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"America's Nervous Breakdown": *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, Popular Psychology, and the Demise of the Housewife in the 1970s

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On February 28, 1977, local television station WJKW moved the soap opera satire *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from 11:30 p.m. to an earlier timeslot at 7:30 p.m.¹ The change upset residents in Cleveland, Ohio, who prompted their city council to condemn the station for airing the program during a time when young people might tune in and harm their "innocent minds." In response, station manager Bill Flynn bought an hour of prime-time television to allow the show's creator, Norman Lear, to defend the program against its fiercest critics. While addressing a panel consisting of the head of the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA), a journalist from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, a councilman, and an Episcopalian minister, Lear asked why Clevelanders were so concerned with his scripted TV show but not about the real-life incidents of homicide, rape, arson, and violence that dominated the nightly news airing at 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. Couldn't the news also harm "the innocent minds" of children, Lear asked. "Yes," the woman representing the PTA answered, "but that's not as real as *Mary Hartman*."²

Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman (MH, MH), starring Louise Lasser as Mary, debuted at the beginning of 1976 as the first nighttime soap opera (although it is also a satirical comedy) to run five days per week. The series, which lasted two seasons before Lasser quit in 1977 and aired 325 episodes in total, featured a white working-class family in Ohio, where the titular character struggled to find happiness as a housewife in a consumerist society. The series' central storyline concerned Mary Hartman's nervous breakdown, which Lear considered a metaphor for "America's nervous breakdown."³ Lear had two main objectives with the show. The first was to satirize daytime soaps, which *MH, MH* accomplished in its tone and style with its overuse of melodramatic organ music and extensive pauses to conclude insignificant scenes.⁴ The second was to comment on the prevailing idea that "commercial-driven all-day-and-all-night television" negatively affected the American family, especially, as Lear put it, "the housewife who was more inclined [...] to be at home with the TV on."⁵

Lear's objectives were achieved in large part by Ann Marcus, *MH, MH*'s head writer who had more than a decade of experience writing for soaps. Marcus' expertise in the conventions of soap operas, along with her own experiences as a wife, mother, and woman in the entertainment industry, influenced the show's commentary on television's prevailing negative influence over social behavior. Furthermore, grounding the series in a Midwest working-class city where the livelihood of residents revolved around an

automobile assembly plant allowed the writers to interrogate class and gender politics during a decade marked by sexual liberation along with the rise of feminist and anti-feminist movements. Embodying what media scholar Elana Levine refers to as sex-themed humor, which was prevalent in the 1970s, plotlines for *MH, MH* centered around edgy topics such as the impotence and infidelity of Mary's husband, Mary's own eventual affair, her sister's numerous lovers, and the exhibitionism of her grandfather Larkin as the "Fernwood Flasher."⁶ The series, however, did not simply present the characters' sexual expression as an outcome of the decade's radical sexual culture. Instead, the writers for *MH, MH* created the central characters, especially Mary and her husband Tom (Greg Mullavey) as conservative in their beliefs that marriage, children, a house, and consumer goods are what makes a person happy. Mary's appearance—her braided pigtails and pinafore with exaggerated puffy shoulders—mimics the child-like persona conservative self-help books claimed women should maintain to make their husband, and in turn themselves, happy. The contradiction between Mary's feelings of dissatisfaction despite the fantasies of happiness presented on television and the consumer goods that promised to make life better are what prompt Mary to unsuccessfully fix her problems with self-help advice which ultimately leads to her mental breakdown. *MH, MH*'s pathos, therefore, centers the role that pop psychology played among women who tried to make sense of their gendered role amid conflicting neoconservative and radical ideologies, and more generally, what caused a decade of angst.

Lear's use of a discontented housewife with mental illness to metaphorically represent the nation reflects how ubiquitous popular psychology became in explaining American anxieties in the 1970s. This was a decade marred by economic downturn and political failures, such as the 1973 Oil Embargo, Watergate, and the fall of Saigon in 1975. Social changes such as the Gay Liberation Movement, the Equal Rights Amendment debates, increased divorce rates, dual wage-earning households, and women's growing autonomy over their bodies also became lightning rod issues for Americans who considered such transformations a threat to the nuclear family. But concern over the decline of the family was not a partisan issue. Both liberals and conservatives, for different reasons, believed the Cold War family structure that the housewife was meant to uphold was deteriorating.⁷ As a result, debates about national decline as a cultural condition led to the rise of psychological analysis to explain not just personality disorders, but also generations, decades, and trends.⁸ In a 1976 *New York Magazine* article, for example, Tom Wolfe famously defined the 1970s as the "me decade," blaming white middle-class affluence for what he called a "narcissistic" generation.⁹ Yet the prevalence of psychological terms to diagnose the decade's problems reflects how mainstream such explanations had become. Working within this context, writers and producers for *MH, MH* incorporated the principles of psychology into the series to interrogate the pressure that consumerism and, ironically, pop psychology itself placed on the housewife.

Scholars have moved beyond overlooking the 1970s as an “undecade” caught between significant periods such as the turbulent 1960s and conservative 1980s. Historical literature has since examined how anxieties over the transformations of sex and gender norms in relation to the family fueled liberal and conservative debates about economic politics and democratic rights.¹⁰ Collectively, these transformations contributed to what historians Beth Bailey and David Farber have termed a “cultural crisis” that compelled Americans to look inward through therapy and self-help.¹¹ The study of cultural turning points as a *symptom* of political events has led historians to focus on the causes of generational malaise as stemming from political divisiveness and conflict about changing gender and sexual mores amid a society in flux. What the study of *MH, MH*'s production records reveal, however, is that pop culture—and by extension, pop psychology—contributed to anxieties about the demise of the housewife, which symbolized a declining nation.

I argue that the rise in pop psychology in the 1970s did not simply *respond* to generational fears; instead, therapeutic culture *induced* anxieties about the tenuous standing of US national identity under the strain of conflicting ideologies regarding women's public and private roles. I examine how pop psychology impacted American anxieties through an analysis of *MH, MH* in two ways. First, the tape-recorded and transcribed writers' meetings reveal that the creators of *MH, MH* identified television's role in reinforcing idyllic postwar family values that continued into the 1970s, and how the prevalence of pop psychology became a way to provide answers to everyday people—and women, in particular—who began to question the security and happiness that postwar consumerism promised. Second, viewers' letters show that *MH, MH*'s ability to identify women's unhappiness impelled audiences to question media's influence over their perceived authenticity as individuals. *MH, MH*'s realism, therefore, came from depicting characters' reactions to the realities of contemporary America within the context of a decade that upended the Cold War consensus connecting consumerism with happiness and national strength. Although Lear's reputation was associated with producing socially relevant sitcoms that highlighted structural issues that reinforced race, class, and gender hierarchies, *MH, MH* was different. The satire format prodded viewers to see themselves, their identities, and their politics as crafted from the omnipresent influence of media. Thus, *MH, MH*'s ability to elicit introspection from viewers made the show itself a part of therapeutic culture. This study has broader implications for understanding the anxieties that arise when national narratives about achieving happiness through economic and political systems are exposed as unrealistic cultural constructions.

