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# Hollywood's Return to the Home: Taming the Post-World War II Career Woman

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Hollywood's Return to the Home:  
Taming the Post-World War II Career Woman

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DePauw University Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2019

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No matter the film or product, Hollywood imparts messages about the world as we know it, reflecting culture and sometimes working simultaneously to influence it. Yet Hollywood has often shied away from taking a clear stance on and directly engaging in social and political discussions, leaving difficult, controversial topics for independent filmmakers to explore. When it has engaged with these issues, Hollywood usually remains silent for a few years before taking on such subjects. However, even in its aversion to pointed discussions, its representations and relationships remain political. As society changes, Hollywood's choice to go along with that change, to resist it, or to play a role in its creation functions as a political move in and of itself as Hollywood reveals its values and ideologies. One such period of flux resulted from America's involvement in World War II: as women were called on to work war production jobs in aircraft factories, shipyards, and ordnance plants, their social role changed fundamentally (Hartmann 21). Women's employment grew by more than fifty percent between 1940 and 1945, and while women had worked in the past, many married and older women entered the workforce while women in general broke into male-dominated industries (Hartmann 20).

Popular culture during the war echoed these new roles for women, as the powerful female superhero Wonder Woman debuted in 1941 and films such as *Here Come the Waves* (1944) and *Government Girl* (1943) displayed courageous, independent women (May 62). While such representations may have influenced women's beliefs in their capabilities, they ultimately did not usurp film's and popular magazines' focus on women's domestic role (62). Similarly, within the realm of film press, the 1930s had seen a rise in depictions of ambitious women unwilling to devote themselves solely to marriage, but such depictions fell away as domestic representations of women building the perfect home and pleasing their husbands appeared during wartime (63).

During these years, the press taught women that they were meant to devote themselves to their families and prepare to support their veteran husbands (64). The postwar order aligned with such beliefs—in the aftermath of the war, many women were swiftly fired from their jobs, and by 1946 women’s employment fell from its wartime high of 19 million to under 17 million. However, through the next few years, women’s employment continued to grow, reaching 18.5 million by 1950, as women took on work to assist their families financially amidst rising costs of living (Hartmann 92-93). Despite this increase in employment, the war’s end continued the trend of emphasizing women’s domestic role in film. Independent women, once valued alongside devoted domestic women, were replaced by villainized, sexually aggressive characters as housewives became the prime example of admirable womanhood (May 66). The film noir genre in particular portrayed female independence and sexuality as dangerous; a good woman was one who stationed herself below men and did not seek sexual freedom, in contrast with displays of sexually emancipated women during the 1930s (62, 65).

Not surprisingly, in this context of displaying womanhood through the surrender of power to men, representations of women in the workplace carried important weight. Hollywood’s images of working women ranged between the sensible and proud Amanda in *Adam’s Rib* (1949), played by Katharine Hepburn, and the inscrutable and dramatic Margo in *All About Eve* (1950), played by Bette Davis. From the office to the stage and any workplace in between, the female characters in this era of films show pride or sorrow as they try to balance love, family, and work. Meanwhile, women at home, like devoted wife Milly in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), played by Myrna Loy, were there to support their husbands and care for their children in search of domestic tranquility. These women, with their various occupations and

responsibilities, played a role in displaying how women should exist in the domestic and public spheres after the war.

The films of the time did not act alone in their representations, however. Alongside these characters were the career women taking on these roles: the actresses themselves, from Barbara Stanwyck to Susan Hayward to Lana Turner. Their own loves and work lives were publicized for their fans in fan magazines. This kind of fan content had been around since the early days of film, but by the early 1910s special care was taken to make sure that these representations showed film actors as model, moral citizens, separated from the immorality of stage performers. Part of this switch in discourse included discussion of the stars' romantic and family lives (deCordova 105). Star magazines told fans all about a star's hobbies and homes, supposedly peering into the private lives of these stars—or rather, the constructed and sometimes outright fictional representations of these stars. While these publications provided depictions of these accomplished working women, they often focused on the actresses' domestic lives rather than their career ambitions. The press's representations of these stars thus instruct readers about housekeeping and supporting one's husband rather than about hard work or determination; these fan magazines, like the films of the time, played a role in showing women readers how they should behave.

Such depictions of actresses' domestic lives appeared alongside the different kinds of women they portrayed onscreen, either presenting opposing visions of womanhood or working in conjunction to support similar ideologies. All actresses in Hollywood at this time existed in this historical context, and their portrayal in films said something about Hollywood's own conceptions of working women. The same would be true, of course, for the women on the other

side of the spectrum: the women in the home. The question that must be asked is this: what work did Hollywood do in order to influence its audience's view of these different kinds of women? How did that work differ between film and film press? Both forms dealt in their own images of the career woman and the domestic woman, and both produce an idealized, carefully constructed image of Hollywood and its stars. Neither is completely real, as film press claims to report on the "real" lives of these stars, but instead produces carefully crafted and often skewed images.

In order to answer these questions and explore the power that film and film press exercised at this time of great social and industrial change, I will investigate film and film press in postwar Hollywood through a study of nine different films and a variety of film press sources, all released between 1945 and 1955, that center upon these films' actresses. My analysis will include a discussion of each film with a focus on the actress or actresses who most clearly embody the career woman and/or domestic woman image in the film, followed by a discussion of several film press sources from *Modern Screen* and *Screenland* about the relevant actresses. Together, these screen and press images depict the kind of representations that Hollywood provided women in different areas of their lives—in films viewed in movie theaters and in fan magazines read in both domestic and public spaces. Analyzing film and film press side by side provides a fuller view of the cultural conceptions and preconceived notions being communicated about these actresses and, by extension, all American women.

I will begin by laying out the historical background of women's labor during and after the war, analyzing women's experiences and representations in the workforce, then studying the way that the postwar years led to the dismantling of this labor force and a new focus on the nuclear family. To set up the historical context, I will rely on histories of women's labor participation

from this era. By providing the context in which these films would have been viewed and these magazine articles consumed, this historical setting will allow me to showcase how American women, living at this specific time of social change, might have responded to and made sense of these films and fan magazines and how their messages might have influenced these women as they considered a life driven by either domesticity or a career. Once I have established the historical context, I will introduce three themes of representation present in these nine films that will drive the organization of my argument. From there, I will dive into my analysis of these films and the film press representations of their main actresses. Ultimately, I will explore the different representations of working and domestic women constructed by postwar Hollywood to reveal the extent to which film and film press pushed women toward domestic life.

### **Women in the Workforce, Prewar to Postwar**

Women's labor outside the home in the Depression era was based on necessity, a responsibility adopted only to sustain one's family in times of great financial need (Kessler-Harris 274). Accordingly, 80 percent of Americans during this time disapproved of women working outside of the home (May 59). Women's wartime workforce participation would challenge those conceptions, as women's presence in factories became admirable rather than shameful. In 1940, the female workforce hovered at nearly 12 million; by the war's end in 1945, that number had ballooned to 18.6 million (Hartmann 21). While women had been initially overlooked as wartime workers, in 1942 the War Manpower Commission started a wide campaign to exploit this untapped labor resource (Kessler-Harris 275). Government organizations, journalists, and even popular radio songs such as "Rosie the Riveter" called on

them to participate and fulfill their American duty (276). By this time, only 13 percent of American people were against women working outside of the home (May 59). These changes in perception and employment varied, however: black women, who had held jobs in much larger numbers than white women before the war, did not see a significant increase in workforce participation (Hartmann 78-79). On the other hand, married, older women saw a large increase in participation, as their husbands' absence drove them to take on work to ease financial stress or loneliness (79). While working outside the home was standard for many women, the war saw the incorporation of new groups of women and thus new ideas about women's presence in the workforce.

From the beginning, however, women's entrance into the wartime workforce was gendered and conditional. Despite these changes in workforce demographics and public opinion, this industrial change was by no means grounded in feminism. Politicians and employers made it clear that women's wartime work was temporary, and by 1946, the number of employed women had shrunk to fewer than 17 million (May 68, Hartmann 23, 24). This shift in the workforce, while revolutionary from a statistical standpoint, was a matter of necessity more than anything else and not fully embraced by the public. The widespread push to allow women into the workforce collided with concerns about the effects of this large industrial upheaval. To maintain societal norms, promotional images of women workers tended to be feminine and stylish—their work thus did not make them any less of the typical American woman (Hartmann 23). This increased role in the workforce was also depicted as a patriotic duty: just as husbands fought in the war to serve their country, wives could serve their families by protecting their children and supporting their absent husbands (23). The workers were pushed toward this patriotic motive as



it was tied to the temporary needs of wartime; meanwhile, they were ensured that their domestic duties had prepared them for industrial work (72). This large industrial change needed to be cushioned with assurances that the social norms of gender were still intact: though women had entered the workforce, they were women just the same, driven by patriotism and municipal duty rather than a desire to usurp men as the head of the household. As in the Depression era, women's wartime work was based on the good of others, whether her household or her country.

Some of these women truly did focus on these external factors rather than their own personal desires to leave housework behind and find a passion. The difficult manufacturing work they performed did not always provide fulfillment or self-expression as much as a chance to develop skills and work alongside other women (Hartmann 79). These workers tended to struggle with their ability to perform their wartime work and their own neglect of their household and children (Wolfson, qtd. in Kessler-Harris 274). However, women's work had been put in a new context as public opinion supported their work outside the home; as unsurprising as the push back to the domestic sphere after the war was, it's equally clear that women would be influenced by this new view of their capabilities and be driven to remain in the labor force. Despite their doubts, and though their jobs were not glamorous, many women intended to stay in the workforce after the war; according to 1943-1945 polls, 61 to 85 percent of women, and 47 to 68 percent of married women, wished to keep their jobs after the war ended (Hartmann 90). This tie to their wartime work predicted future shifts, as the declining trend of women's employment would reverse by 1947 when women's employment began an upward trend that approached wartime figures by 1950 (92). What's more, roughly half of these women were married,

connoting a large upheaval in workforce demographics as women traditionally supported by their husbands entered the workforce even after these men had returned from war (Weiss 51).

On the other hand, the postwar situation was neither entirely simple nor progressive, as many women chose to quit their wartime jobs (Kessler-Harris 286). Experienced individuals in well-paying positions more likely wanted to keep their jobs, but women's desire and need for work after the war were greatly challenged: not only were women removed from their jobs at double the lay-off rates for men, but the jobs available for women desiring to reenter the workforce also paid less and provided less security (Hartmann 24, 91). Black women especially feared removal from their wartime jobs and the return to domestic work, which had no access to a labor organization or social security (90). Despite these dismal alternatives to wartime work, women's workforce participation grew—even among married women, 25 percent of whom held jobs by 1950 (92-93). Black women managed to move out of domestic and agricultural work as well. These groups, especially black women, while more accepted into the workforce as a result of their participation during the war, faced workplace discrimination and expanding wage gaps in comparison to wartime wages (93-94). Politicians and popular culture alike urged married women to return to domestic life to forego any threat to the stability of American family life and encouraged single women, whose wartime work represented independence from men socially as well as economically, to marry (May 68, 70). Limited childcare provided another obstacle to career life. There was no public funding for daycares until 1943, even though many mothers had answered the wartime call to take on work, and daycare was believed to harm developing children (67). Despite these women's sacrifice, society still hesitated to give them the means to separate themselves fully from the home.

During the 1950s, married women began to take on jobs in order to support their family's participation in consumer culture, which entailed the ability to buy cars, washing machines, and other time-saving commodities (Weiss 55). A more permanent shift in workforce participation began, but it too was met with concern about the good of family life (Kessler-Harris 303, Weiss 57). Doctors and journalists alike asserted that for the good of the children, women should remain at home. Fears of feminized men, forced to become more motherly in the absence of women, arose (Weiss 56). At the same time, housekeeping and motherhood were referred to as a career, as well as a "duty" that women must complete, rather than something that would bring women fulfillment (57). The language itself changed to note that women were now interested in taking on responsibilities and careers rather than trying to live solely domestic lives. Others accepted that women were working outside the home to support their families; in 1953, *Life* magazine supported these women in their endeavors to achieve material comforts for the good of their homes, comparing them to suffragettes (55). Yet this support was as conditional as the support of women's wartime work—only women who worked for the sake of others, rather than for their own personal satisfaction, were worthy of praise (55). Nevertheless, society provided encouragement for women workers. Some writers of the era explained that women needed an occupation outside of the home in order to make themselves useful to society; others noted that a job would help women transition to a post-child-rearing life (56). Women's participation in the workforce increased through the beginning of the 1950s, but even as they garnered more numbers and support, women still had to reconcile their careers with other socially mandated responsibilities.

## Themes of Representation

Post-WWII women workers had to weather arguments against their capabilities and roles in the workforce. Such beliefs, holding that women should not leave the domestic sphere or push the boundaries of traditional femininity, ultimately made their way into the films of the time. In the films I analyze here, Hollywood constructed representations of career women to discourage its women viewers from pursuing their career ambitions or taking on jobs at all. These films used traditional notions of domestic and career women in order to limit women's capabilities and lifestyles. Specifically, these films pushed domestic life through three arguments:

- 1.) Fulfillment: Women fundamentally cannot find fulfillment in a career,
- 2.) Commitments: Women have duties to their families that are more important than career life, and
- 3.) Character: Career women are selfish and immoral.

Often appearing together and operating in conjunction, these arguments work to counter any positive representations of career women. These characters may be neglectful of their families in some manner; if they are not, a film will instead state that these women cannot find true happiness in a career. If these women do find fulfillment in their career, then a film will discourage similar behavior by portraying these women as cruel and selfish. In all nine films, these three arguments work together to discourage women from entering career life.

These arguments are not limited by film or actress. Barbara Stanwyck starred in two films I will analyze—*To Please a Lady* (1950) and *All I Desire* (1953). While *To Please a Lady* focuses on the character theme by displaying a career woman whose ambition and dedication are inherently harmful, *All I Desire* not only notes that women have a commitment to their families,

but also holds that family life ultimately fulfills women in a way that career life cannot.

Hollywood uses Stanwyck's gender, despite any of her individual characteristics and the nuances of her characters, to exemplify all three themes.

In the three sections of my analysis, I will explore the films that most accurately display each of the three themes and the film press representations of the stars featured in these films. In my comparisons between film and film press, I will question how the press follows or diverts from these themes and how the film representations differ from or align with those shown in the press. These differences and similarities reveal how much power Hollywood holds over the press and the extent to which film press is constructed to present a specific image rather than the genuine lives of Hollywood's stars. Though separate from Hollywood, these press pieces exist within the same system; thus, even pieces describing the intricacies of these stars' lives or pieces authored by the stars themselves are highly fabricated. Several of the pieces I analyze come from the mouths of these stars, but the role of the press in forming these pieces must be taken into account; such pieces still limit the stars' agency in favor of a certain preordained image.

After analyzing each film and the accompanying film press sources for each theme, I will conclude by discussing these works together. I will begin my analysis with the theme of fulfillment; my focus, throughout the introduction of this thesis, has been on the contrast between career life and women's commitments, which might also be a logical theme with which to begin. However, I am starting at a deeper level to deal with the fundamental matter of women's ability to find happiness in the workplace. I'll deal with women's domestic roles second, in order to point out the way in which domestic expectations tame a group of women characters who are

indeed fulfilled by their careers. To transition to the last theme, I will show that women who defy their domestic duties *and* find fulfillment in careers are displayed as inherently immoral people.

### **A Career Woman's Fulfillment**

Although women's decision to work during and after the war was often based on financial necessity rather than fulfillment, women who worked together during the war, even if the work was difficult or tedious, came to enjoy learning skills alongside one another. Depending on the positions they held, many women chose to maintain their jobs after the war. Their experiences as working women were challenging and, at least to some extent, rewarding. In contrast, the following films waste no time invalidating such experiences, arguing that career life is not rewarding, glamorous, or even emotionally healthy. The career women in these films attempt to follow their ambitions and find success, but ultimately realize that career success can never truly satisfy them.

