suggested a connection to an earlier genteel status. The approach was also used to sell houses. In homes of less than 650 sq. ft. (“economy houses” under FHA regulations and smaller than the “basic housing” of 800 sq. ft. Levittown Cape Cods) kitchens were made larger by omitting the dining room. In response, “salesmen evoked the old-fashioned farm house kitchen as they explained why the rooms had been combined.”<sup>62</sup> In a way, kitchens in these homes came full circle to the great rooms of frontier cabins.

Kitchens evolved from places exclusively for cooking to a portion of the home that required decoration and color coordination.<sup>63</sup> Kitchens became “lifestyle rooms” in which modern appliances made kitchen more efficient for women.<sup>64</sup> The room evolved into the “home’s social center” as it allowed a housewife to work in the kitchen and “visit” with guests and family via semi-open plan kitchen. Women were in a way trapped in the kitchen by builder ideology.<sup>65</sup> This was entirely economic on the part of builders and appliance manufacturers. Their products took on feminine qualities and “even as an increasingly open floor plan made the kitchen a less isolated part of the middle-class home, pink refrigerators and stoves reinforced the gender boundaries around the daily

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<sup>62</sup> Wright, *Building the American Dream*, 254.

<sup>63</sup> “Fresh Ideas for Kitchen-Conscious Home Builders,” *American Builder* 72, no. 7 (1950): 84-85.

<sup>64</sup> “Manufacturer’s Research Assures Effective Kitchen,” *American Builder* 68, no. 2 (1946): 111-113.

<sup>65</sup> “1951 Version of Early American Farmhouse Kitchen,” *American Builder* 73, no. 7(1951): 98-99.

meal preparation.”<sup>66</sup> In *American Builder* kitchens came to be described in terms of color and decoration rather than as sites of efficiency.

An executive of appliance manufacturer Hotpoint declared: “Kitchens have proved to be one of the most dramatic selling aids in the postwar building market. Housewives show a keen interest in the room they label as their own.”<sup>67</sup> Builders did not need reminding of this, and while they touted color choices home builders continued to promote appliances as labor saving devices for women.<sup>68</sup> Since technical innovation only reduced the price of the home, builders focused on the kitchen when selling a new home.<sup>69</sup> Kitchens were previously ad-hoc creations. Prior to the war, builders did not ordinarily install appliances in new construction. The residents would often bring the few appliances—stove, refrigerator, as well as cabinets—from their previous home or arrange for delivery by a retailer. In the postwar building industry, builders quickly realized the profit potential of providing a fully equipped kitchen.<sup>70</sup>

The new kitchen was not exclusively an ideal imposed by builders upon housewives. Magazines regularly published ideas for remodeling kitchens in existing homes. Homeowners chose where they wanted the sink in relation to the window.<sup>71</sup> A remodel reflected how people actually lived in the house, and in a way drove builders to follow. Older structures were reshaped to conform to changing social values.

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<sup>66</sup> Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 191.

<sup>67</sup> “New Builder Profits from Kitchen Modernization,” *American Builder* 73, no. 7 (1951): 114-115.

<sup>68</sup> “Appliances: Greatest Sales Aid,” *American Builder* 71, no. 9 (1949): 73-75.

<sup>69</sup> “Planning Kitchens for Today’s Homes,” *American Builder* 70, no. 7 (1948): 72-76; “Packaged Kitchens,” *American Builder* 71, no. 8 (1949): 108-110.

<sup>70</sup> “Completely Equipped Kitchen can be a Tremendous Stimulant for the Sale of Houses,” *American Builder* 71, no. 9 (1949): 68-69; “Kitchens the Focal Point for Sale,” *American Builder* 73, no. 6 (1951): 96-97.

<sup>71</sup> “Kitchen Magic: The Complete Remodel. They Wanted an Open Kitchen...Cheerful with Daylight,” *Sunset*, January 1959, 50-51.

Eventually, the shiny allure of pink stoves began to fade. By the mid-1950s the kitchen was de-emphasized even further by integrating its design into the rest of the home. Appliances began to fade literally into the woodwork and become part of “an overall decorating scheme.”<sup>72</sup> At first this began with more affluent homes like the one designed by architect Cliff May in Garden Grove, California, with all built-in appliances.<sup>73</sup> The palate of the kitchen became more organic with colors such as “avocado” and “goldtone.” By the 1970s the spectrum moved to “almond” and “wheat” and the kitchen as a space that “was assigned multiple functions...a room with furnishings and accessories rather than a food preparation center.” Appliances blended literally into the woodwork.<sup>74</sup>

### Coping with the New Lifestyle

While the kitchen physically integrated into the public space of the home, expectations continued to anchor women to the space. Housewives would continue to be responsible for feeding the family. Another shift beyond the physical change to the home took place. As far as postwar built houses, Americans were now living in fairly similar structures. Even the more affluent lived in closer proximity to the rest of the family than they had in Victorian homes. To be sure, the economically better-off did live in larger structures with more internal and external space than those in basic housing, but it was essentially the same house: kitchen, living room, bedrooms, and bathroom. What had happened was that “the middle-class wife had finally and irrevocably lost her servants,

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 61-65.

<sup>73</sup> “‘Super Kitchen’ in a \$14,445 House,” *American Builder* 77, no. 5 (1955): 101.

<sup>74</sup> Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 275.

and the working-class wife had acquired, or was in the process of acquiring, a house to look after.”<sup>75</sup> The all encompassing “middle-class” of the later twentieth-century had formed, and part and parcel of that was women leaving the home for production but remaining responsible for the care of the family in the house.

In her examination of families in the 1950s, historian Elaine Tyler May noted that in sociological studies of the period husbands found the home a refuge from the stress of work, while for women it “was often the reverse: employment or community work alleviated some of the pressure of full-time homemaking.”<sup>76</sup> Only about a quarter (26.2%) of married women in the West held employment outside the home in 1960.<sup>77</sup> Married, women readers—who worked outside the home (25.5%)—of *Sunset* magazine matched this figure.<sup>78</sup> However, historian Joanne Meyerowitz holds that this “domestic stereotype” does not hold up when placed in an “historical context and questions both [the stereotype’s] novelty and pervasiveness in the postwar years.” Questioning the context may show “that during this era, most American women lived, in one way or more, outside the boundaries of the middle-class suburban home.”<sup>79</sup> Women, whether

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>76</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 176.

<sup>77</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-177; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 6*, 6-585; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 14*, 14-189; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 30*, 30-149; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 39*, 39-216; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-183; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 49*, 49-247.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur Kroeger, *The Characteristics of the Audience of Sunset Magazine* (Menlo Park, California: Lane Publishing, 1962), 9.

<sup>79</sup> Meyerowitz, “Introduction: Women and Gender in Postwar America,” 2.

they chose or were forced by circumstances, only "...sought employment to bolster the family budget but not to disrupt power relationships." Seeking a paying job was acceptable as long as the income was only supplementary to her husband's income and did not undermine his authority within the family.<sup>80</sup>

Magazines offered strategies for when women were unable to present meals themselves. Editors proposed convenience strategies that utilized the convenience attributes of appliances now in the home. In 1957, *Sunset* discussed the problem of how to feed your husband while you were away. Men could fix their own breakfast without a problem and lunch could be bought at a restaurant, but dinner was a dilemma. The solution was to make meals and freeze them. All he would have to do is reheat.<sup>81</sup> The kitchen was obviously getting to the point that men could at least do this little bit themselves. Nevertheless, the automation of the kitchen was threatening the women's sphere of influence and control in the homes. Pushing a button inferred a loss of control for women.<sup>82</sup> "Convenience" removed the designation of "expert" from women. Housewives would continue to be held responsible for meals, but now the duty would carry less prestige.

Traditional cookbooks had changed as well to the point where they neither reinforced nor questioned this view. However, these books continued to stress household management and the nutrition/quality message, but with a gender neutral language and tone—as well as a complete lack of editorial commentary regarding the duties to the

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<sup>80</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 159.

<sup>81</sup> "Caring for the Summer Bachelor: How to Feed Your Husband when You are Away," *Sunset*, June 1957, 154-160.