Helping the Self, Helping the Marriage, Helping the Nation

In the early twentieth century, scientific psychology placed the onus of psychological management of the home on women. Although psychologists considered the failure of

men and women to understand themselves as a source for strained interpersonal relations, how well a family functioned hinged on the wife's emotional state. By the 1930s, marriage counseling developed in response to a more-than 2,000 percent increase in divorce rates and reports that revealed 50 percent of married couples were unhappy. Expressing concern over the effects fractured marriages could have on children's emotional health and, consequently, America's future generations, psychologists underscored women's gendered obligations to maintain marital success. Thus, marriage counselors advocated for secondary school and college courses oriented for girls to learn the "science" of marriage.¹²

In the Cold War era, psychological discourse became more easily embedded in the fabric of American's daily lives through popular culture. Taken together, this reciprocal relationship informed the postwar ideology of divided sex roles and women's confinement to the home. For example, psychodynamic theory in advertising taught Americans how to be citizen-consumers in the post-war economy.¹³ Through psychological research, marketing companies created "personality profiles" that catalogued buyers' consumer identity to predict the brands people were likely to buy. In advertising, marketers commodified buyers' identities and lifestyles by using psychology to tap into their unconscious desires and fears based on race, gender, class, and age. Although segmented market research acknowledged the heterogeneity of American consumers, white middle-class women were considered a homogenous group.¹⁴ Advertising, therefore, shaped the American housewife image, while entertainment television taught viewers how to adjust to postwar opulence. Accompanying the messaging put forth by commercial sponsors, sitcoms in particular used product placement to enhance the idyllic version of suburban white uniformity. Alongside advertising, shows such as *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* constructed an American identity that connected corporate interests with family values.¹⁵ By the 1950s, happiness had become a commodity.

In the midst of such marketing pressures, women who found themselves unhappy in their domestic role could find therapeutic relief through different forms of popular culture. Women's magazines featured self-help articles written by marriage counselors who educated readers about the value of domesticity and suggested techniques to find a sense of purpose in housewifery to overcome their dissatisfaction.¹⁶ Furthermore, women consuming daytime television soap operas could find relatable characters who struggled to find happiness and emotional stability in postwar family life. But, as with magazines, women's emotional problems in soaps were typically presented as personal ones disconnected from larger social forces. And yet, audiences found therapeutic value in these nuanced representations of the woman's search for happiness.¹⁷

Responding to depictions of women's discontent, Betty Friedan famously argued in her 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*, that popular culture and psychology created an image of "the happy housewife heroine" that shaped American women's

identities. According to Friedan, women's magazines, advertisements, television, movies, and novels were just as responsible as psychologists, psychoanalysts, and marriage and family experts for defining women's fulfillment as wives and mothers.¹⁸ Even though representations of unhappy women in soaps and magazines implied the fragility of postwar gender norms, dichotomous portrayals of happy versus dissatisfied housewives only encouraged women to internalize their discontent. Because the language to describe what Friedan called "the problem that has no name" did not exist, women often interpreted their unhappiness as housewives as a personal problem, something that only a psychiatrist might fix.¹⁹ Thus, as women were socialized to seek out the happy housewife ideal, they also learned to scrutinize their own mental capacity if they could not fulfill their prescribed role properly.

Friedan's critiques were not widely accepted at the time, particularly by some women. When an excerpt from *The Feminine Mystique* appeared in *McCall's* magazine, readers responded negatively. As historian Jessica Weiss has shown, women critics of Friedan considered their roles as housewives a contribution to the body politic, holding national and international significance. Their notion of domesticity was connected to a Cold War ideology of containment that viewed the family's stability as analogous to the country's strength. As one woman wrote to Friedan: "When the home falls apart, it isn't long until the nation falls apart."²⁰ Thus, when in the 1970s *MH*, *MH* presented the American housewife as a proxy for the nation, it was in step with cultural trends stemming from the 1960s.

What contributed to the fraught nature of the 1970s, however, was the way characteristics previously associated with the counterculture of the 1960s—such as natural foods, less-restrictive clothing, longer natural hair, open communication, spirituality, and greater sexual freedom—began to seep into the habits of the mainstream middle class. In what sociologist Sam Binkley refers to as "getting loose," new forms of self-expression created a degree of uncertainty and anxiety among people who tried to adjust to a new way of living that directly contradicted the norms they had been raised to uphold.²¹ Sexual liberation and feminist movements altered men's and women's expectations of what they wanted to put into and get out of intimate relationships. Thus, expressing what made each person in a relationship happy—or stimulated, in the case of the bedroom—was what could make a couple more intimate.²²

Complications arose from this "individualization of intimate relations," and portrayals of couples who lacked intimacy and failed to communicate dominated literature, film, and television. Increased divorce rates and popular culture depictions of unhappy couples fostered a bull market for psychologists who could provide relationship advice. In self-help books, magazine articles, and even television talk shows, psychologists provided different models for communicating as a prescription for sexual intimacy problems and relationships in general.²³ As more Americans attempted to navigate societal shifts and worked to understand how they fit between new and old ideologies,

they tapped into a broadening culture of self-help consumerism. The self-help market, however, was not solely dominated by liberal perspectives on intimacy and empowerment. Evangelical women created their own subculture with sex advice commentary that allowed them to respond to, and participate in, the changes in mainstream American sexual mores within Christian marriage. Conservatives used literature, workshops, and television talk shows to encourage sexual exploration and expression between husband and wife to counteract the decade's social and economic disorder and reinstate the patriarchal role for men in the household.²⁴ Moreover, conservative self-help presented an antidote to feminist claims that patriarchy and consumer culture caused women's misery. Rather than look toward men and sexism as the culprits of women's discontent, conservative literature pointed to women as the agents of their own happiness, which, it was believed, could determine the happiness of the entire family. As sex for pleasure, not just procreation, became an essential tenet for happy marriages in suburban and Christian homes, popular psychology encouraged sexual exploration as a treatment for marital troubles. Thus, by the 1970s, the ideology of containment that Friedan threatened with *The Feminine Mystique* could no longer be preserved solely through a defense of domesticity.²⁵

The pressure for women to analyze their psyches to strengthen themselves, their marriages and, in turn, the nation had existed since the development of psychiatry in the nineteenth century, but was relegated to gendered mediums, such as women's magazines. Yet by the 1970s, it was common practice for television to sensationalize contrasting viewpoints on the state of the modern American family and the demise of the housewife, which brought psychology once geared for a limited female audience to the broader public. In this context, the growth of the self-help industry became just another consumer good for Americans to purchase in their search for happiness. The cacophony of messages media hawked in the name of self-help contributed to American anxieties by selling conflicting theories and practices for achieving a sense of self amid changing gender and sex norms. In *MH, MH* this was especially true for women who were caught in the crossfire of feminist and anti-feminist discourse in their search to improve relationships with their husbands and children. "America's nervous breakdown," therefore, came from the awareness that the fantasy world created through media and consumerism was not real. Nevertheless, an ironic consequence is that the satirized portrayal of Americans' discontent made the television itself a therapeutic device for viewers to become aware of the consumerist factors that contributed to their unhappiness.

Making *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*

Norman Lear came up with the general idea to produce a night-time soap opera in 1968 but his ongoing productions of numerous sitcoms kept him from developing the concept. In addition to his prevailing obligations, Lear was unable to find a writer for his newly

planned comedy series willing to take on the project because of one unwavering demand: Lear wanted to open the series with the murder of an entire family, including their two goats and eight chickens. Unable to find a way to make a murdered family humorous, every writer Lear approached turned down the job, until he found Ann Marcus.²⁶ But by the time Marcus joined the writing team for what would become known as *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, the political landscape had changed and conservative influence over media policy impacted Lear's ability to find network support for the series.

