Image Versus Reality:

Women Journalists in Film and on the Home Front, 1940-1945

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I. INTRODUCTION

Journalism is often stereotyped as a man's profession, not fit for women. This assumption, however, could not be further from the truth. While men may have founded newspapers and held management positions earlier than women, this is no indication that women were not—and are not—prominent within the profession. In fact, women have been working on newspapers alongside men since the beginning of the appearance of broadsides and other circulars, and in the United States at least since the colonial era. Especially during World War II, as men went off to war, women filled in, working every newspaper job from producing the paper to reporting on events and writing editorials.

This senior honors thesis focuses on the issue of the involvement of women in journalism during World War II. Much writing has been produced on women's entry into professions like medicine and law as men went to war and left many positions open in these fields. Yet despite the acknowledgement by historians of journalism that the numbers of women in journalism did expand in this era explorations of the details of their involvement is sparse. Many of the studies of women journalists in World War II focus mostly on foreign correspondents during the war, spending little time discussing the role of women running newspapers or working for them on the home front.

I have addressed two literatures in exploring this subject. The first is the many movies about women journalists that were made during this period. In particular, I draw my analysis from four major films: *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Meet John Doe* (1941), *Woman of the Year* (1942), and *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945). I chose these films because they represent the variety of movies made during this period. Each plot is different, and yet they all follow the same formula, in which the woman journalist, who is tough and masculinized, must come to terms with her essential femininity and make a choice for marriage. They are connected to the 'screwball' genre of films that featured a conflict of wills between a man and a woman. Between 1930 and 1946, 130 films featured women reporters as their protagonists.[1]

The second literature I used in my study is the oral interviews from the Washington Press Club Foundation, of which I have read twelve. Each interview ranges between 50-200 pages in length. These interviews are part of an oral history project found in the "Women in Journalism" collection. As the preface states,

> The project includes comprehensive, full-life interviews with women journalists who have made significant contributions to society through careers in journalism since the 1920s. The interviews provide an important documentary record of the experiences of women journalists in seeking acceptance in their profession and the impact that this development has had on the reporting and editing of the nation's news. The interviews also document changes in the roles, expectations, opportunities, and obstacles for women in American society during this period.[2]

The twelve female journalists used for this thesis were chosen based on their journalistic experiences during the 1940s. These women include: Katherine Beebe Harris, Beth Campbell Short, Betty Carter, Marvel Cooke, Ruth Cowan Nash, Jane Eads Bancroft, Mary Garber, Mary Ellen Leary, Sarah McClendon, Gladys Montgomery Singer, Charlotte G. Moulton, and Dorothy M. Jurney. The work of these twelve women and the lives they lived during World War II

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[1] Kathleen A. Cairns. *Front-Page Women Journalists, 1920-1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 24.
[2] Washington Press Club Foundation, "Oral History Project Preface," *WPCF Oral History Project: "Women In Journalism,"* http://npc.press.org/wpforal/preface.htm#top.

contradict the image of female journalists in film, who are made to follow a specific formula of working side by side male reporters, and in the end becoming a 'real' woman by getting married. Among the twelve women in this study, Katherine Beebe Harris, Beth Campbell Short, Betty Carter, Marvel Cooke, Ruth Cowan Nash, Jane Eads Bancroft, and Sarah McClendon covered news, focusing on war and its effect on the country. Mary Garber started on the society page and moved to covering sports in 1944. Dorothy Jurney became editor of several women's pages. Mary Ellen Leary and Charlotte Moulton wrote about politics, and Gladys Montgomery Singer wrote about science. In addition, although the women journalists in films are usually young, in their twenties, the actual journalists were in their later twenties and thirties, often married and with families during their wartime reporting.

My exploration of the idealized image of women in journalism in film and the realistic image of women in journalism in the movies has led me into a third area of exploration: How does image reflect reality? In what ways are the lives and choices of the women journalists in film similar to or different from those of the actual women journalists? I will conclude that the filmic image is for the most part different from the real image. Films involving women journalists create an image based on a formula, in which the female journalist finds love in the end. The real image is based on the idea of choice and on balance between having a family and a career. In addition, the women journalists in film and the real women journalists live to some extent contradictory lives. The women in film began the decade as tough, independent women writing about crime and murder. By the end of World War II the film journalists are still the star reporters on their papers, but they are no longer writing about hard news. Rather, they write about society. Real life women journalists had the opposite experience. Many women began their careers writing on the women's pages. Once the war started they took over for men who

were fighting in the war, and began writing hard news. The image of women journalists in film does not reflect the wartime experience of those real life female journalists who benefited from the opportunities presented during World War II.

HISTORY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Women have been involved in journalism since the profession's beginning. In the colonial era women helped their husbands with the local paper, performing any job that arose. When someone died, women took over the family newspaper to keep the paper running.[3] As years passed, and the profession of journalism became more complex, women used family connections to continue working on newspapers. As Marion Marzolf points out, "in 1937 there were at least 300 women publishers in a field of 12,000 American dailies and weeklies. Often they were wives, widows or daughters of publishing families, but that does not diminish their effectiveness or dedication to journalism."[4] Marzolf suggests that for many women this was their only way into the profession. These women paved the way and opened doors for future women journalists.

In her book, *Ladies of the Press*, Ishbel Ross defines four decades of journalism: the stunt era (1890-1900); the sob era (1900-1910); the suffrage era (1910-1920); and the tabloid era (1920-1930).[5] In the stunt era women went undercover to get exclusive stories. The sob era refers to the period when women were thought to sympathize with the characters in the article, and to write emotional articles about them. As women became more involved in politics and other forms of societal action, the suffrage era developed, and women's issues became serious

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[3] Kay Mills, *A Place In The News* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1999), 16.
[4] Marion Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote: A History Of Women Journalists* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1977), 63.
[5] Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press: The Story Of Women In Journalism By An Insider* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), 14.

front-page news. Finally, the tabloid era emerged in the roaring 1920s as the nation became more industrialized and cinema and speakeasies dominated the culture creating sensational scandals. Ross wrote her book in 1936 before she could define the following decades. Yet, had she done so, she might have called the 1930s the human-interest era and the 1940s the wartime era.

WRITING ABOUT WOMEN'S ISSUES

A majority of women journalists began by writing about "women's issues," or writing from a "woman's angle." In discussing the origins of the "women's angle," scholars focus on the 1907 Thaw Trial as the beginning of the "sob era" of journalism. The Thaw Trial, in which wealthy Harry Thaw was on trial for killing his showgirl wife's lover, "gave women their first real taste of court work," as "the emotional and dramatic elements were heavily played." [6] Women "covered sensational crimes with an emotional intensity that brought a tear to the eye."[7] The term sob sister, in reference to women journalists, refers to this idea of evoking emotion through their articles.

Not all women covered trials at the turn of the century; other women journalists wrote about issues pertaining to daily life. Women covered all social events: "weddings, luncheons, teas, bridge parties, and debutante receptions."[8] In a book about opportunities for women in journalism, Genevieve Boughner considers society writing "the most familiar route to other newspaper positions [that] has been traveled by many star women reporters and special writers."[9] In their book *Women and Journalism*, Deborah Chambers, Carole Fleming, and Linda Steiner,

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[6] Ibid., 23.
[7] Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote*, 32.
[8] Genevieve Jackson Boughner, *Women in Journalism* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1942 [1926]), 14.
[9] Ibid., 1.

state that "although women were confined to a restricted area of journalistic reporting, they brought about changes to print and broadcast journalism at least in the sense that they broadened the topics deemed newsworthy."[10]

WOMEN'S IMPACT ON JOURNALISM

World War I created many opportunities for female journalists. Some women went abroad as foreign correspondents, while other women replaced men at home and made the front page with increasing frequency.[11] The war "gave them experience, assurance, sound technique, and a number of good reporters were developed."[12] Women gained not only experience, but also credibility writing articles men would normally have written. This was women's chance to give a voice to the female population. They became not just journalists, but representatives of all women.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, whose husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was in office between 1933 and 1945, was a feminist who took advantage of her political position. She worked diligently to create equal opportunities for women, including female reporters. Eleanor Roosevelt helped women journalists by allowing only women into her press conferences, forcing newspaper editors to hire women.[13] Yet, it also left men as the sole journalists covering the President's press conferences. It was a double-edged sword, providing women with experience, while also keeping them from being on a level playing field with male reporters. Nonetheless,

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[10] Deborah Chambers, Carol Fleming, and Linda Steiner, *Women And Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 36.
[11] Ross, *Ladies Of The Press*, 23.
[12] Ibid., 23.
[13] Mills, *A Place In The News*, 36.