<sup>82</sup> Hine, *Populuxe*, 127-133.

family and home.<sup>83</sup> Early forms of the emerging lifestyle cookbooks did wander into this area occasionally. The *Good Housekeeping Party Book*—more a book of menus than an actual cookbook—contained multiple entries on dealing with servants, while *The General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* offered a section entitled: “When you have a maid.”<sup>84</sup>

Discussions of this nature would fade completely as the lifestyle cooking trend took off in the 1960s with the publication of Julia Child’s *The Art French Cooking* in which the individual would want to present the accomplishment herself (or himself). As far as women’s cookery instruction went, Bracken’s *The I Hate to Cook Book* represented the triumph of convenience over all else. Bracken’s theme of convenience as necessary to the feeding of the family altered the convenience trope. Women’s service magazines picked this up and ran with the trend for the rest of the century. The convenience concept did appear earlier without Bracken’s humor and sarcasm, and housewives themselves often suggested these “short-cuts they [used] to help prepare meals in a hurry.”<sup>85</sup>

The home and kitchen remained a central touchstone to women’s identity nearly two decades after the war, and architecture continued to emphasize that role. But it also diminished the authority that housewives had held by beginning to combine the spaces. In most published floor plans the kitchen remained a physically separate space, but the door and doorway were gone and the kitchen was more often also a secondary egress from the house which children and husbands used. In smaller houses, of the Levittown type, the kitchen was placed at the front of the home and “reinforced the domestic role of the

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<sup>83</sup> Dorothy B. Marsh, ed., *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (1955; reprint, New York: Good Housekeeping Book Division, 1962), v-15.

<sup>84</sup> Dorothy Marsh and Carol Brock, *Good Housekeeping Party Book* (1958; reprint, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1949), 13-83; The Women of General Foods Kitchens, *The General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* (New York: Random House, 1959), 86.

<sup>85</sup> “You cook it ‘while the coffee perks,’” *Sunset*, September 1959, 110.

homemaker-mother in the nuclear family” but shared the public space of the living room.<sup>86</sup> The published floor plans of more affluent housing minimized this at least into the 1960s, preserving the middle-class look so many housewives apparently insisted upon according to builders and government commissions. The western ranch house, in comparison, avoided the compromises of Levitt’s ranch house (particularly traffic patterns) by increasing the public space without compromising the size of the private space. It allowed for a sense of gentility, even with open plan, by being modern, and thus holding onto middle-class status.

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<sup>86</sup> Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 68.



## CHAPTER 4

HOME ON THE RANGE: *SUNSET* MAGAZINE'S "CHEFS OF THE WEST" AND  
THE MASCULINIZATION OF THE WESTERN SUBURBAN KITCHEN

The cover of the November 1960 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* featured Charlton Heston in a kitchen with earth-toned cabinets tossing a giant salad. An actor known for his masculine roles, Heston was obviously enjoying himself. The audience was secure in the knowledge that since he did other manly things (or at least portrayed manly men on the screen) that this feminine activity did not diminish his masculinity.<sup>1</sup> A few years earlier, actor and spokesman for General Electric, Ronald Reagan appeared in an ad for General Electric kitchen appliances basting a roast in an oven. Heston was dressed in a securely casual style while Reagan's sports jacket, tie, and two toned shoes betrayed a formal attempt at looking relaxed. Reagan looked rather square and overdressed but secure in his suburban kitchen.<sup>2</sup> These two icons of movie masculinity did not seem out of place in a kitchen cooking.

These manly and suburban images were a rebuttal to the fear of the suburbs as feminizing. As a counterpoint to the suburban home, *Playboy* magazine offered the bachelor pad. In 1956, the editors presented "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment" an open floor plan abode that looked suspiciously akin to a small suburban house. Only a floor plan was offered with an artist's renderings of the space and close-up photos of the proposed furnishings. In this space, the magazine's "urban bachelor" existed in a space

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<sup>1</sup> *Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1960, cover.

<sup>2</sup> To view this image please see Kevin Starr's *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

which he controlled completely (in his mind). Unlike the depictions of Heston and Reagan, *Playboy* did not present an image of the urban male occupant—rather the reader imagined himself traversing the apartment and living the life described. The kitchen housed a myriad of the latest automatic appliances in order to “whomp [*sic*] up short-order specialties.” Appliances seemed more important than the actual food, but in the city cooking for the urban bachelor was a means to an end.<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1940s *Sunset* magazine published an article on kitchen trends. The editors challenged the proposition that extra people in the kitchen, getting in the way of the cook, as old fashioned. They declared “[t]he cook has discarded it, too. For she likes company while *she* works.”<sup>4</sup> Ten years later in an advertisement in the magazine touting “Westerners who live with Sunset,” Donald W. Douglas Jr.—president of Douglas Aircraft Company—represented the “[t]ypical Sunset readers everywhere.” Not only did his company’s aircraft “shrink our world” but “when he sets his hand to barbecuing, in the Pool House kitchen of his Southern California home, he’s a critical man with a recipe.”<sup>5</sup> In less than a decade, *Sunset* magazine helped men to appropriate the space of the western, suburban kitchen by changing the rhetoric—in which men previously shunned the kitchen—to a discourse in which they could claim the kitchen as “socially peripheral” to their experience while space remained “symbolically central.”<sup>6</sup> The editors of *Sunset* altered the defensive, manly rhetoric of male cookery instruction by making the

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<sup>3</sup> “Playboy’s Penthouse Apartment,” *Playboy*, September 1956, 60.

<sup>4</sup> “Is there a trend in Western kitchens?” *Sunset*, November 1949, 23[emphasis added].

<sup>5</sup> “Westerners who live with Sunset,” *Sunset*, May 1959, 162-163.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen and Co, Ltd., 1986), 5.

kitchen a safe space for men. Men were stepping into the kitchen all over America, or at least in the media in Southern California.

A gender reading of the post-war suburban house in the west demonstrates how *Sunset* magazine, and more specifically “Chefs of the West,” facilitated a remasculinization of the kitchen. The new architecture of the suburban residence, often embodied in the ranch house, invited men back into the home and the recipes—published in *Sunset*—encouraged them to use the space. Anthropologist Susan Kent has commented that architecture creates space by determining boundaries “while use of space can be seen as a means to organize that [previously] unbounded space,” and that “[a]rchitectural partitions usually are conscious manipulations by humans to create boundaries where they do not exist in nature.”<sup>7</sup> Cooking as a hobby permitted postwar suburban men to reenter the home as an active participant while providing plausible deniability that using the kitchen might feminize them. “Chefs of the West” contributors and *Sunset*’s editorial direction emphasized that men in the west were different.

Whereas *Playboy* “mapped out” a world anchored in the “specific spatial context” of the bachelor pad in the city, “Chefs of the West”—and for that matter *Sunset*—presented a broader space in which men could range, which made room for family, a community of chefs, and feminine values.<sup>8</sup> In postwar American society there was a fear that suburbs feminized men, which was an extension of a greater concern that the conformity required of middle-class life was destroying masculinity. *Playboy* offered the

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Kent, *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Fratterigo, “The Answer to Suburbia: Playboy’s Urban Lifestyle,” *Journal of Urban History*, 34, no. 5 (2008): 751.

city as masculine, and men as free agents thus rejecting the postwar ideal of the nuclear family as the center of American life. For *Playboy*, families were a drag. For the urban male, control of the space of the apartment—and the women invited within its confines—was the goal.

For men in the postwar suburban home, control was on a smaller scale. Because he shared the space with other members of the household, any control was—at best—on a project by project basis. The suburban male valued home and family. While for *Playboy* cooking was about control and seduction in a masculine environment, suburban males contributing to “Chefs of the West” cooking in the kitchen or barbecuing on the patio occupied a feminine space with the rest of the household. In the 1950s, American society regarded—and feared—suburban homes as a feminizing force. While public intellectuals and commentators voiced concern with this trend, men in suburbs engaged in traditionally feminine activities in a masculine framework within the new suburban home. With magazines framing masculine cooking in terms other than feeding the family, men ignored the feminizing connotations of using the kitchen. In the kitchen of the middle-class home the appliances men used were not as exciting as the gadgets in the urban males apartment, but these devices were real not imaginary—and, similarly, his home and kitchen was just as real. The suburban and urban kitchens were physically similar, but the differing motivations of the imaginary urban bachelor and the real suburban male facilitated overlooking the feminine aspects of the space.