Despite their talent and ambition, these women ultimately seek happiness elsewhere—usually with a man. Lily in *A Life of Her Own* (1950), played by Lana Turner, is the exception; she ends up alone, and her career life is unable to heal her broken heart. Even though she has become a famous model, her success does not bring her happiness. Similarly, Madeleine's successful editing career in *Dishonored Lady* (1947) brings her distress rather than joy. These women react to their own emptiness similarly: both consider attempting suicide, though Madeleine, played by Hedy Lamarr, is unsuccessful, and Lily decides against it. Yet these films still communicate that a career cannot sustain women's happiness or even desire to live. Finally, Naomi in *All I Desire* pursues an acting career but fails to find success or happiness in her work.

Naomi and Madeleine do manage to find fulfillment elsewhere: they discover that settling down with a lover who promises them domestic bliss is, as the Stanwyck film's title suggests, all they desire.

The actresses behind these characters, though successful, were entrenched in gossip about their love lives. Each had multiple marriages, and their heartbreaks and loves often dominated the pages of the press as their search for fulfillment with a man proved more notable than the details of their career. Yet at the same time, their success and ambition were not completely ignored—though the invisibility of Hedy Lamarr's scientific achievements is certainly worth noting. For each actress, the amount of attention paid to their personal and professional lifestyles varied, but life without a man was never an option.

### **Lana Turner in *A Life of Her Own*: Success and Loneliness**

*A Life of Her Own* features Lana Turner as Lily James, an aspiring model and eventual fashion icon who achieves fame, but desires love more than anything. As the film progresses, it uses Lily to prove that a woman cannot find happiness in a workplace environment. At first, Lily exudes passion and drive as she enters the modeling industry: all she wants is to pursue a career in this field. The film's perspective on career life shifts with the entrance of Mary, an older model who has been unlucky in love. Mary is first seen asking for more work, wanting to reenter the modeling world. This drive, however, does not sustain her. She ultimately commits suicide, alone and unfulfilled. Although the film begins by implying that a career woman will be lost without a man and reasserts this message as Lily follows Mary's path of lost love and loneliness, Lily eventually decides to endure a life alone.

The film pays little attention to Lily's career milestones and growth—once she enters the industry, the film jumps forward in time between relative obscurity and widespread success. Her reasons for becoming a model are simple—she wants to be looked at and noticed and loved. This drive, however, is never clearly depicted in her behavior, as she instead works for the love and attention of men, pursuing an affair with Steve, a married man. Though she claims that she wants “to be a success, to be somebody,” she ends up confessing, “maybe all I really want is to be happy.” This happiness, inevitably, cannot be found in her career life and only comes through love. Lily pursues a semi-domestic life with Steve, although he already has a home of his own. She tries to take on domestic duties, pleasantly serving him coffee on command and foreseeing a future of happily washing dishes together. When she does eventually leave him, this loss clearly affects her; she returns to her darkened apartment as ominous music plays. The once warm, domestic space appears in a dismal fashion as Lily returns to it alone.

This same loneliness follows her into her work life. We see Lily walking, zombie-like, away from a modeling shoot. Her work has done nothing to fulfill her or even distract her. In this scene, however, Lily is not shown in complete isolation—other women in the industry surround her, busily working on the shoot and yelling back and forth in passionate discussion. While Lily acts as the film's protagonist and thus the main example of women's behavior, these other women provide a positive perspective on the experience of working women. Though Lily is miserable and unfulfilled, these women enjoy their work, including Lily's friend and colleague Maggie, who is married. Because Lily and Maggie differ only in marital status, the film suggests that a working woman will never be completely fulfilled by her work if she does not also have a husband back at home.



Though she mimics Mary's fall into loneliness and despair, Lily does not ultimately meet the same fate. Lily meets up with Mary's old lover Lee, who notes that Lily's work "didn't fix anything" in her life. He asserts that Lily will never again find a love like Steve and will be relegated to casual relationships—setting her apart from the domestic bliss that she momentarily experienced. Lily leaves this encounter and goes to the same building off which Mary jumped to her death. The possibility of a life without a man to love seems too much for Lily to bear. As the movie closes, however, Lily stares at the building for a few moments of deep contemplation before turning and walking away. She does not speak or communicate her feelings through narration, so her thoughts are up to interpretation; the questions the audience must contend with are whether Lily will choose life, whether she will return to work, and whether she will seek happiness with another man or from within herself. The viewer can at least conclude that Lily has, to some extent, gained strength from some source other than a man, as she is able to continue living even after breaking ties with her lover and after Lee predicts a lonely future. While this source may be her career, her despondence suggests otherwise. Ultimately, however, Lily still collects the strength to remain alive despite her failed relationships and loneliness. She resolves to move forward without a man beside her. As the film's title suggests, Lily's life is her own, and she makes the decision to keep living it by herself, on her own terms. While her future is uncertain, this moment displays her resolve and independence.

Yet this conclusion does not quite usurp the film's previous messages; for one, its inherent uncertainty does not allow for a clear interpretation. Lily might, in the moment, choose to go on without a husband, but, contrary to Lee's warning, she would likely meet someone, get married, and have children in the future—just because she does not reach these particular goals

in the film's runtime does not mean she has given up on these dreams. What's more, Lily does not make any clear rededication to her work; her ability to find fulfillment in her career seems unlikely, and the film makes no indication that her feelings will change. As every previous moment of the film asserts the importance of marriage and companionship, this uncertain ending does not clearly defy these ideas. Overall, the film denotes that a woman's life is worth living only in the arms of a man—if you do attempt life alone, like Lily, your future is uncertain. It's no coincidence that we don't see a scene of Lily in the future, fulfilled and successful; the film purposely makes no indication that such a life is possible. Despite Lily's strength, her chance for happiness as an unmarried working woman is intentionally doubtful.

Like Lily, Lana Turner's career and her dedication to her work was not always a topic of interest. Turner was an accomplished actress by the war's end, but more than anything had been viewed as a beauty and a party girl. At the time of the release of *A Life of Her Own*, Turner was married to Bob Topping, her third marriage of seven (Longworth, "MGM Stories Part Twelve"). These marriages, and her alleged romantic affairs, filled the pages of the press, and a great amount of gossip and cynicism arose regarding her and Topping's marriage (Parsons, "Lana Told Me All" 60). Like the film does for Lily, the press put stock in Turner's own search for love, creating a sense of domestic promise even in its acknowledgement of her turbulent romantic past. Turner's role as a mother appears as well, though in balanced terms with her career life. Accordingly, her career is not delegitimized so much as ignored in favor of gossip—content that the press found more provocative and thus more interesting to consumers. While the few mentions of her career are either neutral or positive, the press also suggests that Turner will give up her career in favor of domesticity.

The press offers detailed discussions of Turner's love life and the different men she either associated with or married. Turner is said to be "on an eternal quest for happiness in love"—a quest that the press itself constructed through its keen attention to every single detail of her romances. Turner denied many of the rumored affairs throughout her life, but no matter which stories were true and which were fabricated, this representation of a woman who depends on a man for her happiness certainly mimics Lily's image (Longworth, "MGM Stories Part Twelve"). Turner's fulfillment in her career, in comparison, gets little mention. Actor Gerald Stewart notes the lack of respect for Turner even among the contemporary public: "Why is it," he says, "that Americans don't seem to recognize how good she is?" (Holliday 63). If the press's coverage is any indication, the public's interest in Turner was instead fixated on her loves—as well as her domestic life.

The press establishes Turner as a domestic woman but does not limit her entirely to this role. A one-page spread from *Screenland* in 1949 shows Turner throwing a party for her seven-year-old daughter Cheryl ("Lana Gives a Party"). Turner appears beside Topping as well as Cheryl and her young friends, displaying her as a representation of motherly love and dedication, a woman who belongs among children. Even in this portrayal, however, Turner's upcoming appearance in *A Life of Her Own* receives mention; one caption says she will "hypnotize fans again" in the film ("Lana Gives a Party"). While this piece depends on visual depictions of Turner's family life, her current career developments are still worth interest and her talents worth moviegoers' time. Elsewhere, Turner's relationship between motherhood and career life is more complex. Her blood type made pregnancy difficult, leading to two miscarriages. Kaaren Pieck's piece on Turner's life after miscarrying her son Timothy shares her plans to return to work:

“instead of bending over a crib, she’ll be facing a camera” (102). Motherhood and career life are put at odds, but while such a binary could seem limiting in other circumstances, Turner’s tragic experience merits Pieck’s assertion that career life cannot fill the hole left by a child (102). This representation is respectful rather than limiting, especially since Pieck acknowledges that Turner values her career (102). Turner’s personal trials lead to a respectfully measured press coverage; in contrast, this balance between work and home life does not appear in the representations of many other actresses.

Under less tragic circumstances, the press presents a less balanced view of Turner’s home and work lives—specifically regarding marriage. A 1952 article about Turner’s engagement to Fernando Lamas ends with an assertion that Turner has not only learned about her own happiness but also “let experience make her an expert at keeping a man happy” (76). This piece could simply end by asserting Turner’s own contentment, but her duty and ability to please her husband also appear. Louella Parsons depicts a similar picture of women’s position in the home; she asserts that after Turner’s miscarriage, she considered giving up work “to be just Mrs. Topping—that’s how eager she was to make a real homelife for herself and him” (60). Turner’s career is put in a different perspective here, as a submissive life of devotion to her husband seems to usurp her work life. Parsons adds that Turner, like many working women during the war and into the 1950s, only chose to keep working to maintain their lifestyle financially (60). Not only does this piece assert Turner’s role in the home as a natural part of their marriage, as “Mrs. Topping,” but it depicts women’s participation in the workforce as a matter of necessity rather than a conscious decision or desire. Women, in this mindset, have no inherent desire to work or to defy their traditional roles. Concurrently, this statement of Turner’s ability to provide

financial support acknowledges her as the main breadwinner in her home—a distinct shift in traditional gender dynamics.

This depiction of Turner’s professional power is not an anomaly; in a study of her marriage to ex-husband Steven Crane, Pieck notes that Crane wanted Turner to help him start his acting career (101). For one, Turner appears as a professionally superior individual capable of success in her field. Additionally, Turner is quoted as saying, “Acting just isn’t right for most men . . . . With a woman, it’s practically second nature” (101). While this statement is tied to Turner’s own beliefs about women’s flexibility, Pieck also develops a dichotomy in which most men cannot thrive in a certain professional environment—noting that women, in contrast, are naturally compatible with this career path. Turner thus argues for her own professional capabilities and those of all women in her field.

The impact of these moments of power, however, cannot override the previous representations of Turner as domestic or submissive. Just as Lily’s career path is ignored, so too are Turner’s talents overshadowed by gossip—an erasure of her abilities that even fellow actors caught onto. The film press perpetuated this glamorous, two-dimensional view of Turner, an image that the Hollywood community itself supported—for one, Turner was glaringly snubbed at the 1952 Oscars when her acclaimed performance in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) went unnominated (Longworth, “MGM Stories Part Twelve”). The press, and even the industry itself, did not broach Turner’s passion and fulfillment in her work, as she instead became a beautiful face and a symbol of Hollywood’s fleeting romances. Lily herself sustains this same treatment, as her passion is pushed to the background in favor of love. The film is more direct, however, in stating that career life is unable to sustain Lily; while Turner maintains her career even amidst

the gossip about her domestic life, Lily's career future is unclear. Turner's participation in the industry warrants the press's attention even as it ignores her relationship with her work, and the limited representations of her career display an equitable representation between work and home. While the press notes Turner's success and influence, it places more importance on her "quest" for love. Meanwhile, *A Life of her Own* makes a similar, albeit more explicit, statement: women can succeed in careers perhaps, but it will not bring them happiness.

### **Hedy Lamarr in *Dishonored Lady*: The Woes of the Working Woman**

While *A Life of Her Own* ends with Lily mustering up enough strength to live another day alone, *Dishonored Lady* features a woman who starts off with a similar independence but relinquishes it to gain inner peace—which only comes to her through a man. Madeleine Damien, played by Hedy Lamarr, is an established career woman who exemplifies women's incompatibility with the workplace when her career life spurs her to a nervous breakdown. As Jan Horak notes, Lamarr's postwar films such as *Dishonored Lady* feature submissive women, echoing film trends that were moving away from the assertive women of the 1930s. Ironically, Lamarr produced these films, asserting her agency as a working woman while producing films about women who are stripped of their own power (38). Concurrently, Lamarr was involved in a different kind of labor: she patented radio technology that would go on to serve as the basis for GPS and Wi-Fi technology, but her contributions went unnoticed for decades (Dean). These themes of submissiveness and professional erasure also form the backbone of *Dishonored Lady*, as it features a career woman who ultimately finds happiness in a man rather than her work, accomplishments, or capabilities.

Madeleine, a successful art editor for a magazine, holds her own in male-dominated meetings, fully aware that she's doing "a man's work," and freely engages in sexual relationships with men—a lifestyle that stirs her to despair rather than contentment. After driving her car off the road in a failed suicide attempt, Madeleine is found by a psychiatrist whom she ends up consulting for help. He persuades her to leave what he calls an "area of infection," referring to her career and sexual relationships. She follows his advice, leaving work, cutting off outside contact, and taking up residence in a new apartment. The film clearly sets up Madeleine's professional and romantic lives, in which she holds a successful career and seeks sexual pleasure, as mentally harmful. After she leaves her work, she appears more relaxed and vows never to return to the office again; her work is put in direct opposition to her happiness. Notably, she finds peace not within herself, but in her new love, Dr. David Cousins.

From their first meeting, Madeleine is willing to take on traditionally feminine roles, forfeiting her previous authority. After she returns one of the doctor's mice, he notes that she wasn't frightened of the animal. "Women are supposed to scream," he remarks. While admitting that she isn't afraid of mice, she replies, "Next time, I'll scream." Madeleine is willing to let her strength go in order to conform to this man's view of a woman—just as she has forfeited her professional duties and instead taken up painting. Professionalism as a trait is linked to men instead of women: a montage of overlapping shots shows David hard at work at the typewriter, over a microscope, and among test tubes. These scenes of her accompanying the doctor as he works are deeply ironic, as Lamarr herself was an intelligent inventor in real life. Though she assists David in drawing the illustrations for his report on anti-reticular serum, when he first brings up the subject, she teases him about how uninteresting it is. Madeleine lacks Lamarr's

inherent knowledge and passion as it is only David, the man, who can be successful and devoted to the professional sphere. What's more, this film mimics reality: when David turns in his report, he admits that he did not tell his superior that Madeleine had done the drawings. While the couple laughs together at his silence, the lack of recognition for her work parallels the real-life erasure of Lamarr's scientific accomplishments. In contrast, Madeleine willingly separates herself from her former authority and professionalism as David instead thrives in a work environment.

Through the film, Madeleine's focus is instead on David himself. When Mr. Courtland, an old flame, comes looking for her, her psychiatrist says that she is "looking for a new soul." The film then cuts to Madeleine's new apartment; she has a short conversation with the landlady about her new dedication to painting, but she then almost immediately meets David. From there, the film centers on his research and their relationship. Little screen time is devoted to her painting, and the film provides minimal evidence that the activity brings her any true joy. Madeleine's search for her "new soul" is depicted in terms of her romantic interest rather than her personal goals or growth. As she tells David, in no uncertain terms, "I'm only alive because you love me." This love has given her a reason to live and a sense of fulfillment that career life never could. Her new happiness is connected not only to love, but also to marriage; unlike her previous partners, David states his intention, from the very moment he reveals his feelings, to marry Madeleine. Her salvation comes not only through his love, but through the promise of wedded domestic life.