Eleanor Roosevelt's openness with reporters and her willingness to speak only to female journalists helped advance the careers of newspaperwomen.[14]

During the Depression, front-page stories were often human-interest stories (typically written by women) in order to take people's minds away from their problems. Because of this, hard and soft news began to blur on the front-page.[15] Women used their writing skills to weave their stories into important areas. "From the 1920s through the 1940s, women 'manned' city desks, covered political stations, and documented human misery resulting from racism and the Depression." However, even though women were breaking new grounds obstacles remained. Women were not allowed in the national Press club, they were paid half of what men received, and there were few jobs available to women.[16] While in these eras women worked hard to get to the front page, they left much work to be done by future female reporters.

Between 1920 and 1950 California became a destination for many migrant travelers, and it was not long before the state became the home for a variety of professions. In particular, California became a good place for women to become front-page reporters because of the connection between politics, culture, and media.[17] In fact, with Hollywood situated in Southern California, producers and directors turned to the female journalists around them for inspiration.[18] It is easy to see why many popular films in the 1930s and 1940s were based around a young, energetic, female journalist waiting to get her hands on a hard-news story. Not only was this a dramatic situation in eras when the majority of filmgoers were women, but also the film industry was located in Los Angeles, and many of the reporters on the fan magazines who covered Hollywood were women.

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[14] Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote*, 45.
[15] Ibid., 21-22.
[16] Ibid., xiii.
[17] Ibid., xxi.
[18] Ibid., xxi.

WORLD WAR II

The Second World War was a turning point for women just as World War I had been earlier. At no prior time had women been called in such great numbers to take up work and to replace the men who left to fight the war in Europe and the Pacific. It soon became evident that if "World War I cracked open the newsroom door to women and the Depression opened it wider, World War II finally demonstrated that women belonged in front page journalism."[19] The Second World War was significant for women journalists because it opened up jobs as war correspondents both at home and overseas.[20]

Limited scholarly literature exists with regard to female journalists, especially about women reporters on the home front during World War II. During the war while a handful of women became foreign correspondents, the real breakthrough occurred back at home. Rosie the Reporter, the relative to Rosie the Riveter, was born.[21] Yet, in her history of journalism, Kay Mills does not write much about the women at home; rather, she focuses on women abroad.

Books written about women working on the home front during World War II also neglect the subject of women journalists. Emily Yellin gives some information. In 1940, thirty-three female reporters covered legislative proceedings on Capitol Hill in Washington DC; and by 1944, there were 98.[22] Yet, Yellin ends her discussion of female journalists on the home front here, providing little detail. Instead she goes on to discuss war photographers Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange, and other foreign correspondents. The same can be said for Marzolf's discussion. World War II "took many men away from newspaper jobs and women

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[19] Cairns, *Front-Page Women Journalists*, 31.
[20] Ibid., 31.
[21] Ibid., 50.
[22] Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home And At The Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 292.

filled the gaps on the city desk as copy editors. Some set type and ran presses. A few became foreign correspondents serving with distinction. By 1943 women made up 50% of the staffs of many newspapers in small cities and this trend was expected to continue."[23]

In general, when women journalists—either in books about journalism or about the home front—are mentioned, it is in reference to their short-lived experience in the newsroom. A woman working during World War II was to some extent a contradiction because she was told she was smart enough to do anything, but it was clear women were only needed in an emergency situation—such as when the country was at war.[24] One such example is Dorothy Jurney, who was city editor for the *Washington News*. When the war ended she lost her job because she was a woman.[25] During the war, women who took over jobs from men who had given them up to go to war had to sign waivers saying they would leave the job at the war's end. Because of this, women did not return to the newsrooms en masse until the 1960s.[26] Washington correspondent Genevieve P. Herrick of the Chicago *Tribune* observed, "A war does not create a newspaperwoman. It does give her greater opportunities and wider fields of journalistic activity."[27] However, World War II did provide women with new opportunities and experiences that would help them in the future.

THESIS AND OUTLINE

This honors thesis argues that the image of female journalists in cinema between 1940 and 1945 contradicts the real life experiences of women journalists during this time. In the first chapter I will discuss the image of female journalists in film based on the following four movies,

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[23] Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote*, 69.
[24] Ibid., 75.
[25] Ibid., 75.
[26] Mills, *A Place In The News*, 50.
[27] Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote*, 72.

His Girl Friday (1940), *Meet John Doe* (1941), *Woman of the Year* (1942), and *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945). Chapter two will explore the lives of twelve female journalists—in particular their experiences as journalists between 1940 and 1945. These interviews are based on the oral interview collection from the Washington Press Club Foundation. Finally, in the third chapter I will argue how the image of female journalists in film contradicts the real experiences of women journalists. While similarities do exist, film is based on a formula, whereas reality is not so easily controlled or predicted. The conclusion will review the concept of disparity between image and reality. Film journalists lived controlled lives and real life women reporters went after opportunities presented to them. Some women married before the war and had children. In the movies, women were married once they gave up their jobs. In addition, the content of women's articles in the movies went from hard news to soft news, whereas real women journalists wrote about soft news transitioning to hard news during the war.

CHAPTER ONE:
FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN FILM

In films featuring women journalists, the sob sister designation defines these characters. Although the sob sister era of journalism ended by 1919, Hollywood picked up the term in the 1920s, and female journalists in film were forever known by this name. Women journalists did

not like this name because it reinforced the stereotype of woman as emotional and soft-minded, but intellectually sloppy. The implication was that they could not by nature be as effective journalists as men. But the sob sister in the movies by the 1930s is no longer only an emotional writer. She is independent, hard-boiled, and ready to do anything a male journalist would do to get a story. In some instances she will do more, for as a woman she has to prove herself in ways that male journalists did not. Like many real journalists the Hollywood female reporter works hard to be accepted by male journalists. She tries to be "one of the guys," and she yearns to hear the one phrase that indicates her acceptance by male journalists: "You are a newspaperman."[28]

However, as the female journalist throws herself into her work (like a man), she must be careful not to lose her femininity. She must find a way to incorporate the traits of the journalist needed for success in the journalistic film world—aggressiveness, self-reliance, curiosity, toughness, ambition, cynicism—while finding a way to be the traditional woman—compassionate, caring, loving, maternal, and sympathetic. That conflict between maleness and femaleness in the woman journalist in film is an internal conflict that creates dramatic tension and visual strife for the viewer.

Films focusing on journalism usually romanticize the profession. The film journalist is a cowboy on the urban frontier and a detective who becomes personally entangled in major public events in getting his story. He is usually hard drinking and highly masculine. This presentation of the journalist creates dramatic tension in journalism films, although it overlooks the more mundane aspects of journalism: finding sources, carefully tracking them, and writing assigned articles. It also creates a dilemma over how to personify women who are working in this world;

[28] Joe Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist In Popular Culture," The Image of the Journalists in Popular Culture, 3, http://ijpc.org/sobsessay.pdf.

indeed, they often are portrayed as just as masculine—and sometimes even more masculine—than the men.

Films concentrating on the journalistic profession—even ones featuring women journalists—often focus on the newsroom, the place where the editors and writers have their work desks and do their writing and telephoning. This room functions as a metaphor for journalism in general, seen in this period as a dynamic representation for the dynamism and energy in American life in general. It is a noisy, crowded, and highly masculine space (as in the stereotypical newspaper editor smoking his cigar). It is also a space for a second conflict in films about women journalists—between the woman journalist and her love interest, often another journalist working with her on the same paper. Because these films about women journalists are often screwball comedies, the women journalists are sometimes more dominant in their personalities than the men: the male and female roles are reversed. As comedies, the films about women journalists often feature witty dialogue between the female and male leads, in which they banter about journalism and the role of the sexes in the profession and in relationships. In the end, however, the woman, no matter how powerful, will give into the man, although sometimes she continues as a journalist, even though married.