### The Feminizing Influences of the Suburbs

The 1950s was an era fraught with fears—real and imaginary. Atomic weapons and communists haunted Americans, but there was also anxiety concerning the feminization of men. Particularly how conformity demanded of males in a modern economy contributed to decline in their masculinity. Much of this postwar manhood and conformity discussion was proffered by public intellectuals.<sup>9</sup> Sociological studies by C. Wright Mills’ *Power, Politics, and People* (1962); David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950); William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man*; and the novel *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* all perceived trouble in male conformity. A subset of these discourses focused on the suburban home: Herbert Gans’ *The Levittowners*, Richard E. Gordon’s *The Split Level Trap*, and John Keat’s *The Crack in the Picture Window*. In these texts the homogeneity of suburban life could lead to “alcoholism, adultery, and quiet despair.” These issues affected both men and women, as did the problem of conformity. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* portrayed suburbanites as compulsively social—especially women—and “those who did not participate [in neighborhood society] were ostracized.” For men the “emphasis on mass-produced uniformity” at work followed them home to a subdivision of uniform homes and a social life with others in a similar straight.<sup>10</sup> The experts of the era believed the suburban male was confronted with conformity in both poles of his life. However, the men who sent recipes to “Chefs of the West” did not seem troubled on the surface about these issues. A contributor from Portland, Oregon, offered a gingerbread recipe he originally learned from his wife “with full instructions on how to

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<sup>9</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> J. John Palen, *The Suburbs* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1995), 79-81.

make it with a minimum of dirty dishes.”<sup>11</sup> When they baked a cake or threw a steak on the barbecue, men were not responding to a public intellectual discussion, but they were acting out a culturally significant set of values that had required an acceptable masculine reaction. In spite of what the public intellectuals put forth, these men were (if not happy, at least) content with their suburban lifestyle, and did not seem threatened by feminizing aspects of the suburbs.

The urban bachelor, as promoted by *Playboy*, was the suburban male’s counterpart in both the city and in the response to the intellectuals discussing conformity. The urban bachelor was “a white, affluent young male”<sup>12</sup> He was sophisticated. His job remained immaterial as long as it provided sufficient income for his lifestyle and did not impose upon his extra-curricular time. He remained single and did not ponder the fears suburban males focused upon. He was a fantasy; a fantasy directed at the anxieties of the suburban male. The urban bachelor retained control of his environment—and those within it.

The urban bachelor’s “pad” was a masculine place opposed to the feminized suburban house. His apartment “emphasized individuality” whereas the suburban home was purposely built for a family.<sup>13</sup> Suburban men lived with women and children. They had to consider their actions in terms of their families. The urban bachelor had no such constraints, and the bachelor pad emphasized this. Published plans for such apartments never contained more than one bedroom. Furnishings and decoration were masculine. The floor plan contained no evidence of a niche for a clothes washer and dryer, although

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<sup>11</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, May 1958, 141-142.

<sup>12</sup> Fratterrigo, “The Answer to Suburbia,” 763.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 747.

a weekly visit by a servant was noted.<sup>14</sup> However, the kitchen held “[a]ll the sundry electric appliances designed to allow the cook to devote all his energies to pleasuring a gourmet’s palate.”<sup>15</sup> The space was visually open to guests so that the bachelor could perform for, as well as keep an eye on, his visitors.

All in all, the bachelor pad kitchen was not all that different from the suburban kitchen. In the open plan suburban home, the kitchen opened to the public areas of the house. In *Playboy* magazine’s version of the bachelor pad, appliances are hidden and the kitchen cabinets coordinate with the décor of the rest of the apartment. The room is decorated as an integral part of the communal space—just as in the contemporary suburban home. The real difference was in the intent and use of the kitchen.

The difference in the internal boundaries of the bachelor pad and the suburban home centered on the temporal use of the space, and the goals designed for that space. The urban bachelor’s goal was seduction, and he accomplished that (at least from the reader’s perspective) through control of his environment. His constant occupation (and control) of the space of the pad precluded relinquishing control to “his intended quarry.”<sup>16</sup> The suburban male shared his space with the family. Any claim he had on use of space depended on prior claim by other members or the family as a whole (such as dinner in the dining room). In the kitchen, he could occupy and control the space when his wife was not using the space in the manner dictated by middle-class values (i.e.

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<sup>14</sup> Although in the later *Playboy* Townhouse a “houseman” and a servant’s quarters were mentioned in the text, no space in the plans was specifically designated as such.

<sup>15</sup> “The *Playboy* Townhouse: Modern Living Posh Plans for Exciting Urban Living,” *Playboy*, May 1962, 92.

<sup>16</sup> “*Playboy*’s Penthouse Apartment,” *Playboy*, September 1956, 58.

cooking dinner, etc.). With access limited to open time-slots in the household's schedule—and thus limited control—the suburban male could only cook as a hobby.

With limited access to—and control of—the kitchen, the suburban male chose the items he cooked carefully. Rather than cook in order to seduce, he cooked to demonstrate his affluence and the abundance that prosperity brought him—demonstrating his class status. The backyard barbecue might offer an exception to this lack of control. In a way, the barbecue mimicked the absolute control of the bachelor pad. Although his wife probably purchased all his cooking supplies for grilling (à la the bachelor's houseman), middle-class social convention designated the barbecue as his realm of control.

The bachelor pad's external boundaries were not as clear, as the rhetoric of the (imagined) urban bachelor was somewhat narcissistic. Any venture outside the apartment centered on the bachelor himself so that anywhere he located himself he remained the focus. The external boundaries of the suburban house were shaped by the middle-class expectations regarding the behavior inside the home. Pursuit of class status defined the suburban male, which required he interact with the context (the suburb, the household, and the home) in which he found himself. However, the middle-class suburban house did retain a masculine overtone, because housing of this type was often purchased with a VA loan, and these funds were only available through G.I. Bill benefits, which for the most part were denied women. The masculine external boundary of such a home contained feminine interior boundaries.

The kitchen in their new homes was probably not like the kitchen many suburban males grew up in. Unlike most prewar homes, this new housing came with all the appliances built in. The kitchen was a ready-made workshop. The feminine connotations



of cooking were tempered by equipment their mother's kitchen never contained (dishwashers, built in cabinets, etc.), and the fact that the room was now an integral part of the social space of the home.

The new values of the emerging middle class demanded a leveling of the claims on the space of the kitchen and the entire home. Certain spaces retained their specific gender connotations—the garage, the bedroom, the kitchen—but these connotations mattered less, or were ignored. The kitchen did not so much cease to be a feminine space, and become a masculine space, as women released exclusive claim on the room because they assumed more and more responsibilities outside the home. In turn, men in the suburbs accepted a concealed feminization as a result of the new middle-class value set.

If the intellectuals of the era are to be believed, men needed to pursue individuality, but the similarity of houses in a suburban subdivision complicated that goal. The architecture of the house and the landscaping of the yard allowed few outlets for personal expression—house paint and the lawn conformed neighborhood norms. Expressions of individuality turned inward to the house, and the kitchen presented a shop-like space in which to experiment. Suburban men did not cook whole meals so much as concentrate on a single dish. “Chefs of the West” contributor Norman Goeltz (USN, Ret.) offered his “Smothered Chicken” but admitted he bought packaged noodles as an accompaniment although his “[g]randmother made her own noodles.”<sup>17</sup> In search of individuality, men created individual recipes.

Women could not afford such indulgences. Society continued requiring they maintain a presence in the kitchen. Although women were moving to activities outside

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<sup>17</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, January 1949, 56.

the home, daily responsibility for cooking family meals remained theirs. Men, in contrast, spent more time at home. Part of this was the geographical remoteness of the suburbs from traditional male social outlets (bars, clubs, sporting events), but also the emerging values of the new middle class—home and family. The old male enclaves of saloon and club did not sit well with the adopted values originally drawn from Victorians and Progressives. Besides, many of these men had not known these social outlets. They did know the improvisational necessity learned by living through the Depression and the social solidarity brought on by military service (or at least of participating the war effort). In the new middle-class home, the kitchen was accessible and available; if not physically, at least socially, open.