David's presence is further connected to Madeleine's happiness by the disastrous consequences that arise when he leaves town and Madeleine revisits her old social life.



She meets her friend Ethel at a club and ends up crossing paths with Courtland, who coaxes her to come home with him; after she flees his home, Courtland is murdered, and Madeleine stands accused. Furthermore, the cause of her re-entry into public life is Ethel's request for help on a work project. Madeleine helps her with this professional matter, Ethel notes Madeleine's adept talent with the project, and almost immediately things go south. She attempts to enter a public space and exercise her professional talents, but she is quickly punished for this effort. Without her lover by her side, Madeleine's life goes dismal again—clearly connecting David to her newfound happiness and stability. Additionally, Madeleine's situation implies that, without a man, a woman may try to go after professional pursuits—a dangerous position that spells certain disaster.

Madeleine's presence in society ultimately proves personally damaging as well as dangerous—after finding out that she went to Courtland's home, David cuts ties with her. Her attempt to take on her professional duties and live without a man nearly ruins her; she denies any chance to defend herself in court, as her one true happiness has left her. It is only when David proclaims that he still loves her that Madeleine gains the courage to defend herself. As she later tells him, “you made my life worth saving.” The film clearly states that one's freedom and reputation are not worth much without a lover with whom to share them. Madeleine is unable to value her freedom and reputation without a man whose love would prove her value as a woman. Moreover, David uses his intellect and masculine strength to persuade the real murderer to come clean. As he is entirely responsible for the resolution of the film, Madeleine would be lost without him and his love for her. Thus, the film's conclusion binds Madeleine to a domestic future by his side; she attempts to go off alone and better herself before pursuing a life with him,

but a mere minute after David finds out about her departure, he finds her at the airport and, without any exchange of words, she stays behind to reunite with him. Her attempt to make her own decision about her future is swept aside as the film's final moments reassert that Madeleine's happiness resides in domestic life with a man.

Similarly, the film press often denied Lamarr the chance to express and discover herself as an accomplished working woman. Lamarr's image was instead one of glamour and drama, as she was considered one of Hollywood's most beautiful actresses and had three marriages end in divorce by 1949. Gossip about her many romantic affairs filled the pages of the press (Graham 104). Career-wise, Lamarr was not considered a serious actress—Alyce Canfield notes that Hollywood saw Lamarr as a “face” and a “puppet” and describes Lamarr's unsuitable film roles (30). In the postwar years, however, Lamarr attempted to achieve more agency—a move that the press would support but also push back against. Canfield's 1946 piece indicates a new leaf for Lamarr as she began to produce films and gain “real freedom” and power over her roles (30-31). The piece not only defies previous conceptions of Lamarr, but also establishes her as a serious, fulfilled career woman. Canfield explains that Lamarr was upset about not winning awards or playing serious, challenging roles (87). While the article cements Lamarr's beauty, it also focuses on her intelligence and capability in developing scenes and art for her films; she is praised as “practical,” “analytical,” and “clever.” Her new career role genuinely fulfills Lamarr, who is said to be “more genuinely happy than she ever has been before in her life” (30). This happiness is directly tied to not only her new film roles, but also her new sense of power over her work and, by extension, her image. Such feelings of career fulfillment sharply contrast the experiences of Madeleine in *Dishonored Lady*—Lamarr's own fulfillment as a career woman did

not translate to the films she produced, even with her influence behind them (Horak 38). Despite the lack of independent, fulfilled women in these films, Lamarr's own freedom was honored and celebrated in the press.

Depictions of this freedom were not always career-focused, however, as the press also ties Lamarr's fulfillment to her children and a domestic future much like Madeleine's. Fredda Dudley cements Lamarr's ability to make her own choices in life, but only in relation to her pastimes, travel plans, and children (56). Dudley goes into a long examination of Lamarr's experiences raising her three children, who are said to be "the core of her being," and suggests that Lamarr "might devote herself to her household and give up her career" after finding a husband—a conditional statement that is not directly attributed to any quote from Lamarr or clearly depicted as a paraphrase (58). The author seems to push Lamarr to follow the press's ideas of proper behavior—specifically marrying and taking on domestic life. Though the article speaks of Lamarr's excitement about her latest pictures, Dudley writes that "Hedy's plans for retirement" will be postponed after the release and supposed success of her next film (58). Her plans to retire, whether legitimate or not, again are offered up as a normal, logical course of action for a mother. Ultimately, Lamarr has taken charge of her life, but she is a mother and potential wife more than anything.

While Dudley discredits Lamarr's career life by diverting attention from it, other writers explicitly criticize her desire for agency. By 1949, Lamarr's drive was disregarded; Hedda Hopper, in a piece called "Myths Stars Believe About Themselves," writes about Lamarr's "stretch of fancying herself quite an actress" during which she was less willing to follow MGM's orders (99). The article's title and this statement's doubtful tone call her feelings into question.

Lamarr's lack of success in her producing career might contribute to this discreditation of her efforts, but Hopper goes even further to take attention away from her work (Horak 38). Her conception of Lamarr exhibits none of Canfield's praise, as Lamarr's work life is minimized in favor of domestic roles that are supposedly inherent to her as a woman. Hopper describes Lamarr as "a beautiful and simple girl" and "a born housewife and mama" (Hopper 100). In no uncertain terms, one caption states that "she's happiest when occupied with household chores, gardening or caring for her three children." (36). While Lamarr's happiness previously had been attributed to her career success, this work portrays Lamarr's professional life negatively and limits Lamarr to the motherly realm.

Lamarr's professional life also received ire for disrupting her marital relationships. Sheilah Graham's piece on Lamarr's "strange loves" not only cements her need for a man, but also blames her career for the dissolution of her marriage to John Loder. Romance is displayed as Lamarr's truest reason for joy; she allegedly has "a deep and understandable need for the devotion of the man who could fulfill her life" (104). While the press asserts that only a man can fulfill her, Graham also posits that Lamarr "wants a man who'll boss her around" (106). Such desires are put in opposition to Lamarr's career and financial success—her high salary is clearly depicted as a turn-off for men, solidifying that women who surpass men professionally, acting as a breadwinner and asserting their power, are undesirable. Graham clearly ties Lamarr's own financial power with her divorce from Loder, citing it as one of the main issues in their marriage (105). Even when the article mentions Lamarr's intelligence and competence, it does so to argue that these qualities, along with her "flair for domesticity" and the fact that she's "a fine mother,"

make her a suitable mate (106). Lamarr's domesticity is tied to her ability to seek a man, which depends on her submissiveness.

Lamarr fails to escape a reputation based on her elusive beauty and multiple failed marriages, even though her attempts to assert herself in her industry are granted some merit. Through time, the press suggests that Lamarr's career ambitions were not worth the effort; such a view certainly proliferated, as even Horak posits that she was not a great talent (39). Whether or not such a claim is true, it's worth noting what details arise to fill in the blanks—as Lamarr's acting talent is perceived unworthy of discussion, writers sell her image with her beauty and romances. Others, such as Hopper, assert that she is a comfortably domestic woman. Such an image could be easily attached to any woman with children; Lamarr, with three children, was made a perfect example of motherliness. Though she likely could have been a devoted, caring mother, the press made a clear decision about what images should be emphasized—especially since her scientific ventures were ignored completely and replaced with vague descriptions of her intelligence. Despite her great talents and drive, Lamarr's future was boiled down to the man who would fulfill her and the children she was raising.

Like Madeleine, a similarly driven career woman, Lamarr's desires are linked to domesticity. Yet depictions of Lamarr are even more limiting because of her role as a mother and the assertion that this role is her source of true happiness. Children certainly are a guarantee in Madeleine's marital future, but she maintains the ability, albeit briefly, to go off on her own and find herself. Lamarr, in contrast, cannot even appear in an article about the risks she's taking in life without reference to her children's upbringing. On the other hand, while the more positive representations of Lamarr's career goals did not last, her career life is not presented as negatively

as Madeleine's. Though their focuses and methods differ, ultimately the film and film press work together to prove that women should not seek fulfillment in career life because such satisfaction is found only in the home.

### **Barbara Stanwyck in *All I Desire*: Navigating A Woman's Place**

Like Madeleine, Naomi in *All I Desire* attempts to find fulfillment in career life but ends up giving in to the promise of domestic bliss. *All I Desire*, set in the early 1900s, features Barbara Stanwyck as Naomi Murdoch, a woman who abandons her husband and three children to pursue an acting career and spare her family the scandal of her extramarital affair. Naomi flounders in show business, but when she returns home after ten years, she convinces the family that she is a great success. Her oldest daughter, Joyce, rebuffs her, while her youngest daughter, Lily, worships her, and her husband, Henry, finds himself falling back in love with her. Though set in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the novel on which the film is based was released in 1951, and the film two years later (Fischer 143). Audiences tend to interpret period pieces according to the social conventions and context of the present, even though they take place in a different time. In the early 1950s, a film about a woman abandoning her family to pursue a career would have called to mind contemporary arguments about the selfishness and domestic instability of women's work outside the home. Ultimately, the film's position on this issue presents more complexity than the film's premise might imply; while *All I Desire* portrays Naomi's choice to leave her family as damaging and unfulfilling, the film's plot does not punish her.

Naomi's decision to choose work over family is critiqued through her failed career and the effect her abandonment has on her family. Naomi not only lives from gig to gig, but also

finds her way of life difficult and unrewarding. When Lily begs Naomi to take her to New York to start her own acting career, Naomi assures her that her lifestyle is neither fulfilling nor easy. She reveals her failed career at the film's end, weaving a dismal tale of the "tough jungle" of show business. Naomi's career is a poignant representation for the post-WWII period, as women's roles at home and at work were often put in opposition—her experience suggests that women who give up their domestic role for a career may not even succeed and will have given up their family for nothing. Alternatively, the film implies that women who put work above their families do not deserve to be successful in their profession.

These dichotomies persist through the film, as Naomi never attempts to strike a balance between work and family; however, she is not shamed for her career. As Naomi spends more time with her estranged family, she begins to treasure her home above her career, musing at one point that "you don't know how unimportant success is until you've had it, or what a home means until you've lost it." In the end, she returns to Henry and her family with no mention of whether she will still pursue acting. While this film shows its career woman choosing the home over work, sending what seems to be a clear message to its audience, the representation is not overly patriarchal or demeaning. Henry, rather than rebuking Naomi for abandoning her role as wife and mother, partially blames himself for her departure. He remarks that he feared he was tying her down, as he had a quiet lifestyle that held back her ambition. Her dreams and goals are thus portrayed as natural parts of her character rather than foibles that she must abandon. Henry's admission that Naomi was not meant for a modest life as a wife and mother gives credibility to her desires to leave her family. Yet the film also allows a different interpretation: intellectual, mild-mannered Henry regrets that he did not fight harder for their relationship, especially

considering her affair with Dutch—a more domineering, rugged man interested in traditionally masculine pursuits such as fishing. Naomi's ambition and inability to commit to family life disrupted their marital gender roles, emasculating Henry. Without Naomi's willingness to remain in the home, he was unable to act as the traditional dominant husband to a submissive wife, and their marriage suffered. Such a message reinforces the idea that women need to be preserved and controlled by men, as if they were possessions.

Naomi's absence has harmed others in her family as well, but the eventual improvement of these relationships again allows for a forgiving representation. Joyce despises Naomi at first, not even considering her a part of the family. Notably, it is Joyce who has taken up most of the domestic duties that Naomi was unwilling to fulfill. While Joyce may just resent the extra labor, she also functions as Naomi's antithesis: the domestic woman who is dedicated enough to provide the support and work needed to maintain a functioning household. The younger children, in contrast, seem largely unfazed: Lily worships Naomi, and though their reunion spurs impulsive fantasies about becoming an actress herself, she is a happy, stable young woman. Naomi's son, Ted, has no memory of her, but he is eager to get to know her; as a result, they quickly bond. Even when Ted sees Naomi with Dutch in what he mistakenly assumes is a romantic meeting, his initial doubts give way to Naomi's words of motherly love. By the film's conclusion, as Naomi returns to the home, even Joyce has warmed up to her and accepted her as family again. While Naomi's abandonment is not completely pardoned, it brings on no permanent adverse effects for her or her children. The film thus communicates that a woman can always come back to the home, even after choosing to pursue a career.



Though the film features a woman who has effectively abandoned her family to join the workforce, *All I Desire* disseminates messages of both ambition and domestic harmony, producing a nuanced but unstable message to its female viewers. Naomi does not flourish after she abandons her domestic roles; her career plans did not give her success or happiness. At the same time, the film seeks to explain why Naomi had cause to leave her family: her ambitions are not completely demonized. As the film allows her to return to a happy home, it suggests that women, who may naturally feel an inclination to pursue a career, can experience both a career and domestic life. Yet this relationship is without a doubt a conditional one: if Naomi had instead decided to return to work, or even attempted to balance work and home life, the film would not have pardoned her to the same degree. Though Naomi is not put in a demeaning or overly domestic role within the household, the film shows a career woman choosing the home over her work and congratulates her for it.

While this film places Stanwyck in a role that questions women's career aspirations, the film press discussed Stanwyck's career in frequent, careful detail. Stanwyck often rebuffed Hollywood social life, but she was very visible in Hollywood film press (Maynard 98). She maintains some of her own voice by producing several self-written pieces, but the degree to which these pieces contain her own thoughts should be questioned. While Stanwyck's love life was discussed at length amidst her two divorces, she was not often put into domestic or motherly roles, even though she did have a son whose upbringing could have been an object of attention for the press (Clark 80). Unlike Lamarr and Turner, Stanwyck's image was of a respected, talented actress whose career merited attention and respect.

This respect for Stanwyck perhaps contributed to her multiple opportunities to author her own pieces in the press and, in the process, display a certain amount of balance between her work and personal lives. One piece from 1955 gives Stanwyck the chance to tell her own story, from her beginnings to the present. She describes her different career landmarks and even highlights her emotional journey as she describes the “chip on her shoulder” and her attempt to grow out of her “bitterness” (Stanwyck, “Doll” 90-91). Here, she seems to have a chance to give her own story, without any barriers or suggestions from the press. In a column from November 1954, Stanwyck relates acting to motherhood; both roles, she says, teach you to be kinder to others. In contrast, “women who are neither mothers nor actresses sometimes must train and discipline themselves especially hard to think of others” (“Busy B” 25). While Stanwyck suggests that mothers are kinder, better people than the average woman, she says the same thing about a certain kind of career woman; neither role is shown to be more important or positive. When speaking about her own life, she notes that she is unhappy when she is not working, further showing her dedication to her line of work. She notes the importance of both motherhood and career life but makes specific mention of her own work—a progressive, balanced view of a career woman’s values.

Whether or not Stanwyck’s authorship contributed to this balance, her agency over these pieces was not absolute, and other self-written pieces display more fraught images. In a column titled “Take My Word For It,” Stanwyck starts off by describing her taste in clothing, makeup, and accessories. The description of this column series notes that “the stars themselves trade ideas, opinions, and problems with our readers” (22). While this description suggests substantive content, Stanwyck’s “ideas and problems” seem to revolve only around fashion. Though she is

listed as the author, it is still a *Modern Screen* publication—the editors likely had a hand in suggesting the article’s content beforehand and were involved in the article’s organization. Stanwyck’s own ideas likely appear to some extent, but the influence of film press is also present. The article then moves into a discussion of Stanwyck’s love for acting “and the studying involved” (23). This shift in focus may suggest a balance between Stanwyck’s interests, but this discussion of acting lasts only a paragraph before she begins to discuss fashion again. To the very end of the column, the organization is telling. Stanwyck describes her bond with the Sinatra children, Nancy and Frankie, Jr., putting her in a domestic role that fits in well with the article’s core femininity, but she diverts to discussing current film trends (24). She speaks competently about realism versus romantic films; then, just as quickly, she switches paths once more. Transitioning with no more than a noncommittal “Well . . .,” the piece ends with her reflecting on how she should wash her gloves, a process she supposedly loves (24). Stanwyck is pushed back and forth between subjects as the piece strives to focus on her feminine interests rather than her work. Stanwyck’s career experience is stifled in this column supposedly focused on her “ideas, opinions, and problems,” implying that the magazine’s readers should be more interested in learning about her fashion sense than her accomplishments.