At the same time, the rise of conservatism influenced the very critique of consumer culture that informed Lear as he shaped *MH, MH* in the nine years between the show's conception in the 1960s and its production in the 1970s.²⁷ In speeches, interviews, articles, and congressional testimonies, Lear expressed concern over the possible negative consequences of television playing such a prominent role in American households. Critics of Lear and his sitcoms shared the same concern, though their political motive for interrogating the medium's effects differed. By the mid-1970s, political perspectives on network television's purpose in American lives shifted. Liberal ideals in the 1960s advocated for more diverse programming to reach wider audiences, but by the following decade conservatives claimed that the medium needed to reach a "monolithic public" represented by a universal "American family" with shared values and interests.²⁸ Advocates for television reform who emphasized a need to protect "family values," therefore, couched their appeals in concerns over children as viewers.

Political interest in television's impact on children reignited in 1969 after the Surgeon General Scientific Committee on Television and Social Behavior investigated how violent and obscene images affected children. Network executives feared budget cuts because of the report's conclusions. Thus, broadcast networks and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) decided to self-regulate.²⁹ Early efforts to make prime-time television more "family friendly" came from CBS Entertainment president Arthur Taylor who unilaterally determined that a "family viewing hour" from eight to nine p.m. (seven to eight in the central time zone) would allow American families to "watch television in that time period without ever being embarrassed." Shortly thereafter, NBC and ABC joined Taylor's mission to make TV safe for parents and children.³⁰

When Ann Marcus agreed to take on *MH, MH* as head-writer and co-creator, Family Viewing Time regulations were already in place. Executives from ABC and CBS initially expressed interest in the series, but all three networks ended up rejecting the pilot by the late-1970s. Certain that American audiences would respond well to *MH, MH*, Lear sought an alternative plan to broadcast the show. He went directly to independent and multi-owned stations to sell *MH, MH* with the expectation that it would "open up a new marketplace for ideas and programs."

Over 70 stations carried *MH, MH* when the show premiered, but its ratings success led another 30 stations to pick up the program seven weeks into its initial run. In its second season, 125 stations nationwide carried *MH, MH*, reaching an estimated 55 million

households.³¹ In what was perhaps a dig toward network executives who rejected the series, Lear stated in *MH, MH*'s press kit that the show's future would "be in the hands of the people [who] should make all such decisions—the public."³² Despite the roadblocks Lear faced with getting *MH, MH* on the air, his freedom from network oversight allowed writers to discuss how media and consumer culture contributed to American anxieties and the nation's "nervous breakdown" when the US was politically moving in a more conservative direction and network television faced increased regulations under the aegis of "family values."

What made *MH, MH* particularly salient was the moment during which the show aired. The rise of neoconservatism and the push for family values increasingly supplanted the liberal political zeal for socially conscious television of the previous decade. Fans of *MH, MH* therefore considered the series a breath of fresh air, particularly since trends in popular culture began to lean toward nostalgic representations of the past. Hollywood's resurgence of Westerns, as well as films and television shows set in the 1950s like *American Graffiti* (1973), *Happy Days* (1974-1984), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), or even further back, like *The Waltons* (1972-1981) and *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-1983), strived to create what Andreas Killen refers to as "an imagined past of total harmony."³³

Although Lear conceived of *MH, MH*'s concept, it was Marcus who developed the show's storylines and main characters and influenced the direction of the show. In writing her scripts, Marcus would later explain, she drew inspiration from everything she ever read or saw (from real life occurrences to films and television), as well as her own life experiences and those of people she knew.³⁴ It was precisely Marcus's experiences as a woman in the television industry that contributed to the "realism" that so many viewers alternately appreciated and protested.

Marcus began her career writing for magazines such as *Life* and *Vogue* in the 1940s. During this formative period, she developed a feminist sense of self after reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), a book that Marcus felt spoke "directly to and for" her. Inspired by *The Second Sex*, and drawing on her own experiences as a writer for women's magazines, Marcus wrote an article for *Vogue* in 1953 titled "Are Women the Second Sex in Hollywood?" After interviewing several actors, including Ann Baxter and Ronald Reagan, Marcus concluded that as women fought hard in the highly competitive male-dominated film and television industry, they found their self-confidence undermined. Indeed, women were the "second sex" in Hollywood.

Marcus took considerable pride in her report, but *Vogue* rejected the article. In the years following, Marcus grew tired of writing unpublished essays and felt unfulfilled and bored when she tried to devote her time to being a wife and mother. She dabbled in acting and writing screenplays (*A Woman's Place*) and short stories that reflected her own life experiences as a working mother. For example, one short story she penned titled "Should Mothers Have Brains?" featured a woman who lamented having raised her sons

so well that even as young boys they thought they were superior and more knowledgeable than their mother.³⁵ By the early-sixties, Marcus participated in workshops with actors, writers, and directors at Desilu Productions, the company founded by Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, where she eventually found an agent willing to represent her as a television writer. With that connection, she met Ezra Stone, the first producer to offer her a job on a television show. In 1961, Stone invited Marcus to work on *The Hathaways*, which starred a childless couple raising chimpanzees as kids. However, Stone had one stipulation: Marcus could only have the gig if her husband, an established television writer, wrote the show with her. Infuriated by the blatant chauvinism that accompanied her first employment offer, Marcus swallowed her pride and took the job. In the coming years, she eventually became recognized as a credible writer independent of her husband.³⁶

By 1975, Marcus had an established career as a writer for many soap operas and dramas, including *Peyton Place* (1964-1969), *Days of Our Lives* (1965—), and *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* (1967-1973). After Lear hired Marcus, she recruited Daniel Gregory Browne and Jerry Adelman to make up the *MH, MH* writing team. Due to Lear's commitments to his other five sitcoms—*All in the Family* (1971-1979), *Maude* (1972-1978), *Good Times* (1974-1979), *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), and *One Day At a Time* (1975-1984)—the three writers worked under the direction of Marcus to flesh out the characters in Mary's family and to create ten new characters, in addition to writing the long-term storylines for the entire first season, including the first ten half-hour scripts.³⁷

Throughout the first season's 130 episodes, themes related to the omnipresence of psychology and media are woven throughout the series. Plotlines begin with a madman who kills a family in Mary's neighborhood. The police investigation leads Mary to meet Sergeant Dennis Foley (Bruce Solomon), with whom Mary later develops an intimate relationship. All the while, Mary's husband Tom is having an affair with his co-worker Mae Olinski (Salome Jens) but is impotent at home with Mary. In addition to Tom speaking with a psychologist, Mary reads self-help books about how to fix her marriage, she sees a sex therapist, later joins group therapy, and eventually works at a telephone helpline. Furthermore, the negative effects of television on society are presented through the portrayal of numerous characters' storylines such as the news anchor who seizes upon the murder of an Ohio family as an opportunity to present a juicy news story to viewers, the eight year old televangelist Reverend Jimmie Joe Jeeter who aptly dies when a television cord falls into his bathtub (he worked with his father in the Condos for Christ fundraising scheme), and Mary's nervous breakdown, which occurs while she is scrutinized on an evening talk show as the "Typical American Consumer Housewife."