The urban bachelor was a throwback to this world of saloons and clubs. He had pretensions beyond middle-class status. Part of this was *Playboy* picking up where *Esquire* magazine had left off, and part a consumerist sales pitch. Before the war, *Esquire* chronicled the remnants of the bon vivant upper class society in New York and fashionable winter retreats such as Florida. This was not a group that cleaved to Victorian, Progressive, or middle-class values. By the time *Playboy* made its debut in the 1950s, the magazine's readership did not have the social and economic wherewithal to participate in these exclusive activities anyway. The imaginary urban bachelor had to relate to his audience, and for the most part remained in his own narcissistic world of the pad. His individuality depended on an inward-looking gaze. To compensate for lack of access to the accoutrements of upper-class society, the urban bachelor surrounded himself with automatic and remote control consumer goods. Machines (or the afore mentioned houseman) prepared his food.

Suburban men approached the kitchen as a workshop. Cooking for them was a hobby—the process mattered as much as the result. The backyard barbecue<sup>18</sup> was an element of this, but its development, while emerging earlier, was parallel to male access to the kitchen. For many men the backyard barbecue was sufficient. Others required the stove and counters of the kitchen. The “Chefs of the West” used the backyard with fanfare and the kitchen quietly. With the barbecue, method took an equal place with cuisine. When grilling steak, a “Chef of the West” did not “mind cooking it plain and adding absolutely nothing except salt (after cooking, please).” On one occasion *Sunset* even eschewed the grill but cautioning the reader to place a steak directly on the coals “carefully...But for occasional dramatic effect, just walk up to the fireplace and throw it on the fire.” Other occasions required more technically detailed operation of the barbecue with safe operation of the tools as paramount.<sup>19</sup> The language employed by *Sunset*’s editors—while full of masculine swagger and posturing—encouraged showmanship in chefs. Throwing the steak directly “on the fire” preserved the “chefs” masculinity. With the most of the May 1957 column dedicated to a food associated with masculinity—steak—men could feel secure following the recipes for marinades. This was not plain meat they were cooking. Each marinade required gathering ingredients and preparing several hours ahead of cooking. In spite of the “throw it on the fire” bravado, “Chefs of

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<sup>18</sup> In this thesis “barbecue” (with a “c”) refers to any outdoor cooking. The people of post-war America used this term in this way. The trend, begun in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to categorize generic outdoor cooking as “grilling” does not apply to the era under discussion. However, the trend is in line with what is discussed in this chapter, but outside its scope. Thus, I apologize to those readers to whom “barbeque” (with a “q”) has specific connotations.

<sup>19</sup> “Teaching Your Son to be a Teen-age Barbecue Chef,” *Sunset*, August 1959, 85.

the West” prescribed proper preparation of the food which preserved the “chef” as expert, while also placing the cooking of the steak in a western context.<sup>20</sup>

In the West, the liminal connection of the kitchen and backyard was at first aided by long summers and relatively mild winters in California and Arizona. As this lifestyle spread eastward and technological improvements to homes encouraged it, the connected space of the kitchen, living room, and patio became more common. At the time, there was a concern that suburbs had a feminizing influence on men. *Playboy’s* visualization of the city as masculine and *Sunset’s* framing of the suburban kitchen as neutral ground each provided men with cover while cooking, but with different motivations. Gendered description of space determined the external and internal boundaries of the urban bachelor pad and the suburban home. For the urban bachelor boundaries radiated from him, but in the suburban home boundaries were the dynamic between members of the family and the expectations middle-class values imposed on the household. The suburban home was a feminine space, but recipes often ignored this.

#### Men’s vs. Women’s Cookery Instruction

In postwar America, cookbooks and magazines presented recipes in a definitely gendered prose. The nature of the rhetorical approach varied with the vehicle, the author, and the audience. During the 1930s, an increased number of cookbooks and recipes in magazines appeared aimed specifically at men. Many of these documents treated any form of masculine cooking in a sarcastic mien, but others took the same tact with

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<sup>20</sup> “Chefs of the West: The Chefs Cook Steaks...with Soy....in the Smoke...and Right on the Glowing Coals,” *Sunset*, May 1957, 68-70.

women's cooking. Cooking was definitely feminine, but when men found themselves forced into cooking the authors of these treatises arrogantly claimed men were better at it. After all men could claim the title *Chef*—women could not. One self-styled expert asked if any “woman had ever dared create anything beyond the already written word of [past] male cookery masters?”<sup>21</sup> *Esquire* magazine's feature writers regularly claimed women were unable to cook, while the writer of the monthly “Man the Kitchenette” column all but ignored the cooking of women. He wrote of easily made meals, perfect meals, and avoided the bravado and sarcasm towards women's cooking many of his contemporaries indulged in. Either way—criticizing women or ignoring them—men's cookery instruction positioned itself by what it was not: women's cooking.

In the twentieth-century, middle-class men *and women* were not universally taught to cook while in their parents' homes. Social and cultural expectations expected them to do better, but without servants, and exiled to the somewhat remote new postwar suburbs, they had no choice but to learn to cook—or at least women did not have a choice. Traditional women's cookbooks offered strategies on shopping and meal planning; skills one would expect to be taught by mothers to daughters. An earlier generation of cookbooks emphasized managing the hired cook in the kitchen as opposed to a housewife preparing meals herself. In the 1920s and 1930s a popular sub-genre of cookbooks played on women's fear of losing their husbands if their cooking was unappealing.<sup>22</sup> By the 1920s, American women faced a different kitchen than their

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<sup>21</sup> Charles H. Baker, Jr., *The Gentleman's Companion Volume I: Being an Exotic Cookery Book or, Around the World with a Knife Fork and Spoon* (1946; reprint, New York: Crown Publishers, 1939), xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 71-72.

mothers did, with the nation now more urban than it had ever been before, with increasing amounts of processed foods and an ever increasing and changing range of kitchen appliances. After World War II, their daughters encountered an evolved kitchen and a new set of convenience foods, as well as changing middle-class values. Women were criticized for failing to cleave to an imaginary standard.

Cooking instruction for men was hardly a new idea. Gender scholar Sherri A. Innes and historian Jessamyn Neuhaus contend that the language of masculine cookery instruction was defensive and designed to reassure men. Their analysis used texts from the 1920s into the 1950s. Neuhaus suggested that masculine, defensive rhetoric continued into the 1950s and that *Sunset* contributed to such a discourse. Innes stated that not only did men's cooking instruction come across as defensive, women's cooking instruction attacked men as unable to cook,<sup>23</sup> and that *Sunset* contributed to the idea that women must watch over men, while cooking, to prevent failure in the kitchen.<sup>24</sup> One *Sunset* article advised women, when absent from the home, that their husband would "fare very well indeed if his dinners [were] planned, prepared, and frozen ahead of time."<sup>25</sup> Innes proposed several "different assumptions about the relationship of men to food and cooking." She characterized these assumptions as "a male cooking mystique...that has helped to perpetuate gender roles..." particularly that men are not "natural" cooks. In terms of "Chefs of the West" three of Innes' elements of the male cooking mystique apply to rhetoric of masculine cookery instruction. The central premise holds that men

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<sup>23</sup> Sherrie A. Innes, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>24</sup> Innes, *Dinner Roles*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> "Caring for the Summer Bachelor: How to Feed your Husband when You are away," *Sunset*, June 1957, 154.

choose to cook and they must make sure cooking does not diminish their masculinity; rather masculine cooking instruction must reassure men that the kitchen will not feminize them. *Sunset's* editors honored this concept, and used rhetoric to make the kitchen safe for men to inhabit.

Innes determined that traditional male cooking rhetoric constructed a framework that made cooking foods associated with masculinity safe for men to prepare; and that as part of that safety men should control outdoor cookery. The rhetoric inferred women did not understand how to cook a steak. Women might burn the meat or alter a nice steak with a sauce.<sup>26</sup> Since the publisher of *Sunset* marketed the magazine to the entire household, editors could not cast outright derision on women's cooking. One issue of the magazine an advertisement touting the breadth of *Sunset's* readership featured Mrs. Wallace Sterling (wife of the president of Stanford University) as a loyal reader and "user of Sunset recipes."<sup>27</sup> Recipes published in the magazine, outside the "Chefs in the West," column addressed the "cook" rather than the "chef," and wrote in the tone of traditional feminine cooking instruction. Within the column, *Sunset* not only toned down masculine cooking rhetoric, the editors contained the manly discourse on cooking and minimized any suggestion of inferiority of women's cooking within the column. Overall both men and women in a household read *Sunset*, and the editors would not risk alienating such a large readership. "Chefs of the West" avoided any misogynist allusions of earlier masculine cooking rhetoric.