The press also attempted to push traditional roles onto Stanwyck through her romantic life. In 1951, Stanwyck’s name appeared in *Modern Screen* almost exclusively in relation to her divorce from Bob Taylor. These pieces often recount Stanwyck’s romantic histories with Taylor and her first husband, Frank Fay. Some pieces dive into Stanwyck’s career history but maintain a focus on her relationships and seclusion following her heartbreaks (Clark 81). At one point, Frances Clark discusses the marital rift that arose amidst Stanwyck’s building success and Fay’s

failing career; she notes that Stanwyck knew that “sacrificing her own success . . . was no answer to their problem” (80). While the article respects Stanwyck’s pride in her work and decision not to endanger her career, Clark also seems to note that this decision was one of domestic utility rather than passion. This article implies that Stanwyck maintained her career not because of her love for her work, but because doing so would not fix their marital conflicts. Her passion and dedication to her work are revealed, but in a limited context.

The press attempts to portray Stanwyck in materialistic or submissive roles yet ends up establishing a balanced vision of her. She often told her own stories in the press, which perhaps contributed to this positive image, but she was certainly susceptible to the press’s whims. Even when the press wields power over her image, it represents her positively; as a veteran actress, her career is displayed as honorable and worth exploring. Her success merits the honor her career receives, while an unsuccessful career woman like Naomi does not receive attention and is thus pushed toward more “natural” roles such as motherhood. Stanwyck, in comparison, evades overwhelming connections to motherhood, even in relation to her own child. Naomi’s experience encourages women to rediscover their greater purpose in the home and suggests that careers are harmful, while Stanwyck’s working life was an admirable pursuit worth discussing. Yet if, like Naomi, Stanwyck had rebuffed all romances and left her child for her career, perhaps she would not have received the same amount of respect in the press. Stanwyck’s image would thus be conditional, dependent on her domestic and feminine roles even if the press allows her to speak on her passions. Still, Stanwyck can exist, and thrive, outside of the home, cementing her fulfillment in her work. The press celebrates her, while *All I Desire* uses Naomi’s similar aspirations to discredit career life and preach domesticity.

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While Lily, Naomi, and Madeleine seem to come to similar conclusions about the role of men and domesticity in their lives, their actresses were treated differently by the press. Stanwyck's long and successful career merits self-written articles and discussions of her career history; her child is rarely mentioned in detail. Lamarr's own image focused on her beauty and children rather than her talent. Both women's love lives are given significance, but while Lamarr needs a man to "boss her around" and help her feel whole, examinations of Stanwyck's romantic history still include long summaries of her career. Their differences in career success and perceived amount of acting talent may account for these discourses' contrast in depth, but these contrasts set up a clear picture of how certain actresses were viewed. Lamarr's attempt to take on dramatic roles and define herself in the industry proved unsuccessful; just like Naomi, her attempts to find fulfillment as a working woman are thus not worth any honor. Turner receives similar treatment, as mentions of her work are few and underdeveloped while her domestic trials are explored in detail. Lamarr and Turner, younger women seen as beauties rather than experienced actresses like Stanwyck, weather representations more focused on their loves, home lives, and appearances. Just as Naomi's unsuccessful career led her to find fulfillment in the home, so do Lamarr's and Turner's own career reputations lead to representations of their femininity and domesticity.

Though Stanwyck's representation is the most balanced, Lamarr and Turner do resist the tight chains of their films' representations. Turner managed to enjoy her career, unlike Lily's futile attempts, and Lamarr stuck to her work life despite domestic pressures, while Madeleine defaults to life with a man. Yet these actresses, as well as Stanwyck, are pushed toward romantic

fulfillment just like these characters. These women feel the same pressure; the stories about their love lives, however limiting they may seem in their content, push them to find a man and, through him, find fulfillment and joy. Among the films, *A Life of Her Own* presents the greatest chance for a more progressive reading, as Lily chooses to persist through life alone—she may very well find a man and settle down eventually, and though her career future is uncertain, she shows that life without the promise of love and domesticity is still worth living. *Dishonored Lady* explicitly argues the opposite, as David is the sole source of Madeleine's happiness and worth, while *All I Desire* depicts home life as Naomi's truest source of fulfillment. Yet no matter their conclusions, or the final romantic status of their protagonists, the films all assert that career life will never be enough to make a woman truly happy.

### **A Career Woman's Commitments**

Historically, women's role in the workforce was put in strict contrast to their domestic lives and commitments. The question of whether they could balance their responsibilities caused stress for many working women and anxiety in the public mind. Such concerns guide the trajectory of the following films, as career women try to chase their ambitions and, unable to balance career and home life, find themselves thrust back into submissive or domestic roles. On the other hand, this portrayal of women characters who yearn for career success shows—successfully, in fact—that women can indeed find fulfillment in their careers, defying the limits of the fulfillment theme. However, as a result of their career ambitions, Amanda in *Adam's Rib*, played by Katharine Hepburn, endangers her marriage, and Angie Evans in *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947), played by Susan Hayward, falls into alcoholism. Meanwhile, Marie in *The*

*Best Years of Our Lives*, played by Virginia Mayo, and Esther in *A Star is Born* (1954), played by Judy Garland, emasculate their husbands and find their marriages torn apart. Standing in contrast to these women as the symbol of domestic bliss is obedient, supportive wife Milly in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, played by Myrna Loy—her household, in contrast, remains strong and intact. These characters' neglect of their domestic commitments holds them back, damages their relationships, and eventually teaches them that, above all, they owe their household full attention and submission. Career fulfillment, in contrast, is not an inherent duty and thus can be forgotten.

Accordingly, the film press pushes a highly domestic agenda for many of these women. Myrna Loy and Virginia Mayo are tied to submissive, domestic roles, Hayward's personal life is defined by her children, and stories about Garland claim that she only achieves true happiness from motherhood. Yet the press also pulls away from traditional domestic roles to praise Garland's talent and maintain an almost completely professional focus on Hepburn. While the films push a clear domestic agenda, the success of these working women merits attention and praise in the press.

### **Judy Garland in *A Star is Born*: Career Success, Domestic Turmoil**

Drawing inspiration from Stanwyck's relationship with Frank Fay, who helped her break into Hollywood before his own career dwindled, the story of *A Star is Born* appeared first in 1937 before reemerging in 1954 with Judy Garland as its star (Longworth, "Strange Love"). Since then, Hollywood produced two more remakes with new elements and more progressive themes, but this dedication to the story of a woman achieving her dream of fame persists. The

1954 version is a musical, unlike its predecessor, but the premise is the same: an aspiring performer, Esther, is taken under the wing of a famous actor, Norman Maine, who connects her with the bigwigs of Hollywood. As she rises to fame, Norman's alcoholism and failing films lead to his own fall into obscurity and, ultimately, his suicide. The first version, released during the final years of the Great Depression, depended on its own conceptions of working women. Though the larger plot points remain the same, the 1954 reboot is significant in that many more women at this point had participated in the workforce or were wanting to take on careers. The case of Esther, a working woman whose success eclipses her husband's, was a more realistic fear for a time period in which married women were entering the workforce in larger numbers.

At its outset, the film encourages Esther's career success as she rises to fame under the stage name "Vicki Lester." Norman pushes her to use her talent to its full potential and to dream bigger; what's more, he does not doubt her ability to achieve and maintain a successful career. At one point, to encourage her, he even insults his own film when it is shown in a theater alongside Esther's debut film performance. He initially has no fear of a successful woman and instead focuses on Esther's fulfillment. The film also explores Esther's relationship with performing; she reveals that she feels most alive when she's singing. Her desires and dreams are highlighted and put in a positive light from the beginning. The trajectory of Norman's own career, however, complicates this vision of Esther's.

Through the film's depiction of Norman's crisis of masculinity, it makes a statement about women's position alongside men and the negative effects of women neglecting their traditional roles. Norman never states that his wife's success makes him unhappy, but his behavior certainly suggests it. He is released from his studio contract and, unable to find work,



spends most of his time at home. The film thus shows a man occupying a domestic space that would traditionally be occupied by a wife while her husband is at work. In one scene, he even takes on domestic duties and makes a meal for Esther. With her, he seems content; however, his larger social role in the home has changed. Most of the phone calls to their home are for Esther; one caller, not recognizing him, even refers to him as “Mr. Lester.” Not only has Norman taken on domestic duties, but his masculine control of his household has been challenged. Esther is given ownership of the family name, wrenching it from the man of the home. His annoyance is obvious, but he does not voice his concerns to Esther. In a shift from the 1937 film, when Norman drunkenly interrupts Esther’s Academy Award acceptance speech, rather than begging for his own award, he merely proclaims his need of a job; the source of his struggle here is more clearly tied to his lack of professional power. The clearest example of the gender-based elements of his frustration comes when his studio’s press agent, Libby, shames him by claiming that Esther will have to support Norman financially. He finds himself emasculated both by his wife’s success and by his own inability to rejoin the workforce—as if to reclaim some shred of power, Norman punches Libby in response.

The film’s stance on the balance of powers in the household is further complicated by the genre of the film. The switch in Esther’s skills, from actress to singer, puts her dynamic with Norman in a new perspective. In the previous version, both Esther and Norman were film actors, acting together for the same studio and, at one point, in the same film. They thus competed for fame and attention in the same industry, a position that put them at odds with each other. In the 1954 version, which features Esther as a singer and dancer, they are no longer in identical industries; thus, there is fundamentally less competition between them. Perhaps this difference in

their industries explains why Norman, in this version, is supportive of Esther's career and her success to the very end; it is easier for him, as a man, to support her career when she is not in the same field as he. Her success thus is less indicative of dominance over Norman professionally, which softens the film's celebration of this successful woman.

Still, the film ends the same way as its predecessor, ultimately showcasing the domestic tragedies that successful women cause. Norman, overhearing Esther's plans to give up her career to take care of him, commits suicide. On one hand, the film seems to suggest that Norman died of shame as an unemployed and submissive man in need of constant supervision within a woman-run household. Esther's career plays a clear role in these feelings of helplessness; as she announces her decision to return home, she remarks that if she had not been working so much, perhaps Norman's situation would not have gotten so dire. She seems to doubt her own position in the workforce and believes that she may have abandoned her household to reach success, a common criticism of women workers at this time. This attitude suggests that women should submit themselves and remain in the home rather than devoting time to a career. However, Norman never asks Esther to stop working; in another interpretation of the film, her intention to stop performing is what leads Norman to commit suicide, as he does not want her to sacrifice her success for him. In contrast, the film's final moments, in which Esther announces herself as "Mrs. Norman Maine," imply that she is submitting herself to him by identifying herself with his name, further complicating the film's stance.

Overall, Norman's frustration with losing power and fame in his industry implies the negative effects of women entering the workforce—a particularly salient fear in this time period. In this mindset, men would be competing with their wives and would lose power in the

household, perhaps to the point of their own feminization. The film's dismal ending does not suggest that women's ambition is a positive force: a woman-run household is tied to certain death. Yet from the beginning, Norman does not want to curtail Esther's success. The audience thus sees a successful, ambitious woman who is supported by her husband from start to finish. Though Norman does not ask Esther to submit herself to him, his crisis of masculinity cannot be ignored. If he had remained a breadwinner, even if Esther were just as successful, perhaps he would not have fallen so low. The film cements the need for women to relinquish dominance in their household to maintain their husband's pride, a theme that would not go unnoticed in the mid-1950s. Women viewers are encouraged to chase their own dreams, but certainly not at the expense of the men in their lives.

*A Star is Born* signaled a comeback for Judy Garland in Hollywood—for several years, she had been performing, quite successfully, in European theaters. In 1952, *Modern Screen* admitted that Garland's film career was all but over; her dependence on sleeping pills and stimulants made it difficult for her to keep up with her work schedule (Burton 56, 83). When MGM eventually dropped her, she attempted suicide. Such events and behavior stuck with her, becoming ingrained in her star image—that of a struggling, out-of-control star. The film press continued to follow her closely, even as it largely assumed Garland to be a hopeless case. She appeared in several long articles while she performed on stage and as she was working on *A Star is Born*, and while Garland's work life does shape her image, her marriages and children contribute to notions of her domesticity.

While Garland holds a position of power in the film, albeit a harmful one, the press pushed for images of submissiveness within her romantic relationships. A 1952 *Modern Screen*

article forecasted trouble ahead for Garland and her third husband Sid Luft, citing Luft's inability to keep Garland in line. Luft had drinking problems of his own; the article explains that Garland once had to bail him out of jail after he was booked for public intoxication—an event that bears striking similarity to a scene in *A Star Is Born*. Though Garland played the supportive, devoted wife here as well as in the film, friends of hers wanted Luft to take care of Garland instead. They claimed, “she needs an older man of position and experience who can keep her line” (Brooks 71). Garland is made into a child in need of close supervision by someone more able to remain stable and level-headed—specifically a man. This attitude reinforces the stereotypical assumption that women are over-emotional and argues that Garland would be, to some degree, unable to control her behavior on her own. Elsewhere, the article notes concerns about Luft; it even puts forth the question of whether he would be good for Garland's career (72). Even though the article claims that she needs a man to grant her stability and, by extension, happiness, her work is also a substantial concern.

Garland's career was also discussed on its own terms, apart from her home life. Her history in show business as well as her stunning performances onstage are the clear focus in a *Modern Screen* article that describes her return to Broadway after her success in Europe. On one hand, it notes Luft's role in her decision to go to Europe and credits him with turning Garland's “personal and professional” life around (Burton 83). The article risks making the statement that she needs a man to be happy and successful, but the true focus of the article is ultimately Garland herself. The piece closes by describing, in detail, one of her wildly successful performances on Broadway. The crowd is moved to tears, and Judy expresses her appreciation for them. This

intimate look at Garland's comeback honors her talent and her dedication as a performer; her career success brings her, and her fans, obvious joy and fulfillment.

When the domestic and professional realms meet for Garland, the press does not often manage balance. William Barbour attempts it, noting that both caring for her children and working fulfill her (Barbour 81). From there, he explains Garland's fierce work ethic and explores her career history, putting even more emphasis on her professional life. But before it can make its final statement ("Judy Garland has grown into a happy and fulfilled young woman"), the article throws in a quote from Garland in which she asserts that having children is more important than her career (84). The structure of this article is very telling; it has explored Garland's love for her work and discussed her successful career, but it cannot connect those topics with the statement that Judy is happy and fulfilled. The reader must first be reminded that Garland is a wife and a devoted mother; happiness thus only comes to women who, at the end of the day, embrace domestic roles. Other representations follow this model: in June of 1955, Parsons notes that Garland gave birth to her son on the night before the Academy Awards ceremony. Garland supposedly remarked, referring to her new child, "I've got my Oscar, already!" (10). While the statement might have been made jokingly, its inclusion in this piece communicates to its audience that motherhood trumps career achievement. Accordingly, in her final words on Garland, Parsons claims, "she has told me often that she's never so happy as when she's pregnant" (10). The press consistently supports Garland's domestic image both on its own and in contrast to her career life.

Garland's image in the press was fraught with her struggles and emotional strain. At the same time, as she came upon success and times of happiness, she is concurrently described as a

symbol of both domestic bliss and career success. Though neither view is dominant overall, within articles there is little balance. Many pieces tie Garland's greatest happiness to motherhood, while descriptions of her talent and success maintain their own focus. Attempts to strike balance ultimately revert to domesticity. At the same time, Luft is often placed in dominant positions over Garland. Some pieces come to terms with her controversial reputation and put Garland in a more respectable light as a performer, while others employ domesticity to create a rosy, homey picture for readers. Even as film press tried to put her in this stable, domestic light, her emotional performances on stage took up similar space.