This study focuses on women journalist films made during the 1940s. In particular I focus on: *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Meet John Doe* (1941), *Woman of the Year* (1942), and *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945). These four films illustrate a formula involving female journalists, emphasizing the dilemma of domesticity versus work. The female journalist works aggressively for a story, and in the end settles down with her love interest.

REFUTING AN ARGUMENT

In his book *The Media in the Movies*, Larry Langman argues that by the 1940s the woman journalist in a leading role faced many setbacks. According to Langman, "She appeared only as an adjunct to the more clever, savvy and brave male reporter who got the scoop, solved the murder and helped free the wrongly condemned."[29] However, based on the four films viewed for this study, Langman's argument is inaccurate. While women journalists did go through a transformation during the 1940s, writing hard news in the earlier part of the decade, to writing soft news—women's issues—by the end of World War II, the woman journalist continued to play a strong leading role in film.

His Girl Friday, made in 1940, is the screwball comedy based on the movie *The Front Page* (1931). Wherein *The Front Page* the lead character Hildy Johnson is a man, in the 1940 version Hildy Johnson is a woman, adding a male-female dynamic to the screwball comedy. Contradicting Langman's claim that in the 1940s women journalists no longer played the important leading character in journalism films, Hildy Johnson is a tough, feisty woman who states her opinion and does not let anyone—including men—walk all over her. The male leading role in the film is that of Walter Burns, editor of the newspaper and Hildy's ex-husband.

The film begins with Hildy and her fiancé Bruce Baldwin entering the newsroom of the Chicago *Morning Post*, as Hildy prepares to tell Burns that she is getting married and no longer wants to work for the newspaper.[30] The following is an example of the back and forth banter Hildy and Walter exchange in his office.

Walter: Listen. I made a great reporter out of you, Hildy. But you won't be half as good on any other paper and you know it. We're a team. That's what we are. You need me and I need you, and the paper needs both of us.

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[29] Larry Langman, *The Media in the Movies: A Catalog of American Journalism Films, 1900-1996* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 4.

[30] *His Girl Friday*, DVD, directed by Howard Hawks (1940; Los Angeles, CA: Delta Entertainment Corporation, 1999).

> **Hildy** (*overlapping with his words, she pretends she is an auctioneer for Lucky Strike cigarettes*): Sold American! Listen, Walter, the paper's gonna have to get along without me. So are you. It just didn't work out, Walter.[31]

This excerpt demonstrates that Hildy is not afraid of Walter, and will not back down in any argument. As a strong, independent woman, Hildy tells Walter her reason for coming and does not allow him to talk her back into reporting for the paper. Hildy does however agree to write a story for Walter, only on the condition that he buy an insurance policy from her fiancé Bruce—ensuring that both Hildy and Bruce have some money put aside before they marry.

One of Hildy's strongest traits is her ability to talk her way into any situation. In order to get an exclusive interview with prisoner Earl Williams, Hildy "accidentally" drops a $20 bill on the ground in front of the jail guard, then asks if the money belongs to him. The guard takes the money and proceeds to let Hildy interview Williams. As the clever female journalist, Hildy then convinces Williams that he used his gun because of "production for use," whereby a product is made for its use. Based on these stipulations, Hildy persuades Williams to accept this argument as the reason why he shot a police officer.[32]

In opposition to Langman's theory, it is Hildy, not Walter Burns, who uncovers that the mayor and governor are trying to hang the innocent Williams in order to get reelected. Throughout the film Hildy proves herself time and again as a strong, talented reporter, who knows the profession, and knows how to get the scoop before the competition.

In Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941), journalist Ann Mitchell proves her worth to her editor—after she is fired—by creating a letter written by a Mr. John Doe, who is angry with the government and plans to commit suicide on Christmas. Once Mitchell's article is published, the

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[31] Tim Dirks, "His Girl Friday (1940)," Filmsite, http://www.filmsite.org/hisg.html.
[32] *His Girl Friday*, DVD. 1940.

town is in an uproar, and everyone from the mayor to the local storeowner wants to find John Doe and offer him a job. Except there is no John Doe—but only Mitchell knows this.

One can detect from the beginning of the film that Mitchell does not take a back seat to her male colleagues. In fact, it is Mitchell who creates the letter and convinces her editor Henry Connell to continue the sensation by running a story everyday profiling John Doe's life until he commits suicide. "There is enough circulation in this story to start ink shortages," she asserts.[33] Not fully convinced, Mitchell persuades Connell to hire a man to be John Doe, so the newspaper can profile him until his supposed death. Connell agrees to Mitchell's idea and hires John Willoughby to impersonate John Doe.[34]

Not only is Mitchell the brain behind the John Doe story, she also becomes the voice of John Doe. When the newspaper's publisher decides to use John Doe as the spokesman for a third political party with the publisher as the lead candidate, he asks Mitchell to write Doe's speeches. She agrees, using her late father's words to write speeches that inspire an entire movement.[35] This symbolizes that the lead male character, John Doe, is nothing more than a puppet that recites what he is given. Mitchell, on the other hand, is a dominating figure who becomes the voice and brain behind John Doe the man, as well as the John Doe movement. Contrary to Langman's assertion, Mitchell's character is imperative to the plot of the film, as she is the one who writes the original fake letter. Without her, the publisher would have no one to nominate him for office, and the John Doe movement would be non-existent.

In 1942 *Woman of the Year* introduced Tess Harding, the independent, hard-working,

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[33] *Meet John Doe*, DVD, directed by Frank Capra (1941; St. Laurent, Quebec: Madacy Entertainment Group, Inc., 1998).
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

intelligent female journalist for the *New York Chronicle*. The movie opens with a montage of headlines either written by or about Tess Harding and her adventures with the leaders of World War II and the war itself. Her importance and reputation in the newspaper business is confirmed when a bartender says to two men who work for the *Chronicle*, "You guys on the *Chronicle* ought to form a cheering section for Ms. Harding."[36] Another man points out that she is considered the number two dame in the country next to Mrs. Roosevelt.[37] After making a comment over the radio that people should give their full attention to the war, and perhaps baseball should be abolished until the war's end, she and sportswriter Sam Craig argue with each other about this issue through their columns in the *Chronicle*.[38] It is clear from the beginning of the film that Tess Harding, not Sam Craig, is the leading character and the star reporter for the *New York Chronicle*.

Throughout the film Tess Harding is shown as an important woman who works and socializes with the elite both domestically and abroad. In contrast, Sam Craig is depicted as a simple sportswriter. When he attends a party at Tess Harding's apartment he is unable to speak to anyone because while most of the guests speak other languages Craig speaks only English, and those who do speak English discuss deep important political issues.[39] Craig is clearly out of his element, emphasizing that although Harding and Craig write for the same newspaper, they live in entirely different worlds.

The film emphasizes Tess Harding's individuality as both a journalist and a woman. Like most female journalists in film during this period, Tess works hard for her stories and does not take no for an answer. However, Tess Harding also has an independent personality. She

[36] *Woman of the Year*, VHS, directed by George Stevens. 1942.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

does not depend on anyone but her male secretary and her female housekeeper, who attend to her busy life and keep her day in line. Interestingly, in the relationship that ensues between Craig and Harding, it is Tess who plays the "man" in the relationship. She writes about political issues, and Craig writes about sports. Tess is highly regarded and is a well-known journalist, whereas Sam Craig is known solely within the sports community. Tess does things for herself, and does not need Craig to lift a finger for her. This is illustrated when Tess pulls out a cigarette, and Sam goes to light it for her, only to find that she's already done it herself.[40] Even her clothing represents that of a male, as she wears pant suits, and one of the few times she is shown in a dress is when she attends a dinner in her honor for winning America's outstanding woman of the year award.

The role reversal continues in the film, with obvious examples of Tess Harding's independence. Tess is frequently shown in her office on the phone, or reading the news coming through the wire, and with her male secretary making her daily arrangements. The fact that she has a secretary, and Sam Craig does not, shows her importance as a journalist. The fact that her secretary is male symbolizes Tess's masculinity in the film. In many journalism films the male reporters are shown in a bar drinking with one another. For a woman to be part of the group she must join them. This is exactly what Tess Harding does in *Woman of the Year*. Sam Craig takes her out for a drink and is surprised when she orders the same as him—a double scotch. She tells him she can drink like a man and can hold her own.[41]

Langman's argument rests on the idea that the male journalist is the smart, savvy and brave reporter who will go out and get any story. However, in *Woman of the Year*, it is Tess Harding who braves all to get the latest scoop. She travels the world—especially during the

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

war—she meets with diplomats and she rallies for women's rights. She puts her career before her personal life.