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<sup>26</sup> Innes, *Dinner Roles*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> "Westerners who live with Sunset," *Sunset*, August 1959, 96-97.

Innes insisted that masculine cooking rhetoric presumed men as better cooks than women, and that when men cook “it is cause for applause.”<sup>28</sup> “Chefs of the West” proclaimed this idea in every issue. The editors placed men on pedestal, elevated each to “chef,” and praised them for their contributions. The column used this approach to make the kitchen safe for men. As long as cooking remained voluntary and recognized as a special event, the rhetoric of masculine cooking instruction neutralized the feminizing influence of the kitchen. However, in *Sunset* a change in this rhetoric occurred over time. Rather than continuing to employ the traditional rhetoric of the kitchen as an alien space for men, throughout the latter 1950s “Chefs of the West” claimed a place for men in the kitchen. *Sunset* modified the defensive language to an attitude of presumed inclusion, and the toning down of the rhetoric resulted from the changing nature of gendered space in the home. The editors of “Chefs of West” constructed a new “other”—the non-expert male not following *Sunset’s* advice. Properly preparing a ham would not “appeal to the carving knife Toscaninis” that valued showiness over quality compared to the thoughtful “chef.”<sup>29</sup> A man who did not approach cooking in a sober and artisanal manner made slipshod food.

It must be noted that *Playboy’s* masculine rhetoric concerning the bachelor pad and food did not speak with one voice. Culinary features and the monthly food and drink columns were published under food editor Thomas Mario’s byline. The bachelor pad features did not note an author or editor. While the copy accompanying the floor plans and artists renderings mentioned or intimated the use of servants for shopping and

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<sup>28</sup> Innes, *Dinner Roles*, 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, June 1958, 150.



preparing food, Mario's articles presumed the bachelor would do these activities himself. Shopping and cooking allowed the urban male to exhibit his knowledge and prowess in the kitchen. Interestingly, Mario did not utilize the automatic kitchen appliances highlighted in the bachelor pad articles. For him the quality and rarity of a food spotlighted the bachelor.

As experts, "chefs" obtained legitimate access to the kitchen. Rather than seize the kitchen from women, *Sunset's* editors helped men re-conceptualize the space as masculine when they cooked. The editors obeyed the rules of the male cooking mystique and discarded others. In accordance with these, the editors of *Sunset* insured that "chefs" preserved their masculinity when they chose to cook as a hobby, and "Chefs of the West" reassured them the kitchen would not feminize them. "Chefs" made all kinds of food masculine through their status as experts, and allowed men to bask in applause. The editors downplayed ideas that blatantly proclaimed the women's cooking as inferior to men. Whereas when men occupied the kitchen in earlier rhetoric they did so as interlopers in a feminine space, in *Sunset* men shared a kitchen in a manner that altered the gender specific assignment of the space.

Previous literature assigned the space of the kitchen distinctly to women, and "Chefs of the West" challenged that presumption. Also by placing masculine cooking in a western context, the editors used the outdoors to redefine cooking as male. Previously cooking instruction that took a regional form—New England, Southern—or ethnic form—Chinese, Italian, Irish, Mexican—remained feminine. While occasionally publishers presented cooking instruction as an avocation for men, American society regarded time in the kitchen as a responsibility for women. Pre-World War II "cookbooks

bore evidence of how many Americans continued to believe that a woman's primary responsibility should be her home" and that "[c]ookbooks echoed a national debate about women's social roles in general and represented particular kinds of food and cooking as gendered."<sup>30</sup> In turn, men's cookbooks of the 1940s and 1950s reinforced "the differences in male and female food preferences and [insisted upon] the creativity of the man at the stove."<sup>31</sup> In *The Haphazard Gourmet*—a fairly typical cookbook written in a masculine style—author Richard Gehman's instructions for hash confirm this creativity: "One day when I had no potatoes, for some reason...[I] improvised and used boiled elbow macaronis. Another time I used macaroni shells."<sup>32</sup> In a 1940s issue of *Sunset*, a "Chefs of the West" contributor from Santa Cruz, California echoed this style in his recipe for Spiced Nut Muffins: "No recipe had exactly what I was looking for, so I designed my own..." and created his own recipe from what he could find in the kitchen.<sup>33</sup> The editors affirmed this approach a month earlier stating that the man "is the creator, never cook book bound."<sup>34</sup> In contrast, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* cautioned women against altering ingredients "for they have been carefully proportioned to insure successful results."<sup>35</sup> A man could experiment, but a woman had to get dinner on the table.

As far as methods of cookery instruction went, the "Chefs of the West" and *Playboy's* urban bachelor were not all that different. Only their motivations and goals

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<sup>30</sup> Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 191.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Gehman, *The Haphazard Gourmet* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 114.

<sup>33</sup> Chefs of the West, *Sunset*, October 1947, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Chefs of the West, *Sunset*, September 1947, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Dorothy B. Marsh, ed., *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949), 38.

differed. Both cleaved to Inness' male cooking mystique. Both magazines presented in a manner that: reassured men of their masculinity when cooking; food to be cooked was presented as masculine; and cooking was always "cause for applause." Another similarity existed as well—food and preparation as a means of expressing social standing or class. For the urban bachelor, food was to demonstrate his worldliness and wealth. The "Chefs of the West" reveled in the abundance and quality that affluence brought. The distinction between the two is evident in the use of veal. In a 1944 recipe for risotto, the "Chefs of the West" ingredients included—during wartime rationing—ground beef and veal.<sup>36</sup> These are not traditional ingredients in risotto, but they do display abundance and affluence. In contrast, *Playboy's* recipe for "Veal Cutlets Parmigiana" [*sic*] explained in detail how to instruct a butcher how to slice the veal, flaunting the urban bachelor's knowledge of the food.<sup>37</sup> For the urban bachelor cooking was a nuisance and the meal a distraction from more important things, while for the "Chefs of the West" the process and result counted as much as the praise of family.

By elevating male cooks within the suburban home, "Chefs of the West" placed all men outside the suburban middle-class house, and thus the home's kitchen, as unworthy amateurs. As experts, "chefs" obtained legitimate access to the kitchen. Rather than seize the kitchen from women, *Sunset's* editors helped men re-conceptualize the space as masculine when they cooked. The editors obeyed the rules of the male cooking mystique and discarded others. In accordance with these, the editors of *Sunset* insured that "chefs" preserved their masculinity when they chose to cook as a hobby, and "Chefs

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<sup>36</sup> "Chefs of the West," *Sunset*, July 1944, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Mario, "Audacious Italian Dishes," *Playboy*, September 1955, 54.

of the West” reassured them the kitchen would not feminize them. “Chefs” made all kinds of food masculine through their status as experts, and allowed men to bask in applause. The editors downplayed ideas that blatantly proclaimed women’s cooking as inferior to men. Whereas when men occupied the kitchen in earlier rhetoric they did so as interlopers in a feminine space, in *Sunset* men shared a kitchen in a manner that altered the gender specific assignment of the space.

### The “Chefs of the West”

After World War II, *Sunset* “The Magazine of Western Living” emerged into a growing western America which would swell with “millions of new residents, brought there by a booming economy and the desire for a better life free of Eastern winters and offering new job opportunities.” The editors positioned the magazine “to provide information and guidance, to serve as a useful form of reference, to suggest and instruct” on the western way of life to this potential new readership.<sup>38</sup> In 1940, the editors of *Sunset* initiated a monthly column, “Chefs of the West,” that featured “The Art of Cooking...by men...for men.” “Chefs of the West” addressed the growing male population of new suburbs in the west, and offered information, suggestions, and instructions regarding cooking to these men. In the decades prior to the war, masculine cooking instruction suggested that “[m]en cooked unusual, tasty dishes, and favored hearty recipes with a minimum ‘fuss.’ Men-only recipes also used quite a different

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<sup>38</sup> Kevin Starr, “*Sunset* Magazine and the Phenomenon of the Far West,” in *Sunset Magazine: A Century of Western Living, 1898-1998 Historical Portraits and A Chronological Bibliography of Selected Topics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Libraries, 1998), 51.

tone—one that reinforced the masculinity of the intended audience.”<sup>39</sup> “Chefs of the West” cleaved to this ideal in the 1940s, but by 1955, and throughout the rest of the decade, the editors and contributor softened this tone.