*A Star is Born* certainly speaks truth to Garland's own life and struggles with addiction, aligning her with Norman's experiences; what's more, Garland also withstood imbalances between her work and career lives. Esther finds great success in her career but is unable to keep her domestic life in order; in the end, she's willing to give up her work for Norman. Garland is similarly tied to the home, as mentions of her children note the happiness they've brought her—a happiness that's often set apart from her work. However, Garland's career is also afforded great honor and respect as she awes and connects with audiences. Just as Esther is encouraged, in the end, to keep working, so too does the press highlight Garland's career reputation. The men in Garland's life are given power over her just as Esther takes on Norman's name; overall, these representations are similar. Though tied to traditional roles, Esther and Garland continue to pursue their passions.

**Virginia Mayo and Myrna Loy in *The Best Years of Our Lives*:**

**Returning to the Women at Home**

While Esther in *A Star is Born* feels the pressure of balancing her home and work lives, *The Best Years of Our Lives* depicts two different women who each operate in these different spheres—accordingly, the domestic woman leads a harmonious life while the working woman causes the breakdown of her household. The film shows the struggles of servicemen returning home after World War II and the role of women in this transition to domestic harmony. Al reenters civilian life comfortably with his caring wife, Milly, played by Myrna Loy, by his side. Fred, on the other hand, returns to a changed world. He attempts to find a promotion at the drugstore for which he worked previously, but he finds himself working as a soda jerk. Furthermore, he finds that his wife, Marie, has moved out of their home and taken on a job. Their relationship, especially when viewed in comparison to Al and Milly's, makes a clear argument about the role of women in postwar America and the commitments they had to their husbands.

Marie, played by Virginia Mayo, was one of many women who took on jobs during the war to support themselves in their husbands' absence. When Fred arrives home, his wife is nowhere to be found—his homecoming is nothing like the romantic scene in which Al and Milly rush to meet each other and embrace. Milly is right there waiting for Al upon his return, ready to attend to her husband. In contrast, Fred comes home to a life in which his wife's physical presence and larger social role have been displaced. He attempts to go to Marie's new apartment to no avail—drunk, he slumps over on her apartment's doorstep and must spend his first night back in America with Al and his family. It's no coincidence that he suffers a terrible dream that night, reliving his time in the war; without the comforts of his own home and his wife, he is unable to assimilate easily into civilian life. Popular culture pushed women to be present to assist their veteran husbands and adapt to their changed perspectives, and Marie and Fred display what

can happen if women are not there to welcome their husbands back (May 64-65). She is absent not only emotionally, but physically as well—an absence due entirely to her job. She thus abandons her role as a wife in order to pursue work outside of the home.

Fred is comforted, instead, by the film's more devoted women, Milly and her daughter Peggy—the women who were there at home to greet Al and who kept their home intact. It is ultimately Peggy who calms Fred during his nightmare; unsurprisingly, it is this woman, present at home in order to welcome and support servicemen, that Fred ends up with at the end of the film. Peggy is displayed as the kind of woman that men want—the woman who will be there for them in the home, a constant force preserving domestic tranquility amidst the trauma of war. This domestic representation is certainly challenged by Peggy's job at the hospital, but unlike Marie, she is never absent. Her work never takes her away from her family or from Fred; while she is a career woman, she is portrayed as a “good” career woman, the type that will ultimately still be there at the end of the day to support her husband and family. This positive representation, however, is offset and overshadowed by the clear negative connotations associated with Marie's participation in the workforce.

Though Marie and Fred eventually reunite happily, and she quickly quits her job now that the breadwinner has returned, her stint of independence has long-lasting consequences. Fred attempts to gain a higher-level job at the drugstore but finds himself returned to his old position; this professional struggle can be attributed to Marie's tampering with the house's balance of power. Meanwhile, Al is promoted to a special position of authority in his bank's dealings with the GI Bill. He, the man with his devoted wife and children by his side, succeeds in civilian life; it is no coincidence that Fred, who lacks this solid family unit, falters. Even after



Marie attempts to return to the home, the power dynamic has still been irreparably shifted: he is unable to provide for her and her expensive tastes, and their relationship crumbles to such an extent that she turns to a different ex-serviceman for comfort and passion. Her separation from their home and her traditional gender role has dislocated their relationship and Fred's ability to support Marie as the male head of the household.

After depending on Fred for financial support throughout the film, Marie asks him for a divorce. Tied in with this declaration is her statement that she will get a job and "work for herself" and "live for herself." As she displays her willingness to live independently and relinquish Fred's economic support, her statement links women's place in the workforce with the dissolution of marriage. This scene exposes contemporary fears about working women abandoning their homes, and Marie becomes the scapegoat of this breakdown of family structure. Even more damningly, this declaration of independence comes from Marie, the neglectful wife and quasi-villain who has insulted Fred's inability to get a job, wasted their money, and been unfaithful. The desire to support oneself financially is tied in with Marie's flaws; even though the film displays a woman who is willing to get a job and support herself, this image of an independent career woman is soured by her vilification. Ultimately, we never see whether she can support herself; we only see Fred finally find work and reconvene with Peggy. The film thus puts little emphasis on Marie's pledge of independence. Through Marie, the film highlights the social threat and disloyalty implicit in the career woman. While Marie is at one end of the spectrum of working women, a scale in which devoted Peggy is at the opposite end, the focus on her career and its ties to her inability to be a good wife put domestic life and working life in sharp opposition.

Mayo's and Loy's roles assert a similar message: the woman who supports her husband is the kind of woman that veterans, and all American men by extension, need, and the kind of woman that all women viewers should thus emulate. This kind of woman would not only breed a happy family life but also fulfill their American duty of supporting their country's soldiers. Milly stays devoted to welcoming her husband back into civilian life, while Marie's inability to do so for Fred spells professional failure for him and discontent in their marriage. Peggy takes on this nurturing role instead, and she ends up with Fred at the film's conclusion. This film makes it clear—women who fulfill their responsibility to their husband, household, and the country at large are the most moral and desirable.

In film press, Myrna Loy was regularly placed within the realm of the domestic. Though she started out in “vamp” roles, over time she gained the image of “the perfect wife”—a role she embodies completely in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Fristoe). This transition is noted by *Modern Screen* in August 1947, in which her husband Gene Markey describes first being introduced to Loy. Despite his doubts about being set up with “a siren,” a friend encouraged him that “Myrna is no siren. . . . She's a simple American girl. . . and it would not occur to her that the famous Gene Markey could be anything but bored in her presence” (Jeffries 69). From the start, Loy is presented as an ideal American woman—humble, gentle, and submissive to a more powerful man. Loy then became Markey's wife, with supposedly the same amount of perfection as the wives she played onscreen. Alongside an image of the couple, a subtitle states that Loy “proves . . . that her role of perfect wife is real as well as reel” (68). Markey's evidence of her “perfection” ultimately includes her “magnificent” cooking and her ability to complete tasks

under pressure (107). These statements point toward the same idea: the press's constructed version of Loy's life clearly reinforces the domestic representations she embodied in film.

Loy's image as a working woman is unique, as she took on wartime work with the Red Cross. In its depiction of this labor, the press affords her a sense of honor. Hank Jeffries explains that Markey supposedly admired Loy for quitting acting during the war to take on wartime work (Jeffries 107). This praise, on one hand, might negate some of the overtly domestic language used previously—Markey shows respect for women's willingness to take on wartime work rather than rebuffing his wife's attempts to work outside the home. However, at the same time, the article specifically notes that Loy was one of the “actresses who gave up their careers entirely during the war” (107). This statement sets up wartime work as separate from Loy's career, showing that her position with the Red Cross was a necessary duty as an American woman rather than an actual job that she would maintain after the war. Through this conception of Loy as a wartime worker, women's personal experience and fulfillment in these jobs is diminished in favor of pure necessity and American duty. In contrast, a 1945 article in *Screenland* states Loy's plans to continue her Red Cross work after the war (Benton 74). Yet her focus in this position, rather than her own fulfillment or exploration, seems to be the returning veterans and their morale and wellbeing—in effect acting as the “perfect wife” for all these servicemen (74-75). Loy's image, though complicated by her own role in the wartime workforce, mirrored Milly's—she was overall a symbol of the supportive, ideal wife.

Virginia Mayo had a similarly sweet image, but one that was less tied to her role as a wife and more to her appearance, as she was known for her “peaches and cream” beauty (Toole). In 1946, *Modern Screen* compared Mayo to “a great big peach ice cream soda with whipped

cream” in a review of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), of which Mayo was the female star (Kilgallen 14). At its core, this odd description of her features is as demeaning as it is seemingly complimentary: Mayo, an accomplished actress, is likened to a dessert, trivializing her and setting her up as an object of visual pleasure rather than a working professional. That same year, Mayo appeared in a *Modern Screen* advertisement for Jergen’s Lotion which reads, “Learn from Virginia Mayo—How to have the most adorable hands” (Jergen’s Lotion 68). Again, these representations of her, emphasizing her “cuteness,” highlight Mayo’s physical features and pleasant onscreen appearance rather than her accomplishments and ambition.

Though less influential for her overall star image, Mayo was still represented as a wife. She’s often seen with her husband Michael O’Shea in the 1948 editions of *Modern Screen*, unlike her unfaithful character in *The Best of Our Lives*, but she’s unable to escape Marie’s powerful presence. One April 1947 column from Louella Parsons calls Mayo “the girl who plays the naughty wife . . . so well” and goes on to describe Mayo’s disappearance following a spat with O’Shea before they were married (“Good News” 8). Mayo is placed alongside Marie as she herself performs an act of rebellion in response to a man’s actions. Though she makes no claim of independence or separation, the article hints that Mayo’s “naughty” side links her to Marie in *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

Yet Mayo’s own image tended more toward submission than her character’s. In a self-written column in *Modern Screen*, Mayo asserts that women don’t often treat their men with proper care. Because this message wasn’t uncommon at the time, many celebrities and advice columns were releasing suggestions for how to best care for and remain attractive to one’s husband (May 63, 66). The larger ideas of the article, in which Mayo disagrees with women who

see men as inherently immature and try to “change” them, seem to push for more equal relationships between men and women (Mayo 21-22). However, Mayo ends up giving detailed instructions for how to handle men at social events, implying that women are meant to be caretakers, always at their husband’s beck and call (71-72). What’s more, Mayo directly ties women’s conduct with a husband’s desire to stay in the home rather than “loitering at bars” (72). Women thus need to behave and treat their men a certain way if they want them to be happy at home and, by extension, to remain faithful. Mayo makes the article’s intended message all too clear as she concludes, stating that women should let men “be head man around the old rancho. He’s probably better fitted to be a boss than you are” (72). Like other stars at the time, Mayo instructs the press’s readers how to care for a husband and be a suitable, desirable wife within a male-dominated home.

Mayo and Loy, while in opposition in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, are depicted similarly in film press. Both appear as submissive, dedicated women, the likes of which would be worth adoration by readers and fans. These images display their devotion to their men and to their roles as wives. At the same time, *The Best Years of Our Lives* and the press surrounding its actresses work together, portraying a similar cautionary tale for any women interested in a career. While women are not fully advised to avoid careers, as Peggy balances work and home life, Marie acts as the film’s token career woman—selfish and heartless, she abandons her husband. The film asserts that women must be fully devoted to a husband and domestic life before they can think about taking on a career, while the press depicts how women can best act on this devotion. A woman’s home life must not suffer on account of one’s work outside the home; otherwise, she is not fulfilling her duties to her family. These representations, focused on Mayo’s and Loy’s

domestic lives and the responsibility that Marie and Milly have to their husbands, call on all women to keep their own husbands and households in check.

### **Susan Hayward in *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman: A Career Woman's Domestic Joys***

*Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* features a woman who starts with Marie's independence, plus ambition and talent, but ends the film with Milly's devotion to her husband and children. In *Smash-Up*, Susan Hayward takes on the role of Angie Evans, a working woman returning to the home. When the film begins, Angie is a successful singer performing at clubs around the city. At home, she is a supportive companion to her eventual husband Ken, whose own singing career is in a slump. Yet the film does not follow *A Star is Born* and depict his emasculation; though she is a commercial success, Angie does not dominate her husband. Her financial power is never mentioned, and Ken never clearly struggles with the fact that his wife is more successful than he. Instead, Angie is the one who struggles when Ken finds his own success and tells Angie that she doesn't need to work anymore. While disappointed, she happily agrees to take on a life in the home and follow her husband's wishes. Angie remains a bright-faced wife whose only desire is to support her husband. This plot mirrors the experience of many women during the postwar years: when husbands returned, wives no longer needed to work to support themselves. By leaving her career and happily allowing her husband to be their sole provider, Angie surrenders to social norms and reflects the widespread campaigns encouraging women to reclaim their domestic roles.

While Angie takes on the role of supportive housewife, her difficult transition to this position implies that women deserve the chance to work outside of the home. Angie begins to

drink heavily as she adopts her new domestic role. During a party, Angie's old agent, Mike, remarks to her, "Insidious, isn't it, Angie? . . . All this leisure. So much of it makes you realize what work really meant." In response, Angie claims that she doesn't miss working at all and quickly goes back to describing the drink that she's making. She attempts to convince herself that she is content in her new way of life, turning to alcohol for comfort. The film now seems to long for the war years when women were working outside of the home. As early as the late 1940s, writers observed that women often desire a life outside of their home and argued that they should seek employment if full-time housework affects them negatively (Weiss 56). Angie serves as a symbol of this sort of woman, one who might turn to alcohol to deal with their idleness, especially after having to give up a successful career. This film delves into the personal feelings of the housewife rather than simply celebrating her helpfulness to her husband. We witness her nightmares and follow her through loneliness and paranoia as she suspects her husband of infidelity. The film thus suggests that she ought to be more than a housewife: her alcoholism and emotional struggle criticize the push to revert to patriarchal norms of housewives and working husbands.

Despite these progressive themes, the film ultimately goes on to champion domesticity. At one point, Ken enters Angie's bedroom to find her sitting at her vanity, slumped over and drunk. The camera takes on a subjective angle so that it seems as if the viewer is standing behind Ken, looking at Angie alongside him. The viewer can take on Ken's point of view and share in his disappointment and disgust; we are made to take part in his judgment of her. Her struggles, while indicative of her desire to work outside the home, are also shameful. Ken takes it upon himself to find a solution to her troubles, but his solution is self-serving: rather than allowing her

to have a career, he decides to let her plan a party for his work. The film then cuts to such a party, in which Angie has completely changed. Her doe-eyed look has returned as she graciously welcomes guests. She wears a dazzling hooded gown that sparkles; Ken rewards her with affection and tells her how proud he is. While this film explores Angie's discontent with home life, this scene shows that carrying out household duties such as planning parties not only lifts Angie's spirits, but also brings her back into her husband's favor. While her happiness is short-lived, and she turns to alcohol for solace during the party, the film a direct correlation between Angie's responsibilities as a domestic woman and her transition to a happier state. Through her husband's guidance, she has relinquished her misguided ways and finds temporary fulfillment as a homemaker.

While the film again takes on a modern view of women when Angie and Ken separate and she goes back to work, this stroke of independence is short-lived. Angie does not overcome her alcoholism because of her career or newfound independence; it is only through her role as a mother that she achieves contentment. At other points in the film, Angie struggles with her desire to drink while taking care of her young daughter, but eventually abstains. Motherhood, as well as homemaking, helps combat her alcoholism and sadness. In the film's climax, after leaving behind a lit cigarette in her child's room, Angie heroically saves the child as the room is engulfed in flames. She sustains burns and is taken to the hospital; during her recovery, her condition improves only when her child is brought to her. At the film's end, Angie has returned to Ken's side and is supposedly cured of her alcoholism. It seems no coincidence that the act of saving her child leads to her sudden reformation; her role as a mother proves vital and transformative. Angie resumes her position as mother and wife as she gives up alcohol for the love of her child



and a place back in the home with Ken. The film's final image is a view of the back of Angie's head as she looks up at her husband; as she returns to her domestic roles, our connection to her inner life and emotions is severed. Her personal experiences lose importance as the film instead focuses on her return to the domestic role all women were expected to play at this time.