When writing for *MH, MH*, Marcus incorporated many elements from her written work from the 1940s and 1950s. Most notably, she was able to write Mary as a woman, like Marcus's younger self, who felt guilty for longing to be something more than a housewife. Moreover, the writing team in brainstorming sessions pulled from contemporary books, theories, and discussions regarding women's sexuality. The main

point the group wanted to deliver through Mary's character was the difficulty modern women faced when trying to navigate the mixed messages presented in self-help culture and media about how to find happiness.

Between Feminism and Family Values

Psychological culture of the 1970s influenced the way Americans discussed and understood contemporary events and trends. Cults, radical political groups, drug use, and sexual experimentation—among other changes in the decade's culture—all led to analyses of the psyche in search of explaining what caused people to distance themselves from societal norms. Doctors and social critics looked toward changing family structures from the 1960s to understand mental illness and fanaticism in the following decade. Hollywood also provided its own version of this prevailing story through films such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Sybil* (1976).³⁸ Although fewer attempts to understand human behavior took place on television, *MH, MH* became one of the most notable shows to dramatize psychopathology and the demise of a typical nuclear family. The *MH, MH* press kit described the soap as having "a wry sense of humor that is satirical, humanistic and realistic," and explained how the average person reacted and interacted "to the realities of contemporary America."³⁹

Set in the fictitious working-class city of Fernwood, Ohio, *MH, MH* begins with the murder of a local family of five, along with their two goats and eight chickens. Although Mary lives close to the scene of the crime and has her kitchen television tuned to a news reporter (a character based on the popular investigative TV journalist, Geraldo Rivera) detailing the horrific violence, it is not enough to distract her from questioning whether the new cleaning product she purchased truly lives up to its promise of removing the "waxy yellow buildup" that has developed on her kitchen floor. Echoing arguments put forth by psychologists and social critics of the decade like Tom Wolfe, Lear instructed the writing team to address the "lunacy of our escalating consumer culture" in the opening act of *MH, MH*. Ann Marcus captured Lear's vision in the famous opening scene: "My, who would want to kill two goats and eight chickens?" she asked without taking her eye off the can of cleaner. "And the people. Of course, the people."⁴⁰

Leading actor Louise Lasser developed Mary's character, while Marcus and the writing team created storylines about Mary's search for her sense-of-self, her husband Tom's "performance anxiety" in the bedroom, and Mary's eventual nervous breakdown (Figure 1). In the show, Mary takes on the responsibility to fix her marriage and looks for advice through daytime television talk shows, *Reader's Digest*, and self-help books from the library with titles such as *You and Your Climax*, *343 Ways to Improve Your Marriage*, and *Orgasm and You*. The writers emphasized the prevailing psychological culture of the decade through storylines that included Mary hiring a sex therapist, who in a plot twist turns out to be a sex surrogate, and her experimentation with personal growth therapy

referred to as STET, a spoof on the decade's trend in Erhard Seminars Training, or EST, marked by "empowerment workshops."⁴¹ The American public was already skeptical about the effects of people watching too much TV and seeing so many advertisements, but the writers of *MH, MH* wanted their viewers to think about how the medium played a part in establishing gender roles that made women and housewives feel trapped in their home. Whereas Lear's intention with the show was to question how consumer culture impacted American housewives, Marcus and Lasser helped to answer that question with the characterization of Mary.



Figure 1. Mary and Tom Hartman (Louise Lasser and Greg Mullavey). Photo Division, CBS Television Network, 1976.

A question the writers continuously grappled with was how to realistically portray a housewife in the seventies. Cold War family ideology that emphasized domestic containment and consumerism seemed outmoded in a post-sixties world. Furthermore, the writers identified how differences in class could impact how women had to maneuver through different paths to liberation. For instance, Mary was confined to the home by constant domestic labor since she and her husband could not afford to hire help. Lear considered Mary part of "the bulk of America" constantly bombarded with commercials

that interrupt TV shows to advertise oven cleaners: “we forget about all those products if we can afford to have somebody do this for us, we forget how much time is spent cleaning ovens.” Marcus added that it is precisely Mary’s socio-economic class that presented a different perspective of feminism, or from previously televised depictions of women’s unhappiness more generally. Contrary to the message sold by advertisements that the trappings of middle-class suburban technology and cleaning products could make domestic labor easier and housewives happier, *MH, MH* presented an alternative message about domestic consumerism causing women’s discontent.⁴² Marcus concluded the writers’ meeting by stating that for several reasons, both metaphorically and literally, “Mary can’t get out of that kitchen.”⁴³

When creating a character to represent a contemporary seventies housewife, the writers also mulled over how to portray women’s unhappiness outside the confines of feminism. From Marcus’s reports, it seems clear that Lear understood Mary as a woman who unconsciously longed to be something more than a mother and a housewife, but who did not identify as feminist. Unhappy in her assigned role, she was nonetheless influenced by books such as *Fascinated Womanhood* (1963) and *The Total Woman* (1970) that instruct women to, as Lear put it, “sit on the television set with your legs crossed with a touch of crotch showing” to titillate one’s husband when he comes home from work. Both books served as a self-help guide to teach women how to restore their marriage through submissive behavior toward their husbands. Marabel Morgan’s *The Total Woman*, for example, responded to the sexual revolution and feminist movements by presenting a conservative, evangelical approach to “claiming female sexual power while maintaining sex-defined roles in the household.” Sex between heterosexual married couples, Morgan argued, was not sinful but necessary to maintain a happy household. Through costumes, role-playing, and props, Morgan encouraged evangelical readers and attendees of Total Woman workshops to initiate sex and how to properly respond to their husband’s sexual overtures. Sex, Morgan claimed, was “as clean and pure as eating cottage cheese.”⁴⁴

Although conservatives directly opposed feminists in their beliefs regarding how women could achieve happiness and fulfillment, Lear saw the two ideological camps as rooted in the same struggle. Neoconservative women, therefore, did not develop an ideology in response to feminism; instead, they responded to the same discourse of discontent that supposedly fueled feminist movements.⁴⁵ Rather than blaming men, anti-feminists condemned women for feeling unfulfilled with domesticity. In a writers meeting, Lear recaptured the sentiment he thought liberal and conservative women felt: “I’m sure what’s happening with women, on an unconscious level, all across the country, at every level of economic life, is a nameless need to do something more than be a mother and a housewife and do all the little things that we have captured (you have captured) so brilliantly.” He explained to the writers that on the one hand, you have feminists fighting patriarchal structures and trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and on the

other hand, there are women who “are whipped up by the Phyllis Schlaflys” to hate feminists and fight to maintain traditional gender norms. The character of Mary, as Lear understood it, represented everyday women who felt unsatisfied with their lives yet conflicted by these polarizing positions.⁴⁶