Elizabeth Lane in *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945) is the country's most popular food writer. She writes about her family and the joys of working at home. The catch is that she makes everything up. Lane does not live on a Connecticut farm, nor is she married with children. In fact, Lane is single living in New York City. She does not know how to cook and relies on her friend Felix to bring her food as well as his famous recipes for her to publish. In this film Lane is the only journalist; therefore, she is not compared to any males in the profession. Even further, she does not act as an adjunct to other male reporters as Langman suggests.

In making up her column Lane demonstrates her skill in creative writing. She is able to lure readers in with her stories about her made up family and cooking adventures. Little do they know that Lane has never flipped a pancake in her life. She is in control of everything she writes, even fooling her publisher. Lane holds on to this control throughout the film until the end when her publisher discovers her secret. However, even at this point he keeps her as a writer for his magazine because he knows how popular she is among readers, which means a boost in the magazine's circulation.[42]

TRANSFORMATIONS

Although these four movies disprove Langman's general theory that women journalists in the 1940s take a backseat to male reporters, the female journalist still puts family first by marrying her love interest in the end. While women are shown as individuals working hard for

[42] *Christmas in Connecticut*, VHS, directed by Peter Godfrey, 1945.

their stories, they are also shown in the arms of a man at the end of the film. In addition, the issues women journalists write about in film change as well. In 1940, Hildy Johnson covers the hanging of an innocent man. In 1945, Elizabeth Lane is the most popular food writer for a woman's magazine. While the female journalist continue to play leading roles in film, by 1945 women have been reduced only to writing about society. No longer does she run after criminals and solve murder mysteries, as seen at the beginning of the decade.

In *His Girl Friday* (1940) Hildy Johnson announces at the beginning of the film that she is leaving the newspaper business to get married. She no longer wants to be a newspaperman—she wants to be a *woman*.[43] According to Hildy, it is impossible to be both a journalist and a woman. While telling everyone she is leaving, she continues to find herself lured back into the newsroom. When she announces to the reporters in the pressroom—consequently all men—that she is leaving the business and getting married, they laugh and cannot imagine her as anything other than a reporter. The journalism bug soon catches her as a siren goes off and the reporters discover the prisoner has escaped.[44]

As hard as she tries, Hildy cannot give up her masculine traits as a newspaperman. She tells her fiancé Bruce, "You've gotta take me as I am instead of trying to change me into something else. I'm no suburban bridge player. I'm a newspaperman. Darn it."[45] Instead of marrying Bruce who does not understand her love for journalism, Hildy re-marries Walter. The two of them continue writing together, but now the audience knows that Hildy will be married, as is the proper life for a woman.

In 1941 Ann Mitchell in *Meet John Doe* takes on the man's role by financially supporting her mother and two younger sisters. In order to support them Ann works hard to bring a

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[43] *His Girl Friday*, DVD, 1940.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Dirks, "His Girl Friday" (1940), http://www.filmsite.org/hisg.html.

paycheck home each week. Although Mitchell is a successful journalist, Hollywood makes sure to uphold the moral ideals of marriage by showing Mitchell's life as incomplete unless she is with John Doe (John Willoughby). In the end, Mitchell pleads with John Willoughby not to jump off the mayor's building and to live a life with her. She collapses in his arms as he carries her away.[46] The message sent to viewers is that although a woman can be a successful journalist and financially support her family, she must marry in order to find true happiness.

By 1942 the United States had entered World War II and as men left to fight, women replaced them. This is one reason why Tess Harding in *Woman of the Year* is portrayed as a strong, independent journalist. The film keeps audiences on their toes as they watch Tess encompassing many masculine characteristics, waiting for her to settle down as a housewife. Assuming she is pregnant, the audience watches as Tess asks Sam what he thinks about adding a third person to their family. When Craig excitedly asks when they are going to have the baby, Tess tells him it has already been done. She then brings in the young Greek boy given to her for being the chairman of the Greek Refugee club. Craig, who looks confused and somewhat angered, asks Tess about having their own child, to which she responds saying she could never have a baby because it would end her career.[47]

After Sam leaves her, Tess attends her father's wedding where her new stepmother, Ellen Whitcomb, tells her that success is only good and fun if you have someone to share it with.[48] Tess goes back to Sam to show him she can be a loving and caring wife. What Ellen Whitcomb says to Tess is symbolic of what was expected of women. Tess represents a successful, hard-working, and independent woman who in the end is advised not to put a career before family.

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[46] *Meet John Doe*, DVD, 1941.
[47] *Woman of the Year*, VHS, 1942.
[48] Ibid.

After hearing Ellen's advice, Tess tries her hardest to be the conventional wife that cooks, cleans and cares for her husband. Not knowing how to cook, Tess fails miserably as she attempts to make Sam breakfast. As she tells him that she plans to give up her job and be his wife, he sarcastically asks her, "What are you going to do, run for President?"[49] She does her best to show him how dedicated she is to turning over a new leaf, and in the end he takes her back. For the first time Tess becomes the woman in the relationship. Moviegoers understood this sudden transformation in the female journalist's life as "they loved the way the woman gave it to the man throughout the film, but they didn't trust any woman who didn't put family and children above a career."[50] The message sent to female viewers is that while a woman can work hard, she must make her family a priority.

By 1945 women journalists are shown moving back into the domestic role. In *Christmas in Connecticut* Elizabeth Lane is a successful journalist, who writes about the home—also known as women's issues. Unlike Hildy Johnson, Ann Mitchell, and Tess Harding, who write about crimes, politics, and diplomacy, Lane writes about how to bake a cake and change diapers. As the film challenges Lane to embody the housewife she writes about in her column, she loses control of her secret and reveals to her publisher her real life as a single city girl. Once the war ended women were expected to leave their jobs and return to the home. Ultimately, this is what awaits Elizabeth Lane when she falls in love with the sailor she entertains for Christmas. As a reward for marrying the sailor and coming clean about her column, Lane's publisher doubles her salary. By telling the truth, Lane saves her career and finds the man of her dreams. In the end, the female journalist has the life every woman should want—marriage and a family.[51]

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Saltzman, "Sob Sisters," 4.
[51] *Christmas in Connecticut*, VHS, 1945.

These four films illustrate the transformation female journalists go through between 1940 and 1945. When the decade begins women journalists write about hard news—crime and politics; by 1945 women write about the joys of home. This shift represents the change in women's role in society. As World War II ended Hollywood emphasized the importance of women returning to the home. Interestingly, as the content of women's articles change between 1940 and 1945, with women returning to the women's pages, the female journalist in these four films is still considered the star reporter on her paper. Whether it is Tess Harding writing about World War II in the Eastern Axis, or Elizabeth Lane writing about Christmas dinner, each journalist is the center of the film. The image of the female journalist in film by 1945 is that of a successful woman who writes about women's issues—removing her from any competition with men—and who knows her place in society is to return to the home and marry. While this was not the image of real life women journalists at the time, it is the message Hollywood sent to viewers, particularly the female working population.

CHAPTER THREE:
REAL WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The image of female journalists presented in film does not correlate with that of real life female journalists. During World War II, women reporters found work in many newspapers replacing the men who left to fight in Europe and the Pacific. These women performed tasks from reporting to printing. They stepped into men's roles with ease and enthusiasm. The oral interviews from the Washington Press Club Foundation provide documentation proving that real women journalists during the war did not live their lives controlled by a formula.

In each interview the women tell the personal stories of their lives as journalists. They discuss their families, their childhoods, their education, as well as their likes and dislikes in the profession. While the interviews themselves span the lives of the journalists, only information pertaining to experiences during the war are used for this thesis.

Two themes emerge in the interviews bringing their experiences together. The first theme involves the women's experiences working in an environment composed predominantly of men. How did the men receive women on the staff? The second theme focuses on the

atmosphere of newsrooms during World War II. Were women running the paper? Were they hired because of the war; and did they keep their job when the war ended? Finally, what types of stories did they write? Did they focus on hard or soft news?