In an analysis of more than twenty-years of monthly issues—from early 1940 through 1963—of *Sunset*, “Chefs of the West” designed recipes for the most part to serve four to six diners. This number of servings is similar to those found in the monthly “Sunset’s Kitchen Cabinet” and “Menus” columns which did not delineate gender at least in the copy. “Chefs of the West” focused on individual recipes. The detailed recipes contained more components than the average cookbook equivalent. The recipes ranged between ambitious dishes like *coq au vin* and basic ones like chili, but the overlying themes focused on preparation and competency. The men who submitted recipes to “Chefs of the West” portrayed themselves as craftsmen. In contrast to recipes meant for women, these recipes offered detailed preparation instructions, and often required considerably more ingredients and time to prepare. For example, in *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book* Chili Con Carne consists of nine ingredients and forty-five minutes cooking time, and the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* lists twelve ingredients with ninety minutes cooking time. In contrast, the “Chefs of the West” instructions consist of twenty ingredients “and simmer for twelve hours or so.”<sup>40</sup> Even with a recipe as simple (and troublesome) as Yorkshire Pudding “Chefs of the West” approached the dish with an artisanal emphasis. Rather than the rapid-fire instructions of the *Picture Cook Book* or even the step-by-step directions offered by the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book*, the

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<sup>39</sup>Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 197.

<sup>40</sup>General Mills, *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: General Mills), 398; Marsh, *Good Housekeeping Cook Book*, 70; “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, September 1947, 82.

*Sunset* recipe began with a short discourse on the nature and trouble of making the dish, integrating the preparation with the accompanying roast beef, and emphasizing an aesthetic ideal as the popovers attain “a golden brown surface... [and the] texture should resemble that of a custard or an omelet.”<sup>41</sup> The disparity in cooking times for chili con carne highlights men’s cooking versus women’s; women had less time for gathering ingredients and cooking the chili. As a hobby, for men, cooking proceeded at a relaxed pace. The “Chefs of the West” chili con carne was obviously meant for a weekend with its long simmering time. The men’s recipe also cost considerably more and was made in greater volume. While the women’s recipes employed at least two cups of beans to a pound or less of ground beef—providing an economical family dinner—the “Chefs of the West” dish only called for three cups of beans (with their own detailed cooking instruction) to three pounds of “course-chopped” beef and pork browned in a cup of beef fat. This was not a meal for a family of four but for a crowd.

The ratio of meat to other ingredients is significant. “Chefs of the West” recipes most often concentrated on one dish rather than an entire meal, whereas in women’s cookery instruction a dish was normally presented (as written by cook book editors) as a component of a meal. Women traditionally served what anthropologists designate as *ordered meals*. An ordered meal delineates positions of class and gender in those who prepare and eat the food served. In these terms, dinner would consist of an “A+2B meal” which consists of “a larger portion of a higher status food...with complimentary foods

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<sup>41</sup> Marsh, *Good Housekeeping Cook Book*, 328-329; *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book*, 68-69; “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, March 1953, 138-139.

served in smaller quantities.”<sup>42</sup> Meat as the focus of a meal is the classic higher status food. Like “Chefs of the West,” recipes in women’s cookbooks were not normally cross-referenced with other dishes from which a meal was possibly structured, but these cookbooks usually did contain a section in which meal planning and nutrition suggestions were offered. “Chefs of the West” dishes were often presented as singular, objects of perfection. Occasionally *Sunset’s* editors violated this practice when publishing a set of recipes around a theme such as turkey at Thanksgiving. In this setting the dishes were well balanced—soups, side dishes, deserts—around the status food, but this was the exception.<sup>43</sup>

The editors of “Chefs of the West” offered and structured a venue in which men felt safe to share information about a subject that—in postwar America—was dangerously close to the edge of femininity. We do not know if the editors chose to shield men from issues of gender (or if they even thought about it), but on the question of class *Sunset* magazine was directed at a solidly middle-class audience. Contributors measured themselves against each other by several elements they offered in their submissions.

Every month “Chefs of the West” published recipes submitted by male readers and linked together by editorial comments framing the recipes with a masculine tone. In May 1959, the editors of *Sunset* reported the results of a questionnaire submitted to previous contributors to “Chefs of the West.” The editors found “the range of vocations was very wide indeed, including: author, inventor, banker, television producer, real estate broker, architect, engineer, artist, doctor, dentist, rancher, military man [*sic*].” The editors

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<sup>42</sup> Amy Bentley, “Islands of Serenity: Gender, Race, and Ordered Meals during World War II,” in *Food in the USA: a Reader*, Carole M. Counihan, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 179.

<sup>43</sup> “Chefs of the West: This Month the Chefs Surround the Turkey,” *Sunset*, November 1953, 203-205.

received approximately a hundred answers to the questionnaire. The hobbies “[a]mong these 100 *Chefs* were 60 fishermen, 36 hunters, 31 pack trip enthusiasts, 48 gardeners, 16 skiers, 28 boatmen [*sic*], and 9 licensed airplane pilots.” These men defined themselves broadly, and other than their professional activities and their avocation for cooking, these men characterized themselves—for the most part—through outdoor pursuits.<sup>44</sup> Cooking as a hobby permitted men to re-enter the home as an active participant, while providing plausible deniability that the space might feminize them.

In “Chefs of the West,” men would regularly sign their name with a military rank (both active and retired, but usually an officer; although one former soldier named his version of Major Grey’s Chutney “Private Paul’s Chutney”) stressing their contribution during the war.<sup>45</sup> World War II remained a touchstone for contributors to “Chefs of the West,” but as the memories of the war faded, so did the masculine rhetoric that characterized the column in the 1940s. Military ranks still appeared but only of career officers such as the navy captain stationed in Keyport, Washington who submitted a recipe for “Oysters Parmesan.”<sup>46</sup> To reinforce masculine identity and camaraderie, the editors granted each reader the honorific title of “Chef.” With the publication of a recipe in “Chefs of the West,” readers received a chef’s toque—emblazoned with the “Chefs of the West” logo—as an award, and a similarly monogrammed apron for a subsequent published contribution. In a way, the imagined donning of the chef’s hat and apron imitated the act of putting on a uniform. By granting a masculine identity to the readers

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<sup>44</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, May 1959, 192.

<sup>45</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, July 1958, 123 [emphasis in the original].

<sup>46</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, August 1959, 91.



of “Chefs of the West,” the editors of *Sunset* created a safe rhetorical space which preserved masculine solidarity without anti-feminine language.

Along with a positive masculine identity, “Chefs of the West” declared each contributor an expert. The editors assured male readers that “[w]henever you come upon any original recipe signed with masculine flourish, you can be sure that it’s a thoroughly satisfactory formula for good eating.”<sup>47</sup> An expert need not fetter himself to “all the tiresome rules emphasized by mundane [feminine] cooks” but could freely “experiment himself into an excellent cook, if he has the self-discipline of a scientist.”<sup>48</sup> “Chefs of the West” granted men the freedom to deviate from rules meant for women and approach cooking with confidence.

The men of “Chefs of the West” had conformed during the war, and conformed in civilian life. They married, bought a home, made a living, raised a family, but they also went on vacation, raised flowers, and cooked. Perhaps in cooking they were striking out against being perceived as conforming. Either way it is clear they found satisfaction in the activity. “Chefs of the West” may have been a safe place to buck conformity with a like-minded group of men. However, “Chefs of the West” had its own conformity: the toque and the apron. Although thriftiness in recipes was a feminine trope, in the “Chefs of the West” column some men were concerned about cost and others were not, nevertheless food in America was a display and enjoyment of abundance. The Chefs did not always contribute meals centered on high status foods. In some ways class was demonstrated, rather, by (postwar standards) exotic or arcane foods.

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<sup>47</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, December 1947, 58.

<sup>48</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, September 1947, 82.