In multiple writers’ meetings that took place the same month the show aired, Lear re-hashed Marcus’s characterization of Mary, specifically her search for marital help through evangelical sex-advice literature. Frustrated that she and Tom had not been intimate in almost two months, Mary attempts to reignite their romance by initiating sex. Lear connects the intimacy troubles that Mary and Tom experience “to what people are terming the impotency problem,” but, as he noted, the Hartman’s issues are much bigger than impotency. “I viewed it as a husband-and-wife problem and one which I think is rampant throughout the nation, for various reasons,” Lear explained. Tom’s lack of desire to have sex with Mary is not because Tom is impotent, according to Lear; instead, Tom is psychologically responding to the decade’s changing gender norms. Mary, too, feels caught between myriad ideologies presented in media on how women should behave. While feminists declared that women should break free from the chains of domesticity, anti-feminists challenged the notion that patriarchal gender roles fostered women’s unhappiness and placed the onus of a happy home and healthy sex-life on the wife. Both perspectives required women to take charge, but the more Mary attempted to initiate sex the more Tom recoiled. “He didn’t want to be pressed,” Lear explained, “as if he were (in old-fashioned terms) the female, and she were (in old-fashioned terms) the male.”⁴⁷ Mary’s tension with Tom challenged conservative beliefs that women’s sexuality could realign gender roles that became vulnerable during moments of economic crisis when middle-class women had to work to help support their family. Furthermore, Tom’s unrequited desire for intimacy with Mary destabilized conservative notions that wives who pursued sexual intercourse could counter the demoralization their husbands felt in competitive workplaces that fostered exhaustion and unhappiness.⁴⁸ Whereas texts like Morgan’s *The Total Woman* instructed women to initiate sex to strengthen the male breadwinner family model, *MH, MH* portrayed a couple wherein women’s sexual advancements threatened the man’s masculine prowess and did the opposite of what conservative self-help promised.

Mary’s tension with her husband, Tom, was a storyline that developed over the course of the show. The writers frequently discussed in their meetings how to portray Mary as a character who shared many of the problems that feminists discussed, but she was adamant in her anti-feminism, because she did not fully understand feminism as a movement or an ideology. Echoing a point Marcus had made in a previous meeting, Lear stated that it was “marvelous” that they could draw out the storyline of how Mary figured out her unhappiness since she was unable to articulate what was bothering her the way “other women of more education” could. Lear then provided an example of the type of dialogue he envisioned, with Tom accusing Mary of watching too much TV and “getting

into all that femini[st] bullshit about not being fulfilled," to which Mary insists that she is "not one of them" and is happy being a wife and mother. Although Mary has a difficult time articulating what makes her unhappy, the writers all agreed that for her to communicate to Tom, Mary had to insist her beliefs were anti-feminist. Rather than present Mary as a self-avowed women's liberationist, the writers tried to portray how a woman might have to maneuver within her marriage to express her discontent with traditional gender roles. Lear claimed that what he saw in Marcus' Mary Hartman was exactly what he saw in actual women who were trying to break out of a "patriarchal shell."⁴⁹ As he put it, she has certain "needs," but "doesn't want to fall into any traps of expressing herself in any feminist way. You don't even need the word feminist."⁵⁰ Even though *MH, MH* presented a sexually frustrated woman who longed for an identity outside of being a wife and mother, by circumventing any explicitly feminist language, it managed to speak to a wide audience and elicit introspection among viewers who questioned the causes of their own unhappiness. By never using the word "feminist," *MH, MH* presented an invisible feminist commentary on capitalism and housewifery.

According to audience reports conducted by Bina Bernard at Tandem Productions, by the end of the first season, Lear received 1,147 letters from viewers, with roughly 75% of the responses in favor of the show, and 25% opposed to the series.⁵¹ *MH, MH* aired when social relevancy programming dominated prime-time airwaves, yet the soap opera satire deviated from contemporary feminist sitcoms. TV shows such as *Maude* (1972-1978), starring Bea Arthur as a middle-aged, ardent feminist, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) presented main characters and storylines that reflected some of the ideologies that real feminists on the ground were fighting for.⁵² *MH, MH* however, did not have any explicitly "feminist" characters. Instead, the show presented a feminist critique of a traditional white suburban neighborhood and housewife, which is what appealed to so many viewers. As one woman from Lynbrook, New York, wrote, *MH, MH*'s "humor doesn't hit you over the head as in *Maude* or *All in the Family*. It's subtle and outrageously funny."⁵³ Considering that one of the largest complaints among viewers by the late-1970s was that entertainment television "preached" to audiences about moral lessons, *MH, MH*'s "subtlety" helps explain the show's wide viewership.

One of the struggles women's liberationists faced when trying to get their message across was media misrepresentation of the movement and typecasting that portrayed a singular perspective of feminism and its ideology.⁵⁴ Feminists, therefore, used daytime and nighttime talk shows to take control of media portrayals of them. On panels with other guests such as popular psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, and sometimes even anti-feminists, television sensationalized women's liberation, positioning it as another version of self-help culture that came to dominate the 1970s. Although supporters of the medium argued that television could be used to share information to the widest possible audience, this had negative repercussions, as the writers for *MH, MH* tried to convey. Therefore, *MH, MH*'s portrayal of an unhappy housewife who comes to realize the role capitalism and

media play in maintaining the gender roles that contribute to men's and women's discontent is what made the show so impactful for audiences. Rather than telling viewers what to think about their interpersonal relationships, like the experts featured on talk shows, *MH, MH* became a mirror for viewers to see what contributed to their need to watch these experts at all.

The Cost of Being Good

Louise Lasser also contributed to the correlations among Mary's characterization, real women, and American society. After writing scripts for the first half of the first season, one of the writers called Lasser to ask her opinion on the direction she saw Mary going in. Without hesitation, she explained that Mary should have a nervous breakdown. Lasser was instructed to tell Lear about her suggestion, but the idea of approaching the producer intimidated her, leading her to pitch the idea in an unconventional way. She drafted a twelve-page essay, "like a school paper," she later recalled, on the conditions contributing to Mary's emotional state, which include the lack of intimacy in her marriage and her strained relationship with her pre-teen daughter Heather (Claudia Lamb). Thus, on a broader scale, these personal incidents represented feelings of failure during a moment when Americans had access to endless resources to guide them toward self-fulfillment. Lasser identifies how insidious self-help culture could be since it provided contradictory guidelines for achieving happiness, all of which related to what she identified as America's angst. In the essay she fleshes out a scene with fellow actor Bruce Solomon by describing an exchange between Mary and Solomon's character, Sargent Foley. "I just want to live properly and do the right thing," Mary explains, "but all these emotions and relationships that experts write about confuse me." Foley asks: "You mean the emotions and the relationships?" to which Mary replies "No, the experts." Lasser further explains how she envisions Mary suffering from a nervous breakdown from the pressure she feels to be the perfect wife and mother while also trying to understand what is contributing to her unhappiness. The television storyline, however, had a larger significance beyond the literal representation of strained family relationships. As Lasser explained, "Mary personified America;" therefore, her "nervous breakdown was really America's nervous breakdown."⁵⁵ Mary metaphorically represented the country through her realization that white middle-class values and consumer culture in general represented a fantasy, or what Lasser referred to as a "J.C. Penny world." The real world, in fact, was falling apart despite Mary having done everything "right" as a wife, mother, and consumer.