Prior to the film's idyllic ending, the complicated depictions of the contrast between domestic life and life in the workforce might have given women viewers pause. Housewives might have been pushed to question their own lives, or they might have simply seen the film as a fictitious hyperbole. Women working outside of the home might have feared the possibility that, amidst low-paying jobs and unsupportive working conditions, they would become housewives themselves one day. In the end, this film displays motherhood as the cure for Angie's restlessness, loneliness, and addiction, and depicts her as merely a mother and wife. There is no indication that Angie will return to work: being at home with her husband and child is enough to bring her happiness now, sending a clear message to its audience about women's place in society. While career life is not necessarily criticized, the film teaches that a women's life in the home is more important.

Away from the screen, film press representations of Susan Hayward often emphasized her domestic, feminine roles over her ambitions, much like the film's treatment of Angie. While her talent and work were recognized, there was a catch. A 1951 edition of *Screenland* boasts the title "Nothing Stops Susan!" as it talks about her willingness to perform stunts and risky scenes "for the sake of her profession" (Hendricks 42-43). However, this seemingly respectful article begins with infantile language. Hayward is described as "delicately formed" and "tiny," with "an air of appealing helplessness" (42). While the article goes on to state that she is not, in fact,

helpless or fragile, praising her dedication to her career and her willingness to do unfeminine physical work, it clearly demeans her to keep her from seeming too threatening (42). While Hayward will perform any stunt for the sake of her films, the press notes that she does so “blissfully,” associating her with weak, fanciful language to further soften her image (42). The press seemingly acknowledges the hard work that Hayward put into her career, while at the same time infantilizing her and supporting limiting views of women’s capabilities.

Though her career receives honor, Hayward’s work also comes into conflict with motherhood. A 1950 edition of *Modern Screen* includes an article authored by Hayward herself in which she describes her experiences as a mother. After employing a nurse for her children and returning to work, Hayward found “that something was wrong” (Hayward 34). She demanded that the nurse take the night off and that the children be brought to her bedroom; Hayward then realized that “having children doesn’t make you a mother; only mothering does. I had been missing the infancy of my boys” (35). Hayward emphasizes the importance of spending time in the home and being an active mother. While she does not advocate quitting work entirely, she notes that after her next pregnancy, she will take a year off and stay home (95). Hayward even describes the “new wonders” that her children show her and which make her life meaningful (34). Just as Angie’s child leads her away from her alcoholism and toward a new life, Hayward’s life appears totally changed by motherhood. Though this piece is attributed to Hayward, the press uses her voice to assemble its own clear ideology. Though she is portrayed as a working mother, her separation from the home is clearly described as limiting and emotionally harmful. The press thus presents Hayward as the ideal mother, one who knows the importance of being in the home and maintaining devotion to one’s children.

Hayward's devotion extends to her role as a wife, as *Modern Screen* describes Hayward as the ideal mate to an ideal husband. She explores her marriage with Jess Barker through her role as a mother, as motherhood supposedly brought the two of them closer together and helped them through many conflicts (Hayward 95). This article supports the idea of the nuclear family, as full, active motherhood improves their marriage. Hayward admits to some feelings of professional competition between them as actors, as well as other disagreements, but explains that the children helped to counter all of that (95). Accordingly, Marcia Howard describes their household as ultimately centered around "the development and training of their twin sons" (67). At the same time, Hayward's role as a domestic woman comes with domestic activities such as sewing and making her own clothes, with which Hayward seems happily occupied (36). Such an image runs contrast to the image of Angie, whose time at home is spent languishing in alcohol. The press thus crafts an opposing image in which a career woman can enjoy being at home and make herself useful even when she is not at work.

Yet this vision of domestic bliss was not based in truth. Hayward and Barker eventually went through a divorce preceded by Hayward's accusations of "cruelty and grievous mental anguish" against Barker ("Susan Hayward"). *Modern Screen* conceals the truth behind their tenuous relationship in favor of constructing an ideal family life based on family values and hinged on patriarchal views of motherhood and marriage. Yet in film press, Hayward was both a picture of feminine beauty and a doting mother. Despite her marital discord, film press describes the serenity of her home and her ever-present devotion to her children, setting her up as an exemplary wife and mother. Hayward supposedly managed to find happiness and excitement in the domestic sphere, even as she continues to be involved with her career. At the same time,

mentions of her career and skill are offset by infantilizing language. Hayward, though an accomplished career woman herself, displayed the joys and necessity of domestic life.

While the representation of Hayward's comfortable, fulfilling home life contrasts with the fears of idleness displayed in *Smash-Up*, the two works ultimately agree on the importance of marriage and motherhood. In film and in real life, Hayward is honored for returning to the home and remaining unthreatening to her husband's masculinity. *Smash-Up*, even in its portrayals of the negative aspects of leaving the workforce, asserts that making a full return to dedicated motherhood can assuage any emptiness or loneliness that a former career woman feels. Fan magazines mimic this claim, as they link Hayward's domestic duties and childrearing capabilities with her joy and stability. Hayward served as an example of the happy mother and housewife, encouraging women viewers and readers that true bliss could be found at home.

### **Katharine Hepburn in *Adam's Rib*: Independent Women at Work and at Home**

*Adam's Rib* features a career woman with talent and passion equal to Angie's—what's more, she has no children and holds a career in the same field as her husband. However, she too is relegated to a submissive role in her household. *Adam's Rib* features Katharine Hepburn as Amanda Bonner, an accomplished lawyer married to Adam, played by Spencer Tracy, who is a lawyer himself. At home, they have an equal relationship; they discuss court cases together in bed, each holding their own as they break into heated discussions. They even share domestic duties; at one point, Adam wears an apron as he cooks dinner for himself and Amanda, placing himself in the domestic realm. When the pair finds themselves in opposition in the workplace,

however, their relationship and power dynamic is put in jeopardy; what's more, this conflict is based entirely on Amanda's desire to fight for women's equality.

Initially, the Bonners argue about a woman who attempted to shoot her unfaithful husband; while Adam claims she ought to go to jail, Amanda defends her right to protect her home. After Adam's firm assigns him to this case on behalf of the woman's husband, Amanda begins to consult with the woman and is hired as *her* lawyer. Though Amanda does not hesitate to oppose her husband during the trial, Adam becomes frustrated as she becomes dedicated to upholding equality and, according to him, disregarding the law. His feelings deal with more than just lawfulness, however, as her fight for equality ends up threatening his own masculinity as a man—and a husband.

Amanda brings in several witnesses to prove her argument, all accomplished women, and in the process physically usurps Adam. One witness, a weightlifter, proves her capabilities by lifting Adam over her head; this witness, superior in strength and traditional masculinity, and his own wife make him a laughingstock in his professional life. Adam has been publicly infantilized and emasculated, pushing him to storm out of his and Amanda's home. This situation also seems to point to Adam's frustration with losing dominance in his relationship with Amanda. As he states, Adam wants "a wife, not a competitor." Though he seems supportive of her career and her equal status in their home, when she challenges gender roles in the workplace, Adam becomes uncomfortable and unsettled, and their marriage is put in jeopardy. He directly accuses her of this dissolution, telling her "you'll split us right down the middle." While neither character is clearly portrayed to be in the wrong, Amanda begs for his forgiveness and the chance to discuss the matter further while Adam gives a measured explanation of Amanda's "contempt for the

law.” Thus, the film gives Adam’s ideas credit and criticizes women not for pursuing careers, but for allowing their careers to eclipse their marital role. Such an image mimics postwar fears of working women who might abandon their household for the workplace and leave their families in disarray; the film thus argues for the devotion that women must uphold to their husbands and homes.

Despite Amanda’s capability as a working woman and devotion to her cause, the film’s ultimate position on the issue of equality is fraught and uncertain. She wins the case, securing a victory for her client as well as, in Amanda’s eyes, all women. Within her household, however, she has fought a losing battle. Adam appears to her, while she is in the company of a flirtatious neighbor, with a gun, stating his right to shoot the pair to protect his marriage. Amanda, out of fear, states that no one has the right to threaten another person, thus contradicting the whole basis of her legal defense and proving Adam’s point, as according to his plan. Though she achieved a victory in the legal system, Amanda loses the argument with her husband while Adam regains the dominance that was stolen from him in court. The film thus grounds itself in opposition to equality; all of Amanda’s efforts are delegitimized as the man of the house is proven superior. Both the issue of equality and Amanda’s abilities as a career woman are looked down upon so that Adam can prove his point and regain his manly dignity.

The film does not assert that Amanda should completely submit to Adam, however. She does not immediately side with him, apologize for her behavior, and admit defeat; instead, the pair plans to divorce. They meet with an attorney to split up their belongings, signaling their equal status even in the dissolution of their marriage. Even when they eventually reconcile, Amanda does not relinquish power. At the film’s end, Adam states his plan to run for county

court judge as a Republican. While this decision signals his ascension to a professionally dominant role, one that might free the couple from future conflicts, Amanda implies that she might consider running as the Democratic candidate. Adam tries to change her mind, but in her final lines of the film, she asserts that men and women are more similar than different—again arguing for equality. Yet Adam, in the film's final line, celebrates the differences between men and women. The conclusion of *Adam's Rib* implies that women should follow their ambitions even if it means opposing their husband's power, while also reasserting Amanda's misguided notions and cementing Adam's voice as more reasonable.

Overall, the film highlights feminism and equality but fails to fully live up to these themes itself. Amanda, though outspoken and accomplished, is ultimately made the butt of Adam's prank as her mission and feminist beliefs are disproved. Yet in the film's ending, her ambition is intact. While the film may cast doubt on feminism and women who try to balance work and marriage, it also gives proud professionals like Amanda the chance to chase their ambitions. The film depicts an equal marriage in which Adam does not wield exorbitant power and takes up domestic roles, but he does not support his wife's feminism. Considering the film's ending, it certainly highlights strong career women. However, it also depicts the barriers and struggles of being a working woman. The resounding message is that career life, though admirable, may inevitably put your marriage and household at risk.

Within film press, Hepburn was just as independent as Amanda; one common topic was her propensity for wearing men's pants to work (Reid 68). She also avoided publicity and interviews; a 1940 *Modern Screen* article remarks that its author was lucky to have gotten her to agree to an interview (Reid 27). Hepburn's relationship with the press did not improve over time;

in September of 1950, one reader consults *Modern Screen*'s "The Inside Story" column to ask why the public never hears about Hepburn (4). Though she refused interviews that tried to invade her private life and gained a reputation as "difficult," her peers praise her work ethic, and interviewers regard Hepburn as honest and genuine (Reid 27, Parsons, "Good News," May 1950 12). Parsons's 1950 discussion of Hepburn is particularly nuanced, as it mentions Hepburn's political views—a shift from usual discussions about women's families and home lives, which Hepburn likely wanted to hide from the public (12). As Hepburn noted in 1940, she disliked that interviewers would ask questions about her children or her marital status rather than about acting (Reid 70). Her private affairs were kept private, such as her longtime affair with Spencer Tracy—which Hepburn only began to speak about in the 1980s (McNary). As she was unwilling to delve into more domestic or romantic subjects, which were rampant in star magazines during this time period, stories about her are scarce. Though Hepburn is often referenced and held up as a Hollywood icon in the years surrounding the release of *Adam's Rib*, the mentions stop there (Harmon 73).

As Hepburn's press appearances are limited, it is necessary to investigate a wider chronology of publications than in my previous analyses. Earlier pieces featuring Hepburn were lengthier; even when Hepburn was featured in the press, she was not automatically relegated to domestic or feminized subjects. James Reid's 1940 article discusses her relationship with the press as well as her preparation methods for her roles (68). Hepburn is described, in this publication as well as others, as an independent go-getter, a glamorous icon even in her inability, and likely disinterest, to fit into usual Hollywood molds (Reid, Harmon 73). At the same time, the press paid attention to her career; even in dealing with gossip about her distaste of



the paparazzi, the focus is on Hepburn as an actress rather than a mother or wife. A 1947 article praises Hepburn's ability to keep up a calm demeanor; while such a description may be based on stereotypes of women as dramatic, it also describes Hepburn based on her character traits and workplace capabilities rather than her domestic lifestyle (Berman 63). This article also features an image of Hepburn consulting with a producer about her acting, putting effort into her craft (63). A 1942 edition of *Modern Screen* reveals Hepburn's clout behind the scenes, explaining how she sold the script for *Woman of the Year* (1942) to MGM ("Katharine" 21). These images of Hepburn, though they may result from her unwillingness to talk about her private life, depict her as a proud, powerful career woman.

Hepburn, intent to keep her private life out of public knowledge, is displayed primarily in the context of her career life—a unique portrayal of a Hollywood actress at this time, and one that cements Hepburn's capabilities in acting and negotiation. She still managed to amass great fame while rebuffing industry norms, though her reputation may have been marred by her perceived lack of cooperation. As an individual, Hepburn was a symbol of the dedicated, capable career woman. Her own privacy with the press might explain why she, unlike other actresses, is shown in a more professional manner. Hepburn took her own approach to stardom, one that allowed these details of her private life to stay mostly hidden—thus shielding her from the domestic narratives that film press proliferated about most other actresses at this time.

Just like her character Amanda, Hepburn's focus is on her work. Both women work hard, utilizing their skills to achieve more for women—whether that be more power in their industry or equality under the law. As working women, they deal with the consequences of their ways of life; Hepburn is seen as aloof or hard to deal with, while Amanda finds her marriage threatened.

Hepburn's onscreen and film press images, however, are ultimately no worse for the wear.

Hepburn maintained her reputation as one of Hollywood's top icons, while Amanda ends the film with the same competitive nature that drove her and her husband apart. Neither give up their work ethic or desires. Amanda seemingly shares Hepburn's convictions, presenting a mostly positive representation of a career woman. Yet while Amanda's cause is ultimately disregarded in favor of Adam's pride, Hepburn stood her ground as she fought for positive, career-focused representation within film press.

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This theme of commitment, and these films, teach that career women are destined to experience dysfunction in their home lives. Like Marie, Amanda, and Esther, their marriages are bound to suffer as they break out of traditional gender roles and try to assert their own power. Even if these women leave the workplace, however, consequences will still arise; women like Angie who choose to return to the home will suffer emotionally until they fully devote themselves to their families. Esther attempts to return to the home and care for Norman, but the damage has already been done: he commits suicide to keep her from sacrificing her career. Though Amanda continues to work, and even hints at opposing Adam in the workplace again, she has been "returned" to the home as Adam achieves dominance over her in their disagreement. The one woman who refuses to succumb to her domestic duties, who emasculates her husband and even breaks the sanctity of her marriage, Marie, is replaced by Peggy, a working woman who embraces her traditional duties. Not all these women ultimately leave work for the domestic field; this theme of domestic commitment is more complex, and perhaps more progressive, than that. Career women, however, must be put in their place; they must recognize

the importance of one role over the other. They must, as Esther does in the final moments of *A Star is Born*, recognize that they are, above anything else, their husband's wife.