### Cooking in the Backyard and in the West

Cooking, or barbecuing, in the backyard was not an exclusively postwar phenomena. In 1935, ten years after their initial examination, Robert S. and Helen Merrill Lynd returned to Muncie, Indiana and found "...back-yard grills for cooking *al fresco* picnic suppers..." with outdoor furniture and essentially becoming an external living room.<sup>49</sup> The Lynds did not divulge who did the actual grilling of the food or what was served, but their observations demonstrated an early acceptance of this backyard activity in Middle America. However, historian Harvey Levenstein regarded the barbecue boom of the 1950s and 1960s as the "first significant step towards sharing the responsibility for cooking with men." He stated that barbecuing was "[h]eavily promoted by beef and other food producers..." as a means to give women a break from meal planning and preparation, although in practice it did not. However, "...the traditional roles in the household remained secure. The kitchen still rested safely in Mother's hands, for the smoky ritual took place outside its confines."<sup>50</sup>

Most of the popular postwar literature positioned men as interlopers in the kitchen. The rhetoric of these books and articles took on a defensive tone in light of that. If men found the kitchen unwelcoming, they would claim the backyard barbecue as their own. According to Neuhaus, "[b]arbecues combined the two central aspects of gendered rhetoric around food: both the *kinds of food* and the *type of cooking* that a man did over a barbecue differed markedly from the daily food prepared by women." Neuhaus defined

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<sup>49</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book--Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1965), 250-251.

<sup>50</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 132.

backyard cooking, or barbecuing, as masculine.<sup>51</sup> Being in the outdoors, the backyard connected easily to the myth of the west, and the editors of *Sunset* took advantage of the favorable comparison. In a 1948 recipe for skewered lamb, “Chefs of the West” suggested that “[n]omadic tribesmen were thought to have originated this method of cooking lamb, spearing the meat on their heated swords.”<sup>52</sup> A man’s method of cooking required masculine tools because men cooked differently from women. Backyard barbecuing required tools separate from that found in the household kitchen: “large tongs, pronged forks, and fire starters [not to mention the grill itself] all marked outdoor cookery as clearly different kind of cooking than the daily meal preparation done by females.”<sup>53</sup> *Sunset* attempted to alter the formula of men mastering fire and food in the two decades after the war. “Chefs of the West” regularly published recipes that—outside the manly rhetoric—required cooking over campfire such as “Steamed Carrot Pudding” and “Norwegian Chicken with Caraway Seeds.” Framing these recipes as outdoor cooking made them western and masculine.

In *Playboy*, Thomas Mario stuck to the urban bachelor tack when it came to barbecue, and the urban male comes off as a bit of a dilettante compared to the suburban male. Keeping with the theme of seduction, barbecuing was “...an art that [could] be used for many purposes besides assuaging hunger.” Mario wrote of portable “stoves” and “broilers” rather than a barbecue. In turn, he described the cooking process on these devices as “broiling.” And in a barbecuing first, the urban bachelor was advised on his wardrobe while cooking. Whereas the suburban male barbecued in his own backyard, the

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<sup>51</sup> Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 192 -193 [emphasis in the original].

<sup>52</sup> “Chefs of the West,” *Sunset*, January 1948, 53.

<sup>53</sup> Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 193 -194.

urban male left the city and cooked near a lake. Again, as in other cooking articles in *Playboy*, the act of shopping for and purchasing the meat takes up a portion of the discussion, and the discussion of which meats to grill took on a definite discussion of status.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

“Chefs of the West” renegotiated the boundaries the middle-class suburban kitchen for the benefit of men. Taking advantage of the new architectural style of the ranch house, the editors of *Sunset* organized the open space of the backyard, kitchen and family room into a unified whole. This unification of the communal parts of the home weakened traditional gender boundaries, and allowed men to claim non-threatening space in which to cook. Earlier styles of houses segregated men and designated the kitchen as a feminine space. By defining male cooking as a hobby, “Chefs of the West” established masculine space for cooking space in the backyard and then the kitchen. The editors altered the defensive rhetoric employed in previous forms of masculine cooking instruction, made men expert “chefs,” and re-positioned those men who did not live in middle-class suburban homes as “the other” in relation to men who read “Chefs of the West.” *Sunset* also framed male cooking as western. Through the image of the barbecue, *Sunset* placed male cooking outdoors and by association in the west.

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Mario, “How to Play with Fire,” *Playboy*, July 1954, 22-23, 35, 49.

CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSION

In 1974 the archetype of the urban bachelor and publisher of *Playboy*, Hugh Hefner, moved west to a house in the suburbs. Admittedly the Holmby Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles is not a *middle-class* suburb, but it illustrates the point that the suburban male was a reflection of the trends in American society. By the 1960s the suburban male was comfortable in the postwar suburban house. Comparisons with the urban bachelor were always just media proffered fantasies—he did not really exist, at least not in large numbers—directed at an immature male audience. Mature men in the suburbs found solutions to their situation.

In postwar America, a new form of middle class, changing culture, government regulations and subsidies, and new technology coalesced to create a new form of vernacular housing. The houses resulting from this synergy transformed further through the renegotiation of gender roles in the greater society as well as in the home. This combination of architecture and culture accelerated in the western United States as a growing population freed of traditional views migrated from the East, and into a climate that influenced housing design which was more open and leisure based.

The emerging postwar middle class was radically different from a century or even fifty years earlier. In affect they were two different entities employing the same appellation. The new middle-class household was not centered—in contrast to its the pre-industrial predecessor—on the internal production of consumer goods in which the home was interdependent with the community; or the home as an island of feminine controlled

consumption of the Victorian middle class. Nor was the middle class that emerged in postwar America the bourgeoisie of the Victorian era, but rather a *petite bourgeoisie* of men earning a salary or a fairly regular hourly wage supporting only their immediate family; and this change eventually included the supplementary income of women to the household. In order to achieve and preserve middle-class values (such as owning a home, and a house with a dining room, a separate kitchen, and other features) the new middle class had to make economic sacrifices and adjustments to the inherited value system—women had to work outside the home for the money to help pay for the required status items. Ironically, in order to achieve middle-class status women had to engage in a working-class economic solution.

Between 1940 and 1960 the population of the West grew over fifty percent, with an increase of seven million people alone between 1950 and 1960—one quarter of national growth.<sup>1</sup> The Salt Lake City, Utah, area grew by more than two thirds; Phoenix, Arizona, doubled in population; and Orange County in Southern California more than tripled.<sup>2</sup> World War II brought massive migration to the region, and many of these people remained afterwards. In 1960 forty-three percent of the men in the west were veterans

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 17; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 1, *Number of Inhabitants*, 1-3; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part A, Number of Inhabitants*, 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 3*, 3-43; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 5*, 5-163; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 44*, 44-52; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 4*, 4-104; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 5*, 6-412; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 46*, 46-119.

(42% in the seven state *Sunset* distribution area); the highest percentage of the four national census regions.<sup>3</sup> Veterans in the West had a higher median income and level of education than the rest of the population. They had a particular influence on the region, and filled a large portion of the emerging middle class.

### The Emerging Middle Class in the New

#### Postwar Home in the West

Throughout the twentieth-century the house and more particularly the kitchen was a new and strange place for each new generation of the middle class. Part of this was economic as the middle-class enlarged, and redefined itself with each generation. Part was technological as the kitchen changed from a place of servants and manual labor to a space with an increasing number of appliances and cooking technologies (coal, gas, electricity). Foods also changed; from fresh produce and meats to canned and dried prepared/preserved foods to frozen and convenience foods. Some of this was just repackaging, but it brought a new way to look at the foods. And the physical location of the middle class changed as succeeding definitions meant a place further removed from the city core. Along with all this, cultural change accelerated transformation in the middle-class household as women began to work outside and pursue activities outside the home, and men, employed in an organizational and industrial society, began to stay at home more. Thus, men did not so much fight their way into the kitchen as occupied the domestic space vacated as women increasingly stepped outside the home.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population, 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 1*, LIII.

A postwar, national affluence—which allowed the purchase of a home—elevated a large number of people into middle-class status, but this lifting up had also been engineered by government policy. These policies were in effect a codification of Progressive ideals. The basic, or veterans', postwar house was shaped by builders' interpretations of government policy that dictated the size, type and number of rooms in a subsidized house. These policies had been drawn from Progressive ideas of the relation of the family to the home. The middle-class status conferred by home ownership did not necessarily mean rising to the middle class. Nevertheless, buying a house came to be seen as middle class.