Although Mary's breakdown represents an affliction that was considered specific to white housewives, Lasser related media and the commodification of self-help to the cause of anyone's emotional distress regardless of race. Mary's inability to articulate how she feels stems from the media's failure to live up to its potential and its tendency to obfuscate information and current events. Lasser argues that popular psychology

contributes to this anxiety because Mary used to avoid her problems, but now she reads more to try to solve them. And “she doesn’t know what’s happening because she’s reading more,” Lasser writes, “the media is feeding her more—she’s not only getting overwhelmed and bombarded by the people around her, but bombarded in general. She is getting emotionally bombarded and what happens????—she has a nervous breakdown.”⁵⁶

Lasser’s idea made it into the soap, with Mary falling apart on television from the pressure she faced while being interviewed on *The David Susskind Show* as “America’s Typical Consumer Housewife” (Figure 2). During a meeting between Lear and Lasser, they discussed how these events would play out. Maybe a television executive would recognize Mary was “near-hysterical” and want to put her on TV for ratings; or Mary could be on television with two other “perfectly well” housewives who make her unhappiness more noticeable; or finally, they considered whether Mary should appear on the show with two “very strong women’s liberationists,” like Margaret Mead and Bella Abzug figures. They decided to have Mary on *The Susskind Show* with some of the ideas presented. They portrayed a film crew documenting a week in Mary’s life before sending her to New York to face a panel consisting of a feminist, a consumer advocate, and a media expert. Unable to handle having her personal life magnified under television’s spotlight, Mary cracks under the pressure of knowing all the answers she *should* give in response to questions about her “typical housewife” activities. But instead, feeling the need to lie about her familial relationships and present a false image of herself pushes Mary to break down on national television.⁵⁷ The way Mary’s breakdown plays out suggests that everyone knows the “typical” housewife is an unhappy woman—TV executives, Susskind, feminists, and even Mary—and it is the energy put into trying to maintain a façade that wears on Mary’s emotional health. Mary’s anxiety on *Susskind* developed out of her slow realization that consumer products did not deliver on their promise to provide happiness. She begins to see herself as a person whose identity and aspirations are tied to material objects. A *New York Times* article aptly identified the treatment of Mary’s breakdown as “the price she pays for awareness.”⁵⁸ During the writers’ meetings, Lear made sure to distinguish Mary’s character from feminists, but the portrayal of her discontent mirrored feminist criticisms of domesticity. America’s nervous breakdown, therefore, was in response to everyday women identifying media and consumer culture as upholding the “patriarchal shell” they struggled to break out of.

Audiences liked and disliked *MH, MH* for the same reason: it was “real.” As one *New York Times* article pointed out, “‘Mary Hartman’ is the news. It’s the news about how Americans live, complete with the airing of issues like impotence, alienation, homosexuality, and adultery, and with references to Vietnam, Nixon, Watergate, Howard Hughes, Presidential Elections...and whatever else happens to be going on.” But it was the inability of the news to fully inform Americans about their personal lives that attracted viewers to the soap opera satire. To make a point, the article quoted a line from Mary’s mother Martha Shumway (Dody Goodman): “You can always find something on the

evening news to take your mind off life." The disconnect between political topics covered on the news and the everyday lives of its viewers made *MH, MH* transcend the parameters of a television show to become a cultural event. Americans in the 1970s did not need sociologists or culture-watchers to help explain themselves—all they had to do was watch *MH, MH*.⁵⁹



Figure 2. Mary's nervous breakdown (Louise Lasser). KDOG-TV 26, publicity still, 1976.

"Keeping America in Touch with Itself"

Unlike cultural critics like Tom Wolfe, Lear viewed the anxiety-filled decade that led to America's nervous breakdown in a positive light. He disagreed with academics who analyzed *MH, MH* as a representation of the country's "sick society" because he believed the "program is affirmative." He considered Mary a "survivor" who learns over time how strong she really is and argued against critics who called him a subversive for portraying real hardships. Lear considered the cheery sitcoms of television's "golden age" subversive for peddling false narratives of happy housewives with perfect families and "telling people who had lost their jobs and were delinquent in their mortgage payments and had runaway children that it didn't matter because look at how lovely life is."⁶⁰ The realism Lear wanted to portray in *MH, MH* led to the show's large cult following and its fierce critics. Supporters created *MH, MH* fan clubs, cars donned bumper stickers that read "Honk Honk If You Love Mary Mary," and a page broke up a tense moment on the Senate floor by shouting "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" in the same manner as the show's opening sequence. Novelist and award-winning playwright, Donald Freed, even taught a University of California Extension course titled: "Mary Hartman and the Rest of Us—a Nervous Journey into Television Land."⁶¹

As much as fans of the show conveyed their enthusiasm, critics also expressed their deep dislike of the program. Opponents of *MH, MH* framed their objections as ethical arguments made in support of television's "family hour," claiming the show was vulgar, indecent, sacrilegious, and as one writer put it, indicative of "the whole moral fibre [*sic*] of our country [...] going down the drain."⁶² Stations in Richmond, Virginia, and Salt Lake City faced such a backlash that they stopped airing the show. In Little Rock, 1,200 people signed a protest petition against the soap, and in Seattle, hostile critics organized a boycott of *MH, MH*'s sponsors. Arguments over whether *MH, MH* should be cancelled reflected the decade's political divisiveness and turned into disputes about individual rights. Debates about whether viewers had a right to watch or if stations had the right to air reflected differing local interpretations of how television should reflect American values.⁶³ Station WBNS in Columbus, Ohio, for example, received letters from residents who threatened to boycott *MH, MH*'s promoters, with one person claiming, "the show must be sponsored by the Communists who have vowed to destroy us from within."

In response to Columbus' critics, fans also threatened to boycott advertisers if WBNS pulled the show. "Until I receive satisfaction," wrote a woman in defense of *MH, MH*, "may your 'yellow waxy build-up' reach epidemic proportions, and may the Fernwood Flasher visit your wife's next Tupperware party."⁶⁴ Conversely, proponents of the show viewed their support of *MH, MH* as a political position in contrast to neoconservatives who attempted to assert their control via media regulations. A Florida viewer who liked the program, for example, expressed concern that the conservative crusade over *MH, MH* would result in their station withdrawing the program. Having read that the show was

"quite controversial," they hoped "those that don't like it, will turn their sets off (if it's going to destroy their children) and let us have some tongue-in-cheek laughs."⁶⁵ Another writer begged their local station to stand their ground against "citizen groups, P.T.A., whatever...Let the parents police their children."⁶⁶ One person, who believed *MH, MH* would not last despite its fan base, associated the rise of neoconservatism with an overall social and cultural decline: "It takes some intelligence to have a sense of humor. If we can't laugh at ourselves (and obviously we no longer can), we're in trouble...The All American kids can't cope with this or any deviation from the norm."⁶⁷

Fans of *MH, MH* also referenced how they could relate to the program because of its "real" and "truthful" quality and expressed how the show became a medium through which Americans could become introspective as a nation. Members from the Mary Hartman Fan Club in San Francisco, for instance, wrote that Mary Hartman is "the American woman; her triumphs and tragedies are ours, as are the lessons she painfully learns."⁶⁸ Another viewer from California considered *MH, MH* an indicator of national progress by stating that the show was "a giant step for mankind." *MH, MH*, the fan continued "will probably have more of an impact on civilizations than a man waltzing on the moon."⁶⁹ Audience reports conducted by Bina Bernard at Tandem Productions also demonstrate fans' laudatory praise with one person writing to express appreciation for *MH, MH* showing all "the irony, joys and sorrows of life. Keep up the good work in keeping America in touch with itself."⁷⁰