These film press representations mimic these themes of domesticity—except in the case of Katharine Hepburn. Myrna Loy was known as “the perfect wife,” while Susan Hayward is displayed as a vision of perfect motherhood. Images of Virginia Mayo succumb to male dominance in the household, presenting domestic images that align with those in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Judy Garland's career is often highlighted in intimate detail, but as in *A Star is Born*, her personal life often takes precedence as the press describes her love of motherhood. Hepburn is the exception, as her distaste for the press caused her to shy away from publicity. When she is featured in the press, her career is the main subject. Such a representation is not so separated from Amanda's passionate work in the courtroom, but Hepburn maintains a focus on her professional life. Overall, though distinct similarities exist between the representations of women's domestic commitments in film and in film press, the press sources allow for a more balanced view in which women are not all destined for submission or domesticity.

### **A Career Woman's Character**

While the previous themes dealt with women's relationships with their careers and questioned their place in public life, this theme operates differently. Rather than attacking women's abilities or roles, it attacks the women themselves. Moviegoers who encountered a woman character who not only was fulfilled by her career but who also chose to defy domestic commitments had to be discouraged from career life in a more fundamental way. Thus, this third theme targets career women directly in order to tie their fulfillment, pride, and ambition to

negative traits that sully the character of the career woman and, by association, degrade the very idea of career life. Success is tied to selfishness and ambition to cruelty. *All About Eve* exemplifies both of these relationships: the veteran stage actress Margo Channing, played by Bette Davis, is selfish, paranoid, and insulting, while ambition and cruelty come together through Eve Harrington, played by Anne Baxter, an aspiring actress who reaches fame by manipulating and mistreating the people around her. The most dramatic example of a career woman's harmful nature, however, comes from Barbara Stanwyck's journalist, Regina Forbes, in *To Please a Lady*. Her bold attacks on men threaten emasculation but ultimately have graver, life-threatening consequences.

These actresses' presence in film press proves, to some degree, that they were people worth emulating, admiring, or studying, saving them the same level of scorn and derision as their film characters. Even the press's depiction of Davis's own faults is light-hearted and personable rather than damning. The manner through which the press makes it known that the stars are admirable people, however, varies, and while their career success and talent is clear, these stars' home lives and possessions are wielded in order to attract interest. Davis and Baxter are linked to the domestic realm, while Stanwyck is tied to materialism, as previously discussed. Still, their character remains intact—the press grants both Stanwyck and Davis the honor they deserve as veteran actresses, and Baxter's quick success is recognized as well. They escape the films' level of attack on their character, though Davis weathers criticism against her career life.

### **Barbara Stanwyck in *To Please a Lady*: The Price of a Woman's Ambition**

None of the criticism volleyed against these actresses, however, measures up to the dramatic messages of *To Please a Lady*. This film features Stanwyck as a career woman on the job and reveals the deadly consequences of her ambition and fearlessness. Regina Forbes is an intense, hardworking journalist eager to uncover the latest scandal and give the villains of the world what's coming to them. Her newest target is Mike Brannan, a racecar driver whose dangerous tactics contribute to a fellow driver's accident and death. Yet all her passion and grit dissipate as Mike woos her and ultimately tames her bold nature. Regina's devotion to her work is questioned and attacked in this film, a story that ultimately placates her by anchoring her to a domineering man.

From the film's first images, Regina is put in a position of power—she sits at a large desk while others stand or sit around her, including her male colleague Gregg. Her placement implies a professional status even higher than the man in the room. After seeing Mike race, she has no qualms about harshly accusing him; Regina then takes the same bold approach in the blistering column she writes about him. Concurrently, Regina wages another battle, one that is, by no coincidence, also with a man: she has accused businessman Dwight Barrington of fraud for a pension fund that has of yet produced few results for its constituents. He comes to her begging for her to yield, calling her reporting “irresponsible gossip” and warning her that her cruel words could affect the success of his project. Yet she refuses to hold back, maintaining her devotion to truth and her integrity as a writer.

Her strength and passion, however, prove no match for Mike's masculine appeal. After her column about him becomes nationwide news, Mike is dropped from his racing deal and takes it upon himself to teach her a lesson, wielding his masculinity as he slaps and then kisses her—

punishing and wooing her all at once. From there, the unflappable, powerful Regina is put to rest, and a more romantic and cautious version takes her place. This change gives a clear message about strong career women who go toe-to-toe with men—ultimately, they just want to be dominated by a man. This image not only trivializes Regina’s abilities as a reporter but also cements the falsehood that all women will eventually settle down and become submissive to a man.

Regina’s growing affections for Mike immediately soften her reporting style; her journalistic integrity and curiosity are less important than remaining unthreatening to Mike. When Gregg releases a biting paragraph about him, Regina defends Mike’s honor. Her own moral compass as a writer and a human are less important than her need to be with this man, as Regina’s doubts about Mike’s innocence lead them to break off their relationship but quickly reconvene. While Mike changes his ways and rights his past wrongs, protecting a fellow racer at the cost of getting in a wreck himself, Regina does not wait for this change of heart before devoting herself to this man. Her opinions and reporting are delegitimized as she instead becomes fixated on pursuing Mike.

The film provides its greatest critique of Regina’s work when it is revealed that Barrington, indicted for fraud and facing a possible prison sentence, has committed suicide. As her reporting cast light on Barrington’s actions and influenced his fall from grace, she feels responsible for his death. The dangers of the “irresponsible gossip” that Barrington warned about have come to fruition. Mike attempts to defend Regina, though he himself was a “victim” of her work—in fact, he tells her, “you were just doing your job.” He now seems to support her efforts to reveal the truth, but he only does so now that Regina is no longer pointing out his own

misdeeds. Now that she is a tamed woman, he supports her. His assurance of Regina's innocence thus does little to combat the film's criticism of her. For a second time, Regina's work has endangered a man's career—and this time possibly even contributed to his death. It's significant that it is a woman who comes into this crisis of confidence, especially as women's role in the workforce was questioned so much at this point in time. In light of the context, the film seems to warn about what may happen if women are allowed to have power in the workforce—men will be put into crisis as their livelihood and capabilities are questioned by ambitious, selfish women who will do anything to advance professionally and unseat powerful men.

Though Regina relinquishes her power and integrity through the film, her career remains intact. In the final scene, Mike notes that their careers will often separate them. Rather than dispute Regina's career or suggest that she drop everything and follow him to his races, he accepts that they will both lead separate, independent lives; thus, both the man and the woman are allowed to maintain careers as well as love. On one hand, this film makes clear points about the position of women—so much so that a 1951 *Modern Screen* review of the film states that “as an insight into career women, it's mere male propaganda to keep women chained to the kitchen stove” (Maughan 12). Film and film press diverge here, as this contributor to film press, and thus this magazine by extension, critique the patriarchal messages of the film. Yet the film's intended message is still fraught in subtle ways. While Regina is criticized for her harmful ambition and tamed both physically and emotionally by a man, she does not give up her trade. The film is open to a more forgiving interpretation, but its less empowering points cannot be forgotten. *To Please a Lady* sends clear messages to its audience about how women should behave in relationships

and the workforce; the effectiveness of these messages, however, is debatable, as even contemporary audiences could identify its unfair representations of working women.

As I've explored Stanwyck's film press image previously, I will focus solely on how this image compares to her character in *To Please a Lady*. Her image focused mainly on her career, describing her acting techniques and history. Her romantic life drew attention, efforts were made to domesticate her, and her interests were boiled down to fashion and beauty, but overall the press did not include her in submissive and anti-career narratives. The press, in comparison to *To Please a Lady*, certainly presented a more forgiving portrayal of a career woman. Stanwyck often speaks on her devotion to her career, while Regina sacrifices her professional demeanor to pursue a relationship with Mike. Regina's own career goals and ambitions are not explored like Stanwyck's; Mike, it seems, is more important. Even in discussions of Stanwyck's own romantic trials, the press often dives into her career background, early life, and sometimes even her emotional experiences. She is treated as more than a man's lover and receives praise for her career rather than punishment; in contrast, Regina's work causes pain and suffering. Stanwyck's successful career does not warrant doubts about her character, while Regina is slandered to warn against ambition. The press thus provides a more optimistic view of working women, contrasting the blatantly limiting role Stanwyck took on in *To Please a Lady*.

### **Bette Davis and Anne Baxter in *All About Eve*: A Cycle of Career Obsession**

Though their ambitions do not have fatal consequences like Regina's, the successful career women in *All About Eve* exemplify selfishness and cruelty. Bette Davis and Anne Baxter play opposing career women fighting for success in the same industry; Davis plays Margo



Channing, an established stage actress whose talent inspires the adoration of aspiring actress Eve Harrington, played by Baxter. Charming her way into Margo's employment, Eve reveals her dastardly motives as she ridicules Margo in the press and blackmails Margo's friend Karen to secure a role meant for Margo. Ultimately, Margo and her social circle cut ties with Eve, but not before the ambitious actress has secured fame—and her own jealous fan. The film thus presents a cycle of jealousy and success among ambitious, conniving women. In this cycle, Margo and Eve switch between conceptions of women—between negative and positive, dominant and submissive, and domestic and career-focused. Through its two main characters, both proud, talented actresses, the film ultimately gives two contrasting depictions of career women—neither of which is positive.

At first, however, Eve is portrayed as a thoughtful, devoted working woman. When she first meets Margo, she describes her long-time connection with the workplace: she quit school to help her struggling family and worked to support herself after her husband died in World War II. Eve, like many women at the time, took on work mainly to support herself amidst financial strife. Her story touches Margo; Eve quickly endears herself to the actress, and the viewer is initially meant to empathize with her as well. Consequently, Margo takes Eve on as a kind of personal assistant, a role that Eve excels in; all of Margo's friends note how orderly Margo's affairs become, thanks to Eve. She ultimately aspires to be an actress just like Margo, and even these loftier dreams are not originally disregarded. Instead, Eve's obsession with Margo serves as a means through which Margo is portrayed as an irresponsible, selfish career woman.

Annoyed by Eve's obsessive attention, as well as her growing friendship with Margo's boyfriend Bill, Margo spends Bill's birthday party picking a fight with him and downing

martinis, ending up in a melancholic, drunken state. She insists that the pianist replay a gloomy dirge over and over, much to the distaste of her guests. The film depicts Margo as dramatic and self-centered through these behaviors as well as the words of those around her; Bill calls her childish and paranoid, while Karen tells her, “stop treating your guests like your supporting cast.” In one sense, Margo is unable to separate her life on stage, in which she receives praise for her dramatic nature, from her home life. Her great success has proved so absorbing that she can no longer live a life of normal domesticity. She even scorns domestic life; when Karen, a housewife, suggests, “as a nonprofessional,” that they ought to end the party, Margo sneers, “happy little housewife.” Margo yearns for the dramatics of her work and brings this behavior into her personal life. What’s more, she herself is unable to take responsibility for her actions; when Karen’s husband Lloyd, witnessing her drunken state, says he’d like to understand Margo more, Margo can only say, “When you do, let me in on it.” Her admission that she does not understand her own behavior grants her a sense of immaturity and recklessness. Margo, a successful and talented actress, is by no coincidence also impetuous, self-centered, and a heavy drinker. The stresses of her work, the fear that younger actresses like Eve may steal her spotlight, and her inability to separate herself from the privileges of her career harm her and her relationships. Because these problems are directly tied to her career, the film implies that if Margo were not an actress, she would not be acting in such a way. Her behavior thus sets up a clear message about the terrors and anxieties of successful career women.

Peter Biskind, in his short analysis of *All About Eve*, has a different conception of Margo. He titles her the “good career woman,” and he’s correct in doing so, as Margo undergoes a clear evolution of character (264). She becomes bound for domestic life and Eve, in turn, is revealed

to be a jealous, manipulative woman. As Margo apologizes for her previous behavior, she gives a long monologue about what it means to be a woman. In no uncertain terms, Margo remarks that the key to happiness, as well as womanhood itself, is love and marriage—“without that,” she says, “you’re not a woman.” In reference to her career, Margo says that she had to stop “being a woman” in order to advance professionally. The message is clear: womanhood and career life are inherently separate, and career life is a temporary state that precedes true fulfillment in marriage. Women, according to the film, cannot be fulfilled by anything other than a man, and certainly not by a career. Margo finds this supposed fulfillment herself when Bill proposes to her and, with this potential husband by her side, surrenders the leading role in Lloyd’s new play to Eve—for the sole reason that she is about to be married and no longer needs to spend time fighting for roles. Personally and financially, Margo no longer has a need for ambition; her life has been completed by a man. The film again asserts that career life causes anxiety and selfishness, as Margo only makes amends and reaches contentment when she begins to seek domesticity.

As Margo takes her attention away from work, Eve’s true evils are revealed. Instead of finding fulfillment through men, she wants to use them to find professional success. Eve attempts to steal both Bill and Lloyd, who are a director and a playwright, respectively. In her final attempt to reach fame, Eve claims that she will run off with Lloyd and gushes about the success she will have in his plays. She is doomed to fail in this pursuit of professional fulfillment, according to Margo’s beliefs about the futility of career success, and fail she does. Addison DeWitt, a guiltless theater critic, exposes Eve: she fabricated her dark backstory in order to charm Margo, and she lied about Lloyd’s intentions to run off with her. He claims that he won’t expose her, but only if she agrees to “belong” to him; this career woman who attempted to use

men for her own goals is forced to submit herself to a man. His offer is a punishment for her attempt to overthrow gender dynamics and a fulfillment of Margo's lesson: women, and their ambitions, will always fall prey to a man.

The film's final message warns that more career women of Eve's sort exist, and the film's cyclical nature persists. Echoing the film's beginning, Eve comes across a fan who is willing to do all of Eve's bidding—in exchange for success, of course, which the fan imagines for herself as she dons Eve's own clothes in front of a mirror. Eve is now the ideal, the Margo Channing to which young women aspire. This cycle suggests that successful women like Eve will always breed ambitious, jealous fans. Given the film's previous arguments about the nature of successful career women, the continuation of this cycle is without a doubt negative. Margo has escaped the cycle by choosing love over her career, while Eve's selfishness has perpetuated it. At its close, the film ultimately implies that if women would only devote themselves to being “real” women like Margo, there would be no more selfish women like Eve: women would all care more about love and husbands than their careers, and the world would be better off for it.

At the time of the film's release, both Anne Baxter and Bette Davis had seen tremendous career success—Davis was an accomplished veteran actress, while Baxter made a name for herself by her mid-twenties. Their successful careers mimic those of their characters in *All About Eve*, yet their film press representations reveal larger differences in how the press conceives of working women. Though Davis's character is not targeted to the same degree as Margo's, Davis earned a similar reputation as a dramatic yet inherently domestic woman. In his coverage of Davis's divorce from William Sherry, James Hathaway remarks on Davis's “explosive temperament” and the need for a man who is “strong enough to control her flashing moods” and

“tender enough to make her a blissfully contented young wife” (86). This representation of Davis as emotionally difficult, but with the capacity for domestic contentment, perfectly parallels the evolution of Margo from dramatic, selfish actress to blissful wife. Hathaway emphasizes Davis and Sherry’s domestic life to a dominating degree, including this quote from Sherry about his and Davis’s child: “Barbara smiles . . . . Bette’s face lights up, her troubles drop away. That’s my favorite picture of Mrs. Sherry” (87). Her child, rather than her career life, brings Davis true joy and comfort. Sherry takes it a step further to connect her to her role as a wife and mother by referring to her as “Mrs. Sherry,” though Davis continued to go by her stage name even after her marriage. He cements his ownership of her and the role she owes not only to him, but to their child as well.

This domesticity came into opposition with Davis’s work life, as the press blames her marital conflicts with the sometimes-violent Sherry on her own professionalism. According to Hathaway, Davis’s fear of failure pushes her to succeed but exhausts her to a point that makes living with a husband difficult (86). Career life and marriage are put in opposition as the article connects Davis’s work ethic to her success, but then questions the effect of that drive on her personal life. In order to save her marriage, the article urges Davis to relax (87). For one, such advice blames Davis for the problems in her marriage rather than validating her desire to leave a violent man. Additionally, it argues that giving up the hard-working, fast-paced nature that made Davis successful will cure her problems, implying that her career life is harming her marriage and that these two parts of her life are incompatible. Ultimately, the press excuses Sherry’s own faults in favor of pushing Davis toward domestic responsibilities and away from the traits that lead her to success.