The postwar house was a structure with masculine overtones. Conceived as “veterans' housing” (but actually a form of entry-level housing), postwar homes conferred middle-class status on their owners. The limitations of VA benefits to male veterans—which were denied to women that had served—made this type of housing inherently male. Furthermore, all housing was overwhelmingly designed and built by men, and male designed kitchens were imposed (increasingly) upon protesting women.

However, housing in the West was different. The veterans' trope had little influence on an area newly flooded with war industry workers—who stayed on to work in the growing industrial base—that did not qualify for VA benefits. Plain FHA loans did shape housing somewhat, but older architectural traditions—the ranch house—and climate led to a different form of house in which a western lifestyle was practiced. Early large housing developments in Southern California were constructed by larger corporate entities than the Levitts with deeper pockets and more extensive experience with government regulation. Kaiser Community Homes constructed houses on an assembly



line model drawn from the aircraft plants and shipyards of the west coast. Housing components (walls, cabinets, and even appliances) were built in regional factories and designed with an eye towards efficiency.<sup>4</sup>

A milder climate than elsewhere in North America contributed to a different approach to the relationship between the home and the outdoors. California especially influenced western home design because of a larger population and a dominant economic position among western states. Housing designs of a California origin were adapted to the slightly less conducive climates of other western states as they spread eastward. People in California earned more than the rest of the region, and by 1960 the median income in the region as a whole exceeded the national median. Westerners could afford more house than the rest of the nation. Larger incomes influenced the development of the larger ranch house, and was evidence that the region was growing and prospering.

#### Women and the Value Laden Kitchen

In postwar suburbs, women had to cope with conflicting sets of values which were complicated by technology marketed in terms of the values of an earlier generation. Along with value laden technology, the form of the home reinforced and structured these values literally in wood and steel. In 1946 the kitchen definitely remained a feminine space. By 1955, as the kitchen was integrated into the public space of new homes, the hard and fast feminine connotations were softening. However, for women the kitchen remained a place of responsibility and duty. Technology did not change this but increased

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<sup>4</sup> Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University of Press, 1997), 152-185.

efficiency. For men, this same technology painted the kitchen as a hobby workshop making the space safe for men. Further integration of the kitchen into the home by the open plan or clear, unobstructed adjacency to other communal areas clouded the role of the kitchen as a place of feminine production. The alteration of the mode of domestic production (in the kitchen) facilitated a change in the intersection of adopted and emerging values.

Whereas the urban bachelor only consumed, the suburban male produced and somewhat substituted for the lost production of women. In a sense, men taking up production, if even slightly, reassured themselves that the feared social disintegration (as commented on by public intellectuals) could be held off. This was not a ground level fear but instead an intellectual argument proffered by social critics, but the propagation of these fears flowed through the culture. One particular apprehension was the fear of male conformity, and that by conforming men would lose their masculinity. Another fear was that suburbs feminized men. Stranded in the remote new suburbs, men were particularly affected by this, but hobbies offered a means to replace lost production and demonstrate individuality. Men's sharing of space in the home threatened previous areas of feminine control that led to the loss of control over the space of the kitchen. This transfer of control came through men substituting (rather than replacing) their production for the loss of women's production in the home.

Transferring control of the kitchen to men conflicted with the space as a feminine power base, and cultural attempts to eliminate gender and class markers within the house (such as separate kitchens and dining rooms). Traditional women's cookbooks strove to retard this slide by reinforcing the values of a previous domestic ideology. In turn, this

domestic ideology kept men's cooking firmly in the hobby category. Women remained accountable for managing the house and feeding the family. Compared to earlier forms, "Chefs of the West" cookery instruction respected this ideological boundary.

Nevertheless, the editors of *Sunset* encouraged men to cross this boundary. In doing so men altered those boundaries. The gender defined borders within the home gave way more easily in the postwar suburban home with the integrated kitchen. Yet, these divisions were weakened by women's desire for attaining and preserving middle-class status. A separate kitchen (and the dining room) was for them a marker of the middle class. An open kitchen was evidence of a working class home. The new consumer appliances that reinforced the feminine aspects of the kitchen with color and design also diminished the middle-class separation of the room from the rest of the house. Decorating the space of the kitchen as a room to be looked at by those not concerned with cooking made the room presentable to the public and invited others in. This reduction of feminine control, in turn, was further weakened by the size and configuration of the postwar suburban house, and later institutionalized by the expanded public space of the western ranch house.

Women working outside the middle-class home faced a paradox; men cooking in the home faced less of one. Women working outside the home had been grudgingly accepted during the war, but with victory they were quickly sent home. Later on the same arguments that were made during the war—distorting of values, upsetting of family routines—were applied in opposition to women working outside the home in peacetime.<sup>5</sup> In addition, women working outside the home conflicted with middle-class ideals drawn

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<sup>5</sup> Amy Bentley, "Islands of Serenity," 174.

from an earlier age, but maintenance of postwar middle-class identity depended more and more on a second stream of income women provided. Men cooking in the home merely dealt with issues surrounding their own individual, masculine identity.

### Men in the Kitchen

The feminine connotations of the kitchen in the postwar suburban home had been softened by technology and changes in interior home design. At first these connotations were reinforced through separation of the kitchen from the rest of the house and use of bright colors on appliances. By the mid-fifties the space of the kitchen was integrating into the home, and color choices for appliances were moving towards more muted earth-tones. Also, the postwar kitchen men encountered was not their mothers' kitchen. While pre-war kitchens were a purposely separated from the rest of the house with an improvised collection of food preparation equipment and storage containers, the interior of the postwar kitchen was an integrated collection of appliances and cabinets within a floor plan in which the kitchen was connected to the shared public space of the rest of the home.

Men's cooking was, prior to the 1950s, defined by what it was not—women's cooking. For women, cooking centered on feeding the family; was an expression of love; provided nutrition; and focused (increasingly) on convenience. For men, cooking was a creative act structured to reassure masculine identity. Within the new middle-class home, cooking evolved into a hobby. Outside the home men's cookery instruction continued on as earlier, but inside the house the new values of the emerging middle class defined it differently. The home was a shared space different to the individual space occupied by

the urban bachelor. The suburban male lived with his family; compromises among all members of the household were necessary. Home and the kitchen remained a feminine space, and men accepted a concealed feminization in order to function. Men altered the feminine activity of cooking in the kitchen into a manly expression of individuality.

*Sunset's* "Chefs of the West" column emphasized individuality in its discussion of recipes, but in a manner that brought suburban men together in a supportive community through a discussion of cooking. Early in its existence, the column cleaved to the traditionally defensive masculine rhetoric regarding operating in the kitchen, but the softening of this rhetoric paralleled the postwar changes within the suburban home. In part the agreement between "Chefs of the West" and the values of the emerging middle class can be credited to *Sunset's* broader editorial practice of addressing the entire household—men and women. While limiting any masculine rhetoric that cast aspersions on women's cookery, "Chefs of the West" celebrated men's cooking as a legitimate expression of masculinity in the suburban home. In keeping with the hobby approach, cooking was presented as a process through which men were creative.

In turn, women's cookery instruction was moving women out of the kitchen. Peg Bracken took it farther than most, but even *The I Hate to Cook Book* recognized that American society continued to hold women responsible for providing family meals. The rhetoric used in traditional cookbooks did focus more on convenience in the 1950s over earlier nutrition and love of family approaches, but these texts did not grant women release from the duty of cooking to compensate for their expanding economic responsibilities outside the home. Recipes directed at women were terse and efficient compared to those presented to men. Men were allowed to linger in the kitchen while

women had to become more efficient in the space. Cookbooks and recipes in magazines continued presenting the kitchen to housewives as a source of middle-class identity.

For men the middle-class home was as much a definer of identity as it was for women. Some rejected the ideal, while others embraced its connotations. Men's cooking was constructed and practiced within the value framed boundaries of the middle-class suburban home. The postwar home remained a feminine space, but a space in which men were welcome. Much of the public discussions in the 1950s regarding the feminizing aspects of suburbs were based on an accurate interpretation of changing domestic gender roles, but the prognosis was inaccurate. These interpretations were grounded in an out-of-date set of values designed to protect an older order that was fading away. The emerging middle class strove to emulate these anachronistic values, but their own reality required suburbanites alter or adapt them to their own, new situation. For those who were permitted to join the emerging middle class life was, for the most part, good. For both women and men, the space of the new suburban home was terra incognita—a place to figure out.

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