Supporters also wrote about the show's importance and impact in helping viewers understand themselves as individuals. "Politically, socially, and otherwise Mary Hartman is very necessary right now," wrote a woman from rural Minnesota. The mother of four praised the show's timeliness but feared that because it was "too truthful" it would not last. "I feel there is a general, overall unhealthy insidiousness that does claim the soul," she wrote, "and of course it just atrophies a person's ability to create images of one's own making. That's why your thing is ironically calling out to us that there's something really, really outside/empty in all the shit we have to endure in the name of 'being good.'" ⁷¹ *New York Times* journalist Ted Morgan explained why he thought the show affected viewers on a personal level. It "provides a cathartic experience," he explained, since "Mary and her fellow players recycle our society's garbage. As we watch her failing marriage, her dismal love affair, her disjointed attempts to break out of her kitchen, as she sinks and cries for help in the swamp of consumerland, we find relief from our own emotional stresses."⁷² Fans believed that what made certain audiences connect to *MH, MH*'s characters and find "relief" in the show, was exactly why others disliked the program. One woman wrote to her local station and stated: "I think a lot of people are afraid to watch 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.' They may just see some of themselves or some of their friends somewhere in the show." She brought up Mary's father as an example: "I know a number of fathers (and husbands) who like 'George' think that 'a breakfast without a nagging wife is like a

headache that doesn't hurt,' as well as demanding the food be on the table the minute he enters the eating area." She discussed in greater length how she saw herself in Mary,

I must admit I do see some of my own temptations and also some of my friends in her. I wonder how many of us, talk-show-observing housewives, watch the shows, 'Today' or 'Donahue,' only to later expound (in Mary Hartmanesque manner) some of the ideas of their guests (such as Dr. Joyce Brothers—Mary's favorite—, Gloria Steinem, Dr. Reuben, some politician, etc.) as our own at the next party or meeting we attend. Right now, the character, Mary Hartman, is trying to find herself, her goal in life, as are many other women in this world. As in other soaps, perhaps, those TV viewers are trying to find themselves through her gropings too.⁷³

The way in which Marcus, Lear, and Lasser envisioned Mary's character and her dilemmas is exactly what this viewer saw in herself through the show—a woman who tries to make sense of the cacophony of messages television peddled. As this letter and Lear suggested in the writers' meetings, "everyday" women were more confused than convinced by media's presentation of the myriad ways women could find happiness as housewives in the 1970s.

Ann Marcus' contributions to *MH, MH* helped to make critiques of an oppressive consumer culture visible to a large viewer audience. By pulling from her personal experiences and her research as a writer before her career in the television industry began, she developed a feminist sense of self and translated it onto the small screen. It was these very topics that made it into the scripts of *MH, MH*. But Marcus' success came at a cost, or at least that is how she saw it. After production of *MH, MH*'s first season ended, and Marcus, Daniel Gregory Brown, and Jerry Adelman won an Emmy for writing the series, Lear fired Marcus. Dumbstruck and simultaneously furious, Marcus called Lear to yell at him for removing her from a successful show that she attributed to her contributions. Lear, however, felt it was a misunderstanding. He did not intend to "fire" Marcus; he wanted her to write for a second comedy soap-opera that he had recently envisioned while shaving. He wanted to create a program about a world where gender roles were reversed, and men were the second sex. Beyond this basic premise, Lear had not put any more thought into the show that would later become *All That Glitters* (1977). He put his faith in Marcus to develop the setting, the characters, and the storylines. She resisted the urge to decline his offer and instead accepted the challenge to write another pilot, and because of it, spent countless hours in Transcendental Meditation to help her cope with her rage over Lear treating her so cavalierly. Although Marcus—with very little assistance from Lear—created the characters and storylines, and wrote the pilot for *All That Glitters*, she eventually turned down the offer to be head writer for the new series. Despite all her efforts in meditation, Marcus was still too angry to continue working for Lear.⁷⁴

Conclusion: "Now We Can Be Free"

What made *MH, MH* so successful, and contentious, was that it did more than capitalize on American anxieties—it showed audiences why they were consumers of therapeutic culture to begin with. The controversy over *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* reveals the intersection between the rise of pop psychology and the changing relationship between television and its female audience. The production of *MH, MH* reveals this intersection in two ways. First, the form of satire in the series is exaggerated for comic effect yet "realistic," which attracted the show's large cult following and the ire of its critics. The show's ability to scrutinize post-war ideals that connected happiness with consumerism prompted audiences to reflect on their own identities and interpersonal relationships. Second, the discussions captured by the tape-recorded writers' meetings indicate that Lear and the writing team were critical of television's consumer-driven interests but still thought the medium had the ability to improve society by educating audiences about contemporary social issues. In this way, television was considered the cause and cure of societal ills. Taken together, I have argued that the *use of* mediated pop psychology (as presented in *MH, MH*) not only reflected, but also induced anxieties, particularly as the growing self-help industry presented conflicting ideologies regarding women's gender roles in the family during a period marked by the rise of modern feminism and anti-feminism.

Yet, the zeitgeist that *MH, MH* captured did not result in a reckoning about the cultural construction of national narratives. Although *MH, MH* critiqued the omnipresent role of media and pop psychology in women's lives, the two became even more ubiquitous in subsequent decades with the rise of daytime talk shows that presented a type of therapeutic television targeted toward women viewers.⁷⁵ In the 1980s, the television industry capitalized on the decade of angst and the profits to be made from public therapy with daytime talk shows that allowed guests to discuss their personal problems with supposed psychological experts to assist in their recovery.⁷⁶ Although talk shows had been a part of the daytime television fabric since the 1960s with programs such as *Donahue* (1967-1995)—starring Phil Donahue who believed the series should target women audiences and tackle serious social concerns—it was Oprah Winfrey who improved upon this model with *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011). Winfrey appealed to women by marrying public affairs with private issues and by getting personal about her own experiences as a victim of child sexual abuse. She also gave a stage for ordinary people to work through their own psychodramas and experiences with addiction, denial, love, adultery, and sex, among many other subjects. Winfrey's stated objective for her show, "to transform peoples' lives, to make viewers see themselves differently and to bring happiness and a sense of fulfillment into every home," engendered a large audience of mostly women that has continued in the twenty-first century. From clothes to diets to books, Winfrey's endorsement of consumer goods has come to represent items of self-

care that lead to happiness and living one's best life. Winfrey's ability to influence women's spending habits, aspirations, and political views, for example, demonstrates the impact she has in shaping American values in the neoliberal era.⁷⁷

MH, MH did not directly lead to the rise of Winfrey's stardom and the many talk shows that followed suit in the 1990s, such as *Sally Jessy Raphael* (1983-2002), *The Geraldo Rivera Show* (1987-1998), and *Ricki Lake* (1992-2004), to name a few. But the soap opera satire did tap into the capitalist tendencies of the self-help industry that continuously sold therapeutic remedies through television shows consumed by Americans in their endless search for happiness. Although *MH, MH* satirized the pervasive presence of media and pop psychology in constructing ideals on gender, identity, and politics, the self-awareness the show provoked among audiences did not outweigh the profits to be made by airing everyday peoples' confessions, feelings, and problems. As pop psychology became even more entangled with entertainment in the 1980s, it deepened Americans' connection with television as a site for self-help for decades to come.

Endnotes

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¹ Raymond P. Hart, "Will the Real Bill Flynn Please Sit Down!" *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 8, 1977, section 5, 1 and 6.

² Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 291-297.

³ Writers meeting minutes, ND, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," Ann Marcus (AM) Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (hereafter, AHC).

⁴ Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Culture of 1970s American Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 202-203.

⁵ Writers meeting minutes, no date, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," Ann Marcus Papers, AHC.