WOMEN WORKING SIDE BY SIDE WITH MEN

As many of these women discovered early on, the journalism profession consisted mainly of men. From working alongside their male colleagues women learned to hide their emotions in order to write accurate, objective stories. Beth Campbell Short recalls, "You couldn't do your job if you were crying or sobbing inside."[52] Women had to become journalists—which meant hiding their feminine tendencies. Not only did women have to toughen up and not allow their emotions to get in the way, but they also worried about the accuracy of their articles. One can sense the fear Beth Campbell Short felt in trying to report as accurately as possible. "But I suppose the hardest thing was getting every word right, getting every person's name right, getting every job they did right, being exact and not ever saying, 'Well, I asked him, and now I've forgotten what he said.'"[53] As was the case with many women, they did not want to jeopardize their jobs, and therefore did everything to prove to their editors and colleagues that they could be trusted as serious reporters.

Women often found themselves in catch-22 situations. They pushed themselves to be on the front lines of every story. Women who replaced male reporters were expected to take over and fill his shoes. Some editors were already wary about having a woman in the newsroom and they were not going to give her any extra concessions. She was there to do a job, and so if she

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[52] Beth Campbell Short, interview by Margo Knight, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 11 June 1987, 23, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/bcs2.htm.
[53] Ibid., 23.

was assigned to an issue that she did not know much about, it was up to her to learn about it before starting the interview.

The popular image of newsroom relationships is to show the men and women competing with one another. Contrary to many opinions men did take the time to explain the fundamentals of news reporting to the female reporter. In the following excerpt, Charlotte G. Moulton remembers the help she received from a fellow journalist.

> Well, the Interstate Commerce Commission [ICC] was an absolute maze, you know, the workings of how it went about its business, and they weren't about to help the press at all…There was a man there who worked for a trade paper called the *Traffic World*, and he, of course, had a great deal to handle. His name was Lewis W. Britton. He was the *Traffic World* man. And I think if he hadn't…taken me under his wing and helped me through that bureaucratic maze, I would have probably fallen by the wayside because it was just beyond belief trying to understand all that.[54]

Moulton's experience is just one example of a man willing to extend a helping hand not because she is a woman and may be considered weak, but rather, because she is a journalist. Mary Garber, a sportswriter during the war for the North Carolina *Winston-Salem Sentinel*, faced similar trials while covering a college football game for the first time, in a press box full of men.

> I didn't have the faintest idea how to cover a football game. And I went over there and I didn't have any idea what to do. There were no programs, there were no line-ups, there were no numbers—there were numbers on the players but I didn't know who they were. And I was just desperate. And I went into the so-called press box which was jammed with men. And I sat down there and there was a very nice black man sitting next to me. And I told him my troubles. And he said, "I know all the players, I'll help you." So he sat down beside me and he said this is so-and-so carrying the ball. And between the two of us we got the whole thing and I came back and wrote the story. And I was so pleased with myself but bless that man's heart, I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had him.[55]

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[54] Charlotte G. Moulton, interview by Anne S. Kasper, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 30 January 1991, 33, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/moul1b.htm.
[55] Mary Garber, interview by Diane K. Gentry, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 22 August 1990, 25, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/garb1.htm.

Mary Garber's experience also disproves the image of male journalists unwilling to help women reporters. Not only does Garber's story prove that men and women worked side-by-side, but she points out that camaraderie did exist, and that it could exist in sports reporting, among the most masculine of journalistic fields.

Although Garber's press box experience demonstrates that some men did help women, Gladys Montgomery Singer calls attention to the fact that even congeniality can have an ulterior motive. While writing for the McGraw-Hill magazine *Electronics*, Singer realized that the way men treated her embodied more than pure professionalism. "Well, that's where I have a two-sided story, really. I can say that they treated me very well, partly because nobody wanted electronics. It wasn't a front-page story then. And partly because we got along well together."[56] Ironically, as the war continued and electronics became front-page news, Gladys Montgomery Singer, who was the only woman reporter for McGraw-Hill, found herself without a job.

> I believe I was the only woman reporter left from the war days in the office. Somehow it made the head of the Washington office uncomfortable, because he wanted to get rid of women, and he knew that electronics was where I was doing very well. Because electronics was coming ahead by leaps and bounds, he felt that he wanted that to go to one of the men. He even went so far as to say, "'I can get a woman for a third less than a man. Take it or leave it.'"[57]

Depending on where a woman worked and what paper she wrote for, her encounter with men's reactions to working closely with women varied.

While men helped women reporters who were unthreatening to them, women in managerial positions presented a new threat to men. Male journalists became resentful of women telling them how to write. Marvel Cooke, an African American woman, was assistant

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[56] Gladys Montgomery Singer, interview by Kathleen Currie, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 21 February 1990, 35, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/mont3.htm.
[57] Gladys Montgomery Singer, interview by Kathleen Currie, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 7 August 1990, 43, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/mont4.htm.

managing editor for the *People's Voice* during World War II, a black weekly paper in New York City. Cooke recalls managing and editing men's work, and their resentment towards her.

> They didn't want a woman criticizing anything they wrote. For instance…the sports editor was almost illiterate. It so happened that I had been married to a man who knew about sports, and I could have been a sports editor, really. But I'd get his copy and it would almost kill me…there wouldn't be a sentence in the whole thing. It was just terrible. So I rewrote everything he did. He went in to Doxey [the editor] and complained about me. He said, "She murders my copy. I just can't function with her."…So I had my problems. I'm sure that the fact that I was a woman played a part in this man's criticism of me. He didn't want to work under a woman.[58]

Cooke reiterates that being a woman affected her working environment because many men felt uncomfortable working for a woman. In fact, even though she was assistant managing editor, her writing skills were questioned. Cooke remembered a time at the *People's Voice* when she wrote an article about an incident she witnessed right outside the office building. As the only one at work she wrote the story and left it for the editor. As assistant managing editor, Cooke did not write at the *People's Voice*, but having previously been a reporter she felt confident writing the short copy. When her editor asked who wrote the piece, she thought, "Oh, my God, I guess I've lost my touch." She told him, "I did. What's wrong?" He said, "It's the best thing I've seen for a long time. You mean to tell me you write like that and you're not writing?"[59] Cooke's recollection enforces the perception of men's lack of confidence in women.

Promotions in the newsroom were another way women learned of their editor's confidence in them. Gladys Montgomery Singer's boss praised her: "'I've been watching your work and the way you've been received in these various places. Your work has been very good. I've decided to make you Washington editor.'"[60] Her editor's comments confirm that Singer was promoted because she was a good journalist, not because of her gender. " 'I think you can get

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[58] Marvel Cooke, interview by Kathleen Currie, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 1 November 1989, 97, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/cook5.htm.
[59] Ibid., 96.
[60] Singer, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 35.

the articles, and if I tell you what I want on a certain thing, you can pretty well judge whether the person is doing what I want, or you can give him some idea of where it should be different.'"[61] Flattered and also determined to keep this new position, Singer pushed herself to learn about everything she would be covering: "I decided that it was very important for me to know the leading groups, organizations, in the field, and to get a little idea of what they were doing."[62] This preparation illustrates what women went through in order to be taken seriously. It also proves that women felt the *need* to work harder to avoid criticism from male reporters and editors.

As these women retell the stories of their journalistic careers, they portray an image of professional independence and control. However, as with all images, the reality of this portrayal only goes so far. A few women remembered times when they were not assigned to a story because they were women, even though they were considered excellent writers. "They never sent me to an execution, and purposely," Mary Ellen Leary recalls.[63] Leary points out the issue of gender in the newspaper, in the sense that women could work as reporters, even editors; however, when it came to covering stories about death and execution, some papers would not send their female reporters. Before she became a sportswriter, Mary Garber wrote for the news side of the paper. While she was not prevented from covering stories, she did find herself occasionally prohibited from writing about certain aspects of her assignment. In covering a trial, Garber was told to cover her ears so to not hear what was about to be said. "I just never liked court. I thought it was boring. And that was another situation where women were sort of at a disadvantage because there'd be an especially hairy case of rape or something else like that and

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[61] Ibid., 35.
[62] Ibid., 35.
[63] Marry Ellen Leary, interview by Shirley Biagi, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 15 August 1990, 25, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/lear2.htm.

the judge would say, 'Now, Miss Mary, you don't want to listen to this. You're going to be embarrassed.'"[64] This is an example of just how far a woman could go as a journalist in order to be taken seriously. In this case, the judge told Garber to cover her ears because she was a woman and there were certain standards of what women should see, hear, and do. Had she been seen as a journalist—with no gender attached—perhaps the judge's comments would have been different.

