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Kristi Rowan Humphreys

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HOUSEWORK AND GENDER IN AMERICAN TELEVISION

COMING CLEAN

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Kristi Rowan Humphreys : Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean:

Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean examines representations of housework and their relationships with gender in sixty of the most popular television shows of the 1950s through the 1980s, searching for

trends, similarities, inconsistencies, and meaning. Much of the critical scholarship addressing mid-century televised housework claims that domestic activities marginalize female characters, removing them from scenes involving important familial discussions and placing them in devalued positions. This book challenges the notion that housework functions primarily as a mechanism through which female characters are marginalized, devalued, invisible, or passive, and instead proposes a different reading of housework in television, one that brings to the fore the loving, sacrificial, and active qualities so crucial and foundational to housework activity in both representation and reality. These qualities, in turn, attach a strength to female characters, and male characters when applicable, that is often ignored in standard feminist analyses of television. This study reveals roughly twenty trends established in four decades of televised housework, from the housewives of the fifties, to the witches and genies of the sixties, to the elimination of male domestic labor in the seventies, to the dominance of male housekeepers in the eighties.

Humphreys uses textual analysis and personal experience to examine representations of housework and gender from four decades (1950s-80s) of television programs in the US. Humphreys identifies more than 20 trends across these representations, including how 1950s representations of housework and parenting showed both men and women involved in such tasks whereas 1960s-70s representations were less egalitarian, how 1970s programs (e.g., *The Partridge Family*) featuring a single female as the head of a household showed her and children doing household tasks yet programs featuring a single male often had a female housekeeper covering the family's tasks (e.g., *Diffrent Strokes*), and how 1980s programs (e.g., *Growing Pains*) represented women as able to work full-time and maintain responsibility for household tasks. Throughout, Humphreys uses postfeminist principles to describe and critique the matriphobic tendencies of second-wave feminism, espouse the strong and loving characteristics of housework, and reconnect the idea of motherhood with feminist virtues. An accessible, nuanced, and compelling resource for those interested in gender, television history, and popular culture. *Summing Up: Essential. All readers. (CHOICE)* Dr. Humphreys writing is inspiring and evocative. Her meticulous research into how housework on television has both shaped and empowered women's roles in their families as leaders, caregivers and mentors creates a new and powerful meaning to the very essence of housework, itself. Though housework has largely been downplayed as women's work, Humphreys creates a more honest understanding of its importance in one's identity. Through her research, the housework itself becomes a diverse landscape of duties and accomplishments for each individual, and for each family unit, as women across the generations work to ensure their families survival and well being. (Marta Holliday, Alabama State University) In *Housework and Gender in American Television*, Humphreys engages the problematic relationship between feminism and housework. In doing so, Humphreys reveals that representations of housework on network television are more complicated than depictions of traditional gender roles and female characters being relegated to the kitchen. By focusing on the role of housework in family sitcoms during the 1950s to 1980s, Humphreys demonstrates that these shows also depicted women as active agents coming from positions of strength in their performance of housework. (Elizabeth Patton, University of Maryland Baltimore County) About the Author Kristi Rowan Humphreys is assistant professor of critical studies and artistic practice at Texas Tech University.