⁶ Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 202-203.

⁷ On American disputes over gender, sex, and family that shaped modern liberal and conservative politics, see Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1969-*

1980 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012); Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: Norton, 2019).

⁸ Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 183-222.

⁹ Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976; on the use of "narcissism" to describe a cultural condition see Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: Norton, 1978); Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*; Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ David Frum, *How We Got Here: The '70's, the Decade that Brought You Modern Life—For Better or For Worse* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 99-105; Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 78-80; Beth Bailey and David Farber, "Introduction," in *America in the Seventies*, eds. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 6-8; Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Andreas Killen, *1973: Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*.

¹¹ Beth Bailey and David Farber, *America in the Seventies*, 6-8.

¹² Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self Fulfillment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), chapters 1-3.

¹³ Moskowitz, 149-162; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*; Lawrence R. Samuel, *Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Lizabeth Cohen discusses the nuances of segmented marketing and argues that the 1950s and 1960s were not periods of mass consumerism since marketing targeted different demographics. Even with limited television channels in the network era, advertising *vis-à-vis* programming was directed to the presumed audience (toys during children's shows, household cleaners during soap-operas, and aftershave during the nightly news), 292-309; For more on the homogenization of white housewives in marketing see Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 157-162.

¹⁵ On 1950s programming teaching American values, see Gerard Jones, *Honey, I'm Home! Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1992); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23-41.

¹⁶ Eva Moskowitz, "'It's Good to Blow Your Top': Women's Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1996); For more on popular culture's presentation of the "discourse of discontent" see Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Elana Levine, *Her Stories: Daytime Soap Opera & US Television History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 44-47.

¹⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 80-81; on the diversity of magazines featuring articles on women outside of domesticity see Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the

Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958" in *Not June Cleaver*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). See also Moskowitz, "'It's Good to Blow Your Top'" and Levine, *Her Stories*.

¹⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 62-78.

²⁰ Jessica Weiss, "Fraud of Femininity": Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan" in *Rethinking Politics in Cold War America* ed. Kathleen G. Donohue (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). See also Moskowitz, *In Therapy we Trust*.

²¹ Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); on the mainstreaming of 1960s counterculture see also Judy Kutulas, *After Acquarias Dawned: How the Revolutions of the Sixties Became the Popular Culture of the Seventies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

²² Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and The Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 125-131.

²³ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 131-135.

²⁴ Gillian Frank, "'Think about That Special Man Who's on His Way Home to You': Conservative Women's Sexualization of Marriage in the 1970s," in *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars*, eds. Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 178-181.

²⁵ On the influence of a "free and natural lifestyle" and sexual health in the suburbs see Sarah Schrank, *Free and Natural: Nudity and the American Cult of the Body* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

²⁶ Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 292.

²⁷ Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 291.

²⁸ Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles over U.S. Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 132.

²⁹ Perlman, *Public Interests*, 126-127.

³⁰ Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 282-285. Lear discussed what this policy did for social relevancy in his memoir. *All in the Family*, for example, had its time slot moved from 8:00 p.m., where it reigned as TV's number one show for four seasons, to a later hour, since Lear would not conform to Family Viewing standards. The Family Viewing Time was so restrictive that 20 out of 24 episodes of *All in the Family's* 1974 season would not have been accepted by CBS under their new regulations.

³¹ Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 202-203; Ted Morgan, "MH2 Recycles Our Garbage," *New York Times*, October 3, 1976, 195.

³² *Mary Hartman*, *Mary Hartman* press kit, no date, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.

³³ Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown*, 176-177.

³⁴ Ann Marcus, *Whistling Girl: A Memoir* (Los Angeles: Mulholland Pacific, 1998), 154.

- ³⁵ Full short story in Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 135-138.
- ³⁶ Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 140-142.
- ³⁷ Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 292-293; Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 163-165.
- ³⁸ Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown*, 111-133.
- ³⁹ *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* press kit, ND, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.
- ⁴⁰ "Episode 1.1," January 6, 1976.
- ⁴¹ Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 204. Werner Erhard, a former car retailer, established Erhard Seminars Training (EST), which were "empowerment workshops" that taught attendees how to transform one's life. On the development of therapeutic support groups organized by nonprofessional psychologists as a form of grassroots healthcare through self-improvement, see Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 186-196.
- ⁴² On the use of postwar popular culture and advertisements to sell appliances as technology to aid the burden of domestic labor for housewives see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Spigel, *Make Room for TV*; Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World*; Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*.
- ⁴³ Writers' meeting minutes, January 20, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.
- ⁴⁴ Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62-64.
- ⁴⁵ Gillian Frank notes that, like the arguments put forth by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, Marabel Morgan based *The Total Woman* on her own experience with feeling unhappy in her marriage and as a housewife. Morgan claimed that when she accepted "God's plan" to place women under her husband's rule, she was able salvage her once-failing marriage and feel a sense of liberation through evangelical doctrine, not a career as Friedan suggested. See Frank, "'Think about That Special Man Who's on His Way Home to You,'" 182.
- ⁴⁶ Writers' meeting minutes, January 20, 1976 and January 26, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Frank, "'Think about That Special Man Who's on His Way Home to You,'" 185-188.
- ⁴⁹ Writers meeting minutes, January 20, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.
- ⁵⁰ Writers meeting minutes, January 20, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.
- ⁵¹ Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, July 23, 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," Norman Lear (NL) Papers, Act iii.

⁵² Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

⁵³ Letter to Norman Lear, January 21, 1976, Box #S-247, Folder "Norman Lear Correspondence MH (first season) 1976," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁵⁴ Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Bonnie J. Dow, *Watching Women's Liberation, 1970: Feminism's Pivotal Year on the Network News* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ Louise Lasser's essay on Mary Hartman's nervous breakdown, January 29, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Meeting with Lear and Lasser, April 9, 1976, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," AM Papers, AHC.

⁵⁸ Morgan, "MH2 Recycles Our Garbage."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Based on two Audience Response Mail Reports for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, July 9, 1976 and July 23, 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁶³ On fights over local public television channels and battles over competing ideas of a collective local identity see Allison Perlman, "Alabama Public Television Network: Local Stations and Struggles Over Collective Identity," in *From Networks to Netflix: A Guide to Changing Channels*, ed. Derek Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁴ David Drake, "Mary Hartman a Communist?: Viewers Force Advertiser Off Serial," September 7, 1976, *Columbus Citizen Journal*.

⁶⁵ Helen Rongitsch to local station, January 30, 1976, Box 16, Folder "Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*," AM Papers, AHC.

⁶⁶ Louise Burton to local station, January 20, 1976, Box 16, Folder "Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*," AM Papers, AHC.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Oenbrink to local station, February 5, 1976, Box 16, Folder "Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*," AM Papers, AHC.

⁶⁸ Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, February 20, 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁶⁹ Charles Shields to local station, January 13, 1976, Box 16, Folder "Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*," AM Papers, AHC.

⁷⁰ Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, April 9, 1976 and August 30, 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁷¹ Letter to Norman Lear, March 12, 1976, Box #S-247, Folder "Norman Lear Correspondence MH (first season) 1976," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁷² Morgan, "MH2 Recycles our Garbage."

⁷³ Letter to local station, no date, miscellaneous box, Folder "Fan mail to *MH, MH*," NL Papers, Act iii.

⁷⁴ Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 176-183.

⁷⁵ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 260-269.

⁷⁶ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 259-260.

⁷⁷ Kimberly Springer, "Introduction: Delineating the Contours of the Oprah Culture Industry," in *Studies of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture*, eds. Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).