WOMEN DURING THE WAR

As women replaced men professionally during World War II, many female journalists found their skills were needed more in war offices helping the cause than working on a newspaper. Thus, women left the newsroom and used their writing and researching skills as reporters to provide information to war departments in Washington, DC. Betty Carter is a prime example of a female journalist who left her paper to support the war in other ways. To do her part for the war, Carter "went out and got a marvelous job with the Office of Facts and Figures, which a few months later became the Office of War Information."[65] Working in this office Carter researched and wrote speeches to help the department. She also found herself in various other jobs such as public relations, radio, writing biographies, and working as a personal assistant.[66] Although Carter was not working directly for a newspaper, she researched and dealt with the press to create a message for the war effort.

Unlike Betty Carter, Charlotte G. Moulton worked in a newsroom during the war. In December 1942 Moulton went to work for the United Press where she kept records in the

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[64] Garber, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 20.
[65] Betty Carter, interview by Anne Ritchie, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 10 April 1990, 36, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/cart1.htm.
[66] Ibid., 38.

morgue (similar to a library) and wrote some biographies.[67] Yearning to become a reporter, Moulton took advantage of the change in personnel during the war.

> As time went on, the men went into the service and so they had three female dictationists instead of three male dictationists. Then, after the dictationists had served us whatever length of time, they were sometimes promoted to be reporters. So I thought if a dictationist could be promoted to be a reporter, somebody in the morgue could certainly be promoted likewise. So eventually I was and I got the beat that was the lowest thing on the totem pole for wire services, naturally, since I didn't know anything about what I was doing. The beat…would be the Interstate Commerce Commission [ICC] (this is all one beat), the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], and the Post Office Department. The Interior Department was another low level beat.[68]

Moulton's explanation provides an example of the ladder reporters had to climb before becoming top feature writers for a newspaper. Once promoted to reporter, Moulton continued to cover Washington, D.C., and in January of 1945 she began covering trials.[69] As the war came to an end in mid 1945 Moulton notes the return of men looking for their former jobs: "You see, the war ended in 1945 and the men started to come back to work. So these women, who had kept things going all this time while the men were away fighting for their country, when the men came back, some of the women were no longer essential, so they were dropped from the staff."[70] The image Moulton depicts exposes the conditional reality of the newspapers' need for women during the war.

Dorothy M. Jurney also took advantage of the situation during the war and the opportunities for women. After returning from Panama, where she lived with her husband during the beginning of the war, Jurney took a job at the *Washington News* from 1944 to 1946 as assistant city editor.[71] Working closely with the men who did not leave for war, Jurney found

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[67] Moulton, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 28.
[68] Ibid., 32.
[69] Ibid., 37.
[70] Ibid., 45.
[71] Dorothy Jurney, interview by Anne S. Kasper, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 16 January 1990, 26, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/jurn1.htm.

herself in a favorable situation. She remembered working with men who were “drunks, and they were older and when they got drunk and fell by the wayside, I took on more responsibility until then indeed I took the position of the assistant city editor.”[72] Jurney used this opportunity to learn the ropes and create a reputation for herself as someone who was responsible and who knew the ins-and-outs of the paper.

Like many other women Jurney found herself without a job when the war ended in 1945. However, rather than fire her as soon as the men returned, her editor John O’Rourke requested that she stay on staff long enough to train the man who was to take over her position:

> And eventually, after the war was over and the men were coming back, we lost our jobs. And I remember John O'Rourke telling me that this young man—Daniel—was coming back. Now, he had never been on the news side. "He had been a cub reporter in the sports section," he told me, “so he doesn't know anything about editing and he doesn't know about being a city editor. But Dorothy, I would like you to teach him his job.”[73]

Women were needed on a conditional basis, and once fired they were no longer the responsibility of the newspaper. As seen here, the paper had no further use for Jurney as a reporter. However, her services were desired in order to train the young man who was coming to replace her.

Gladys Montgomery Singer found herself in a position for a job as a paper attempted to fill its staff becoming smaller by the loss of men. This position of course was on a conditional basis. She was to be an experiment for McGraw-Hill, a magazine publisher, where women were not widely accepted. The following is an excerpt from what Singer remembers the head of the McGraw-Hill office in Washington telling her:

> “Well, I'll tell you. There is a chance for someone in this office, but I don't know whether they'd take a woman or not. But I'm willing to make a try, because I'd like to see you get this job." He said, "Now, don't be upset, because we've never had a woman reporter in this office." The word came back that, "Give her a try, but call it an experiment." So "Give her a try and call it an experiment," was my entrance to McGraw-Hill

[72] Ibid., 27.
[73] Ibid., 29.

reporting. The experiment seemed to have gone on and on, and I never knew the word to be cancelled or even, let's say, referred to. It went on for 18 years.[74]

Gladys Montgomery Singer's experience in journalism contrasts with Dorothy Jurney's because she not only worked for a magazine that was not open to having women on staff, but she also kept her job for McGraw-Hill far after the war ended. Simply comparing the two experiences of Gladys Montgomery Singer and Dorothy Jurney, one begins to notice that there was no formula for what female journalists should do during the war.

While the general conception is that World War II kept women occupied while their men were in Europe and the Pacific, interestingly, one journalist found war reporting dull and uneventful. Katherine Beebe Harris, reporting for the Associated Press in San Francisco during the war said, "It was rather dull for me, because everything was classified. It was so dead!"[75] She continues, "We couldn't print the weather! Oh, war hysteria, you see, the Army is in its heyday. They loved it. Everything was shut down. All other news paled besides the war news, so really, for me, it was rather a dull time. But by that time, I was married and I didn't care at all."[76] Katherine Beebe Harris represented the female journalist who did not have to choose between marriage and reporting. Although during the war she preferred to spend time with her husband, Beebe Harris described her ability to maintain a marriage and work on a newspaper without feeling the dilemma of how to be a woman, a journalist, and a wife at the same time. Katherine Beebe Harris demonstrated that it is in fact possible for women to have both—it does not have to be one or the other.

Mary Ellen Leary represents the female journalist who takes matters into her own hands and creates work for herself. As she explains, "And then as the war began, I developed my own

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[74] Singer, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 34.
[75] Katherine Beebe Harris, interview by Shirley Biagi, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 13 October 1989, 70, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/beebe2.htm.
[76] Ibid., 71.

beat of war agencies. They were blossoming all over the place."[77] Compared to Katherine Beebe Harris, who remembered war coverage as dull, Leary found herself writing about the effect of the war on civilians. "Well, the first thing of importance on the civilian front was the regulation of prices and wages and everything else. And then the manpower agency trying to steer people into jobs where people were needed."[78] When asked about how the war changed reporting, Jurney recalls:

> Well, it took away the reporters. I mean, it was just astonishing — and of course, what it did was change newspaper opportunities for women. The whole climate of the paper, the whole inside operation changed because all your key people who were young were just gone. Some who were over-age or had kids and couldn't get called nevertheless volunteered. But apart from the photographers, every department just lost men and all of the young left town, everyplace. So the opportunities open to a woman were just totally new.[79]

Although the war opened positions for women, Leary suggests that papers needed women because they were in a state of desperation, and needed to get the newspaper out.[80] In fact, although new positions were available for women, these positions did not include becoming editor.[81] According to Leary, the most significant change for women during the war was the range of issues women could cover:

> The type of stories that women were allowed to do also expanded a great deal. Even though I was doing government-related stories — like I did garbage rates — even though I was doing welfare stories and education and juvenile issues, there was a kind of a feeling among editors that that was all right. I wasn't doing a lot of crime or street violence or automobile coverage or various areas in which we would automatically think that's not a woman's field, that's a man's field.[82]

As described by Leary women broadened their horizons during the war and were no longer confined to writing on the women's page. They were given opportunities to write articles of

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[77] Leary, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 24.
[78] Ibid., 35.
[79] Ibid., 35-36.
[80] Ibid., 36.
[81] Ibid., 37.
[82] Ibid., 37.

significance to more than just the local society club. In fact, Leary found herself asked to cover politics in Sacramento based on her work during the war.[83] As Leary's editor sent her to Sacramento, he gave her the following advice:

> He sat down with me and said, "Look, you're going up there to the State Capitol where everybody writing politics has been there for" — I think the minimum then was nine years was the youngest, the *Examiner* guy had been there only nine years. "They all know more than you'll ever know. They all know all the background about everybody up there and they understand the pressures that are being exerted. You won't know any of that. So just go in and write what you see. Look around and observe as much as you can and just write it, starting with your ignorance, just write it."[84]

Leary's experience of reporting during the war, as well as being assigned to cover state politics, depicts her as an independent, hard-working woman who takes her job seriously and goes after what she wants.