Davis's work, though challenged, is by no means ignored. The press discourse about Davis emphasized her career passions and background, as she had a long-standing reputation as an engaging dramatic actress. One self-written article from November 1948 details her propensity for playing tearful, emotionally fraught roles (Davis 60). Davis describes her acting techniques and confesses that she loves to challenge herself (100). Her focus remains solely on her career and the individual, professional choices she makes. A 1951 *Screenland* article from Jerry Asher describes Davis's string of unsuccessful films and her new sense of fulfillment after finding new roles that suited her better (68). Again, the press does not shy away from publicizing her passion. Her dedication is highlighted further by an anecdote that describes how she lost her voice after screaming her lines for *The Story of a Divorce* (1951) and had to communicate with a notepad (70). The lengths she goes to for her work seem respected here, while Hathaway critiques her for this kind of laborious effort. To conclude, Asher focuses on Davis's biography from 1934; when asked about her greatest ambition, Davis answered, "To be a good actress" (71). This article ends with a clear emphasis on her career ambitions and success rather than her domestic commitments. Yet balanced visions of these different sectors of Davis's life did appear; she explains that her daughter appeared in one of her films and frequently visits her sets (Asher 70). Davis attempts to teach her child about her work, bridging the gap between domestic and professional—the press supports this realistic, nuanced relationship rather than championing domesticity or motherhood above career life. Though she was often portrayed within the domestic sphere, Davis's work life was a source of admiration rather than critique.

Anne Baxter, in contrast, escapes any similarities with her character and any tensions between career and home life. She was happily married upon the release of *All About Eve* and

had, it seemed, achieved both career success and domestic bliss. Her home life, as well as her home itself, were thus top matters of importance in the press. Baxter's home was explored in detail in *Modern Screen's* May 1951 "House of the Month" column, a piece about her and husband John Hodiak's decision to remodel their home. Detail is paid to every feature and piece of furniture in their new home, glorifying the materialistic side of their domestic lifestyle (Peterson 90-92). However, the piece also investigates the nature of their marriage. It starts off with Baxter refusing to move out of their small house; Hodiak shuts down her opinion by saying, "If you can't be constructive, why not be quiet?" (43). The article threatens to construct a clear hierarchy as Hodiak disregards his wife, yet Baxter then convinces him to remodel their home, asserting her own desires rather than obeying her husband's (44). From that point on, the two seem to exist on equal footing; Baxter notes that they were equally clueless about remodeling a home and thus hired an architect instead (90). Though the press holds their home up as a symbol of domestic happiness, it does not force Baxter into a submissive role.

Baxter's marriage and career coalesce in the press, again portraying a relatively balanced picture of her life. In 1949, *Screenland* ventures this question: "But this career business . . . . Aren't there headaches? Doesn't it interfere with a normal homelife?" (Jenkins 58) The tone of this question already seems to indicate an affirmative answer. Baxter, rather than exploring her home life, instead talks about the need to constantly keep up with the latest fashions; the article first seems to be uninterested in a real dialogue about how women can balance career and work life (58). Later, however, Baxter is more forthcoming, asserting that work matters are left outside of her home (59). Her words do not imply that career life results in competition, the disruption of power dynamics, or conflicts within one's household. Baxter confesses that she is not always

“the bright and cheerful little wife whom men eternally want to come home to” after she gets home from work, but she is unapologetic and explains that Hodiak also tends to act disagreeably (59). This press coverage implies that career life does not affect Baxter more because she is a woman, asserting equity, and again counters the image of the blissful domestic woman who submits to a man’s desires.

When the press attempts to focus solely on Baxter’s career life, its messages vary. Dan Jenkins describes her road to fame, fast success, and Academy Award win, establishing her as a reputable actress and even calling her “Hollywood’s youngest genuine ‘pro’” (57). Like Eve, she has pursued her ambitions, but in contrast, she has settled down happily with a man. Other mentions of her career do not allow the same balance; a 1952 article focuses on Baxter’s desire to be a sex symbol rather than on her acting talents. Though the article ends with a history of her career, it quickly diverts to explaining her marriage to Hodiak (Anderson 85). While the article allows Baxter the chance to take pride in herself as a sexual being and an independent career woman, pointing toward her success and even stating her hefty income, its final words remind the reader that Baxter is not just a sex symbol—she is also a mother (85) Baxter claims that “every girl, . . . , needs sex appeal” and, to close, the article notes that this statement also applies to women like Baxter who are married and have “given birth to an utterly delightful baby” (85). The focus of the article, Baxter’s sexuality, is muted as the article’s parting thoughts focus on her role as a mother.

The press’s depiction of Baxter’s lifestyle, though focused on equality in the home, was not based on reality. While film press is a construction in and of itself, Baxter’s happy union was perhaps more so a falsehood: by 1953, she and Hodiak had divorced as a result of “basic



incompatibilities” (Parsons, “Good News,” March 1953 14). They explained that there were no “career problems” at play, yet the press, in its discussion of their conflicts, had in fact blamed their issues on career life (Parsons, “The Inside Story,” Jan. 1953 26). Just two months prior, a reader asked *Modern Screen*’s “The Inside Story” column if Hodiak and Baxter were divorcing. The magazine curtly responded, “Just having career trouble” (26). To preserve its domestic picture of Baxter, the publication mostly likely lied to its readers and put the blame for any marital discord on the couple’s career lives. The previous sense of balance between Baxter’s professional and personal lives, though comforting to see, is called into question by the truth of Baxter and Hodiak’s relationship and the press’s blatant attempt to cover it up by blaming domestic issues on professional life.

Baxter and Davis, both successful actresses with a passion for their craft, were honored for their work and passion. However, though the press makes strides to balance their home and work lives, they are still pushed into domestic roles and fabricated visions of at-home bliss. Their roles as mothers are wielded, usually in an article’s final moments, to cement that, though they are working women, their roles as mothers must not be overlooked. Davis perhaps gets more chances to speak about her career experiences, but her own romantic troubles allowed her career to be weaponized and her character questioned, whereas Baxter’s career was less frequently a point of contention. Baxter’s representation might have been more forgiving, but only because she was not defying the image of marital happiness that Davis struggled to uphold.

In comparison with *All About Eve*, Baxter and Davis find a greater balance between career and work life than either Eve, who thinks only of her career, or Margo, who ultimately desires marital harmony over career success. Davis’s career merits attention even amid attempts

to domesticate her, and even in the press's fabricated images of her life, Baxter balanced home and work. Yet the press emphasizes Davis's taste for the dramatics, mirroring Margo's more negative moments, while Baxter escapes any comparison to Eve's selfishness. She is not an emotionally fraught career woman like Davis, nor a selfish, heartless career woman like Eve. The film asserts women's role as submissive wives and speaks against independent women through Eve's selfishness, while the press does not argue that either Baxter or Davis need to abandon their careers and instead emphasizes the roles they ought to fulfill: that of a mother, and that of a loving, understanding wife.

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Margo, Eve, and Regina exhibit a passion for their craft that Baxter, Davis, and Stanwyck shared. All found great success, but none could defy the limits of women's roles in the home and society. In film, these boundaries meant that women like Eve and Regina, those who defy what it meant to be a "woman," portrayed a threatening image to the balance of social life. Thus, this third theme acts as a failsafe; women who enjoy their careers and show disinterest in domestic tranquility must be immoral people. Eve and Regina harm others, whether by choice or through their harsh professionalism, and such characterizations ensure that viewers would not aspire to their level of ambition and independence. Eve is punished for her nature with a life of submission, while Regina softens, repents, and devotes herself to a man. Though Regina's ambition leads to fatal consequences, her career survives the film's attacks against it—with a catch. She has lost her competitive edge, but she does not leave her industry and devote herself to domesticity like Margo. Additionally, though this commitment to her work is not slandered, she has been punished and controlled by a man just like Eve.

The press did not so clearly attack the film's actresses for their own ambitions. Their achievements and performances are honored; the press admires and pays attention to the traits that the films criticize. While filmgoers might balk at the behaviors of these characters, readers would marvel at the talent and beauty of these actresses. These conceptions of these working women in the press, though displayed to the public for their viewing pleasure, were cautiously assembled and controlled. Their domestic roles are not always displayed outright, even in typically domestic planes such as Baxter's home life or Stanwyck's experiences as a mother. These roles instead appear more subtly, especially in the case of Baxter and Davis. Additionally, it can't be overlooked that while the values and character of Stanwyck and Baxter seem worth honoring, Davis withstood attacks on her work ethic and personality that displays film press's view of career women as dramatic and self-serving. The press allows some complexity in depicting these women, but it is not innocent of attacking the character of career women just like *All About Eve* and *To Please a Lady*.

### **Conclusion**

These films come from different directors, studios, and years; the press pieces similarly vary by writer, date, and publication. However, they all draw influence from the effects of World War II, and they all fit into the themes of women's fulfillment, commitments, and character. These works echo the public's fears about the displacement of women from the household as women continued to search for work opportunities after the war. Their reasons for working varied and did not always stem from a search for a purpose or a passion; for some it was patriotic, others financial. Yet across the board, their ability to work was discouraged. The career

women in these films and the actresses playing these roles receive similar treatment though they did not have the same experiences as these wartime workers. The women in these films were actresses, models, editors, and lawyers, yet even in these less strenuous and more traditionally feminine roles, Hollywood challenged their ability to perform labor and thrive in the working environment. Women like Madeleine (*Dishonored Lady*) and Lily (*A Life of Her Own*) find great success in their work, but they only truly want a man—discouraging women from leaving their families behind at home, gaining financial independence, and usurping gender norms. Naomi (*All I Desire*) and Angie (*Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman*) try to defy domestic roles and pursue their passions but are unable to reach their aspirations and thus recommit themselves to their roles as wives. Just as the war effort communicated that women’s wartime work was temporary, so are these characters shown that career life is not a guaranteed part of their future—not only because there is no need for them, but because women belong elsewhere.

Similar patterns appear as the representations of these characters reflect the three themes I have explored. Despite any other variance between these works, the recapitulation of these themes depicts their cultural power. These ideologies about career women’s place in society are repackaged repeatedly, as all the women in these films learn where they belong (the home) and who they belong to (a husband). Through the production of similar stories with slight variance between them, churning out film after film using the same mold, Hollywood reveals its role in capitalism. The product being sold, apart from the films themselves and the viewing experience, is the ideology that career women must, and will, be tamed and returned to their rightful position in society. Whatever variance that does appear simply serves to strengthen this narrative, as

career women of many different situations and personalities all end up adopting a more “correct” lifestyle.

Some of these characters are more literally placed in the household, such as Naomi and Angie, while Madeleine’s future promises domestic bliss. Their commitments as women chain them to these roles. Additionally, beliefs about women’s compatibility with work life communicates that women are more suited for domestic roles than anything else; Madeleine and Lily ultimately lose their will to live without love. The theme of women’s commitments thus works alongside notions of women’s fulfillment and functions to remind women of their more symbolic duties, as some of these women characters simply take on more submissive roles. Amanda (*Adam’s Rib*) relinquishes dominance to Adam, Eve (*All About Eve*) is made a man’s possession, and Esther (*A Star is Born*) embraces her position as her late husband’s wife. Yet none of these women abandon their careers; in fact, some continue to find joy in their work. Neither Regina (*To Please a Lady*) nor Amanda plan on becoming a housewife anytime soon; they even acknowledge that their work may put distance between them and their lover. Even Esther continues to work, though she defines herself as a wife. These representations might appear more positive, but Esther’s separation from the home contributes to Norman’s death, Amanda’s ambitions are disregarded, and Regina’s boldness supposedly leads to a man’s death. Together, these themes work to limit, reform, and, if necessary, punish a variety of women no matter their circumstances.

In contrast, the theme of character acts as its own punishment. It is no coincidence that women who refuse to coddle and make a home for men, such as Marie (*The Best Years of Our Lives*) and Eve, are villains. Marie’s claims that she will work for herself are her last lines before

her former husband moves on to be with a more supportive working woman. Eve continues working and finds tremendous success, but as an antagonist whose career sparks jealousy in other ambitious women. These women are punished, while another villainized career woman, Margo (*All About Eve*), escapes the defamation of her character by obeying the very structures of the previous themes: she begins to define herself as a wife, a role that she believes will grant her true fulfillment. These three themes converge in an even more powerful way: *Dishonored Lady*, *A Life of Her Own*, *A Star is Born*, and *To Please a Lady* all depict suicide. These films, and the themes they exemplify, thus argue that women's participation in the workforce and separation from traditional norms is a dangerous, life-threatening matter.

Such standards for women's behavior determined the way in which the film press conceived of Hollywood's working women. The success and drive of the actresses behind these roles was worth reading about in fan magazines, but even as it promoted their careers and images, this platform did not always treat them kindly. Women such as Turner and Lamarr, seen as domestic beauties rather than talents, were not given opportunities to explore their career paths and tell their stories like Davis, Stanwyck, and Hepburn. Others were denied discussion of their professional life by overt association with the domestic sphere; Lamarr and Turner experienced some of this treatment themselves, but Loy received the tagline of "the perfect wife," Hayward's life is defined in terms of her children and home life, and Baxter is held up as a vision of domestic bliss. Here, film press speaks clearly about their domestic commitments. Even the most progressive depictions make note of their domesticity or the materialism and fragility often tied to traditional notions of femininity. These women's careers could not be completely ignored, as their film posters and reviews also filled the pages of fan magazines, but

their position as working women, and women worth admiring, was based on their ability to fill traditional roles and spaces. At the end of the day, the press expected them to go home and recommit themselves to a home, a husband, and children.

The power of my three themes lies in their ability to work against each other, to be flexible in order to make their argument. They apply to career women in all types of films, in all types of careers, because they stem from the belief that all women, no matter their personality or skills or intelligence, were ultimately meant to find fulfillment as wives and mothers. These themes are without a doubt limiting, and their range clear. But we cannot ignore Hepburn's clear independence or Stanwyck's ability to speak on her own passions and emotions. Though the films present unforgiving visions of working women, Regina is willing to pursue her career even if she is separated from her lover. Amanda challenges Adam's dominance, and Lily decides to endure a life without love—both in their films' closing moments. What, then, is an audience supposed to believe as they come away from the film and return to their lives? Are these ideologies of women's commitments, fulfillment, and character still intact? These representations, though based in the same three themes, are not simple or clear-cut, and none prescribes fully to just one message about working women. Taking these pieces and viewing them together, however, creates a larger picture that brings context and clarity. Together, the force of these works is overwhelming. The ties between the themes speak to their cultural power, and their influence within this wider body of film and film press discredits these small examples of independence. Though encouraging on their own, they cannot hold up when viewed against the breadth of women characters who are punished for their ambition and the post-WWII

working women who were barred from professional opportunities and judged for their participation in career life.

Changing notions of women's capabilities and position in social life brought on fear and suppression; thus, even as film and the film press highlight working women, they discourage and silence their dedication to their work. The experiences of real women workers, the constructed lives of Hollywood's actresses, and the ideologies of womanhood presented onscreen all work together to illuminate the highly limiting, conditional, and tenuous position that society constructed for working women. Traditional womanhood had to be protected despite these women's talents, accomplishments, and passions. A world in which women could, like Marie, live and work for themselves would be a world in which women held financial and social power equal to or above men; this level of upheaval is thus repressed in order to uphold a patriarchal society. Films and film press sources thus constructed a tight image of women's priorities and desires based on inviolable expectations and consequences. These themes and ideologies, bridging between films and even within single characters, provide a wide-ranging, inescapable standard of acceptable behavior.



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