Mary Garber's career as a journalist contradicts all the images of female journalists described during the war thus far. During her journalism career, starting in 1940, Garber wrote for the society page, the news desk, and finally found herself as the only woman sportswriter in North Carolina. As with other papers, the staff of the *Winston-Salem Sentinel* was decreased to a staff of six women. "It was all women. The only men we had, we had a man who was managing editor who—he wasn't a cripple but he had a bad leg. And then we had two older men who were working on the desk who made up the paper and wrote the headlines. And everything else was women."[85] To explain the atmosphere at the paper during this time, Garber and five other women wrote a book "about six girls putting the newspaper out during the war and all the things that we went through…All the trials and tribulations."[86] Unfortunately, the book was not

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[83] Ibid., 37.
[84] Ibid., 38.
[85] Garber, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 23.
[86] Ibid., 18.

published, but the fact that these women had the experience to control a newspaper, and write about it, demonstrates the diversity and disparity among newspapers across the United States.

Mary Garber did not enjoy writing about society issues, and only took the job because she wanted to write for the paper. She finally broke out of the society page and started covering news soon after the war. "I think it was in 1942, I'm pretty sure that's when it was…I got a chance to get out of society and get into news. And I think that was when I did the Community Chest and what we used to call the do-gooders, the welfare department and all things like that. I kind of enjoyed that."[87] She continues, "As the war went on and more of the men left, the women covered everything. I covered the county courthouse which included court and which I did not like at all; court just bored me to death. I covered the labor unions and I liked that. And then for a while I worked on the morning paper which is the *Journal*, on the news side, and I covered the fire department there and I just loved that."[88] With a short staff of reporters Garber found herself covering a variety of stories for the news desk, an opportunity available solely because of the war.

In an interesting observation, while the country was at war, little news about the war was covered in the *Winston-Salem Sentinel*. "Most of the actual war news was handled by the wire services. But it took a whole lot longer to get news than it does now. But we who were here, of course, did not have any …invasion or anything like that in North Carolina or in Winston-Salem. So we didn't have any actual coverage of the war."[89] Garber explains that although the war was not fought on United States soil, particularly in North Carolina, the war itself involved all American citizens:

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[87] Ibid., 18.
[88] Ibid., 19.
[89] Ibid., 21.

> But the thing that you've got to understand is everything was World War II, everything was involved in the war, all of us were. There was no one who didn't have somebody in the armed service. Somebody was involved in the war services all the time and so all of us, whenever anything happened in the war, we were a part of it. And there was constant keeping up with what was going on overseas. We had a service which we called "Soldier Boys Pictures." If your son or your husband or any member of your family had been promoted or been sent overseas, you could bring his picture in and we would run his picture in the paper saying "Private John Jones has been sent overseas." Of course, we couldn't say where he went or what group he was with. Or we would say that John Jones has been promoted from corporal to sergeant, or to private first class or whatever.[90]

As evidenced by Mary Garber, women brought a new angle to news during the war. Rather than writing solely about the diplomatic and militaristic news from Europe and the Pacific, Garber and the rest of the women on staff turned “hard” news into “soft” stories about family. While some consider women to write more sympathetically about the subject of a story, it can be argued that these women saw a way to boost circulation during a difficult time by providing a different angle of the war—a positive, family oriented perspective of what was happening thousands of miles away from home.

Although many women worked in journalism prior to the United States’ entrance into World War II, it was the opportunity and the stories they wrote during the war that launched their careers. This is particularly true for Mary Garber, who broke into sports due to the war, replacing a young high school boy who joined the Navy.[91] As was the case for most female journalists at this time, as the war ended and men returned home, women were soon replaced. This is no different for Mary Garber, especially since she covered sports—traditionally reported on by men. “I knew my job in the sports department was just—I believe the word was ‘for the duration,’ and I knew when the men came back that I'd be put back in news.”[92] Fortunately for Garber she was not fired from the paper, but simply moved back to the news desk. This however

[90] Ibid., 21.
[91] Ibid., 24.
[92] Ibid., 27.

did not last long, as she soon found herself again writing sports as the only woman sportswriter in the area.[93] Not only did Garber write for a paper staffed by mostly women, but she also wrote about everything from society, to news, to sports. The range of her ability demonstrates the ability of women to expand their repertoire and write about the same issues as men.

This chapter uses oral interviews of former female journalists to explain their experience working side by side with men, as well as what the atmosphere was like reporting during World War II. The original language of the text is used to give the interview an authentic feel, and to incorporate the vernacular of each woman.

Rather than following one formulaic image, the interviews evoke multiple images. While some women wrote about war issues, others researched facts for the War Department, and others wrote for science magazines. What is illustrated here is the disparity between the formulaic role of women journalists in film, and the reality of female journalists during World War II.

CHAPTER THREE:
IMAGE VERSUS REALITY

The filmic image of female journalists differs from the real image of female journalists in that Hollywood uses the platform of an independent workingwoman who does not find true

[93] Ibid., 29.

happiness until she falls in love and quits her job. In reality, female journalists learned to juggle a family and a career. The main disparity between the image and reality of female journalists in film is Hollywood's message advising women to go back to the home as soon as their men return from war, because that is where they belong.

FILMIC IMAGE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS

The formula found in journalism films involving the female journalist presents a precise image of the female. In film the female reporter works alongside her male colleagues, going after the same stories. She is usually the only woman reporter on the paper, and she is considered one of the star reporters in the newsroom. By the end of the film she discovers that true happiness lies with the man she loves, and therefore she must give up her job to start a family. This image is presented by Hollywood to say that while it is their patriotic duty to work during World War II, women should immediately return to the home when the war is over and men return from the battlefields. Even in films like *His Girl Friday* made in 1940 before the United States entered the war, Hollywood advised women to stay at home with a family. By 1945, as seen in *Christmas in Connecticut*, women reporters are no longer shown writing about politics and hard news, but rather Elizabeth Lane is a popular writer for a home magazine. In the end she falls in love with a sailor, and lives happily with him, even though she is the least domestic person in the film. Although the subject of films changed during the war, the concept remained the same—ending with the female journalist in the arms of her man.

The image of female journalists in Hollywood films is found in the common themes within each film. One theme consists of the single, independent woman who works hard and does not take no for an answer. She supports herself, and does not depend on a man to make her

happy. In *Woman of the Year* (1942), Tess Harding is a world-renowned reporter during World War II, who is highly respected by dignitaries. Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday* (1940) is a domineering character that takes control of all situations, and can hold her own in any conversation. Although she talks of wanting to get away from journalism and start a life at home, she realizes that she loves her work and cannot give it up right away. Ann Mitchell of *Meet John Doe* (1941) acts as the male in her home as she works to support her mother and two sisters. Finally, Elizabeth Lane in *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945) is a single New York City woman who writes a column about family and home, knowing nothing about this topic. However, her ambition and drive allow her to continue week after week.

Another common theme found among the image of female journalists in film is that of the sophisticated, feminine woman. This is represented in the way the woman dresses, as well as her mannerisms, her posture, and speech elocution. Ironically, for the first half of the film, the female journalist portrays more masculine traits than she does feminine characteristics. She uses these masculine traits to compete with male reporters. Hildy Johnson for example, wears a dark stripped skirt suit, with heels and a hat. She stands up straight and has proper manners, but can hold her own in any conversation as she is seen arguing and speaking over her ex-husband.[94]

The importance of domesticity and family is the third theme. Regardless of what the female journalist sets out to do in the beginning of the film, in the end she falls in love and gets married. In most cases this happens after the female journalist has created some kind of problem and the only way to solve it is to get married. In *Meet John Doe,* Ann Mitchell finds herself caught up in the idea of making money, regardless of the consequences. John Doe (Willoughby) saves Mitchell by not committing suicide, deciding to be with Mitchell instead. Tess Harding in *Woman of the Year* creates a mess for herself by neglecting her husband and focusing more on

[94] *His Girl Friday*, DVD, 1940.

her career. In the end she discovers that she cannot be happy if she has no one with whom to share her success. Even though she cannot cook and knows little about being a housewife, Harding returns to her husband to find true happiness. Finally, Elizabeth Lane in *Christmas in Connecticut* lies about her column, fooling everyone from her publisher to her avid readers. She then must pretend to be the imaginary woman she writes about week after week. She too is saved at the end, when she and a sailor who is a big fan of Lane's, fall in love, and he accepts her faults. The formula of the film works so to please the audience by showing an independent woman capable of working hard, but who in the end commits to a relationship. Ultimately, it is a game of choice, always resulting in the same conclusion.

REALITY AMONG JOURNALISTS

Many of the same images found in the movies are also found in real life journalists. Both the imaginary and real journalists are hard working and driven. However, the similarities between the two usually end there. While the film journalist lives a formulaic life, the lives of real journalists include more diversity.

An interesting comparison between image and reality is the dynamic atmosphere of the newsroom. In film, the female is the only woman reporter. This is particularly hard to believe especially because during World War II women replaced men in the newsroom. Many of the women in the oral interviews discuss working on newspapers with other women during the war. Mary Garber recalls being one of six women to operate the *Winston-Salem Sentinel* in North Carolina while men were away.[95] By not portraying an accurate newsroom in films, Hollywood misrepresents the journalism profession during World War II, especially as it pertains to women. Movies therefore send the message that women during the war did not take over for men,

[95] Garber, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 18.

because none of the men left to serve their country. This then becomes a misrepresentation of both men and women in the journalism profession. In addition, because a majority of moviegoers at this time consisted of women, it is hard to believe that they too would not question the dynamic of men and women in the cinematic newsroom; especially while the female viewers were living a similar reality.

The dilemma the cinematic female journalist faces is the main theme in any journalism film. As Joe Saltzman defines this dilemma, the female journalist must find a common balance between incorporating masculine traits of aggressiveness, toughness, and being unsympathetic, with being a compassionate, caring, and loving female.[96] This constant dilemma hovers over the female journalist, subconsciously haunting her. In the beginning of the film she is hard working, determined, ambitious, and aggressive. By the end of the film she solves her dilemma by falling in love and getting married. Real women journalists also had husbands and children. However, they did not allow their family to prevent them from having a career in journalism.

WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The oral interviews reveal that both family and work were important to these women journalists during the 1940s. What distinguishes them from the film journalist is a life of choice and opportunity, without a controlled formula. These women made their personal and professional worlds coexist; a predicament the film journalists could not solve.

Beth Campbell Short and her husband both worked on the same newspaper during the 1940s. While some women found it difficult to work directly with their husbands, Short was able to make it work by keeping her independence. "I didn't have to depend on him, but I cared

[96] Saltzman, "Sob Sisters," 1.

more what he thought than other people."[97] In the movies female journalists acted as though they did not need to depend on a man; however, in the end, they had dug themselves so far into a hole that they needed someone to help save them—her male suitor. Beth Campbell Short does point out that as a mother, wife, and career woman she had to have some balance. Here, she acknowledges the importance of focusing on the priority at hand:

> But, of course, there were a number of times when I had to turn down really good stories, because one of the children got the mumps or the chicken pox or something right when I had asked the magazine if they wanted it, and they said yes. But there is just a limit to what you can do, and a sick child with a contagious disease, particularly mumps, when your husband hasn't had them, is something you have to work out.[98]

What Short recognizes is that life is not set in stone, and when a problem arises, such as a sick child, something must be set aside, and in her case, it was her job.

Betty Carter took a differing approach to family and work. Carter enjoyed working, and after the war when her husband Hodding bought back the newspaper they sold before the war, Carter was determined to write. Her husband however did not want her working on the paper. "At first Hodding thought that I would be—he didn't want me to work, really. He wanted to be—take over, do it without me. But the way I got back was I began writing things about art and that type thing. We started a book page, which was a lousy book page, but we started it. And that's how I got back to the paper."[99] Betty Carter confirms the claim that real female journalists had options to choose from in their lives, rather than making choices based on a specific practice. Gladys Montgomery Singer decided to work whether her husband agreed with her or not.

> I was becoming more and more restless, even to the point that my maid said, 'You know, you have these women coming in here. You're just as smart as they are. You ought to go ahead and get a job, Mrs. Montgomery. You ought to do something.' So finally, I did reach the point, but it was precipitated, of course, by Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

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[97] Beth Campbell Short, interview by Margo Knight, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 24 June 1987, 56, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/bcs3.htm.
[98] Ibid., 57.
[99] Carter, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 40.

> That was the beginning of a scarcity of men reporters. I decided, whether Monty, my husband, agreed or not, I was going out to get a full-time employment.[100]

Here is an example of a woman who made her own decision of whether or not to work. Although the United States' involvement in the war was beginning, Singer made the decision to work, putting her career before her family. Important to remember is the idea that although these women put their careers before their family, they still had a family to go home to at the end of the day. This is an aspect missing from the formulaic life of the film female journalist in film. In the movies, it is either one or the other, but in reality, women could have both, and they made it work the best they could.

It was one thing for a woman to be married and be a journalist. It was another for her to have children, and yet another issue if she was divorced. Jane Eads Bancroft talks about having children, and the time she attempted to educate her daughter on sophistication with a friend.

> Yes, but some were divorced, and I knew several women in Washington who were divorced and had children. We'd get together and talk about our children and what we wanted to do for them. There was one woman who was from Chicago, and I think she was a very bright woman. I wasn't real close to her from school or anything else, but she had a little boy. Her little boy went to the same French school right next door, Maret School, that Barbara did. It was kindergarten only. We decided they should learn how to be a little more sophisticated, and she and I decided we'd take them to a very fancy restaurant for lunch on Sunday. We took them, thinking that they'd pick up a few ideas. But instead of that, they got under the table, and they kept chasing each other around on the floor. She and I were really baffled by that. I liked her very much, because she had really great ideas about things, but we never did get very far with our children.[101]

This anecdote tells the personal story of a real life journalist. It displays a reality of the woman, rather than the fantasy image from the movies. The difficulties Bancroft discusses about knowing women with children, and her attempt to teach them the importance of sophistication, brings a real quality to her interview. In movies, the female journalists do not have children and

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[100] Singer, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 33.
[101] Jane Eads Bancroft, interview by Kathleen Currie, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, Washington Press Club Foundation, 4 June 1988, 66, http://npc.press.org/wpforal/eads3.htm.

they struggle between being a star journalist and settling down to have a family. In *Woman of the Year*, when Tess Harding is given a young male Greek refugee, she willingly takes him in as a humanitarian; however, she knows close to nothing about motherhood. Tess lacks a maternal instinct, seeing nothing wrong with leaving him alone for a few hours with no supervision.[102] This is the filmmaker's reminder that while women may enjoy working, they are unable to be good mothers if they try to do both. Elizabeth Lane faces a similar dilemma in *Christmas in Connecticut*, when she is forced to pretend she is married and has a child. The audience soon discovers that this single girl from New York City is no where near qualified to handle a baby, as she barely knows how to bathe him or change his diaper.[103] Ironically, it is the male character in both films that plays the sensitive, caring and nurturing "parent" to the respective children. The message in both films is that women must marry and quit work so to give all her attention to her family.

In contrast to the other real life journalists, Mary Ellen Leary decided to put her personal life on hold while the world was experiencing rapid change. Still, her family worried that she would not find someone, and put pressure on her to find a husband. "Oh, my family. And my dad was worried about me, you know. What's going to happen to her? And I'm sure my Aunt Jo was practically praying, `Where's that nice Catholic young man?' I had guys in pursuit, stories I haven't told my children."[104] Leary continues explaining her reasoning for not pursing a relationship:

> I think what distracted me from a desire for marriage was the fact that there were these episodic changes in assignment. I mean first the whole war, and it sounds, compared to the war front covering these domestic beats was so insignificant. But on the other hand,

[102] *Woman of the Year*, VHS, 1942.
[103] *Christmas in Connecticut*, VHS, 1945.
[104] Leary, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project*, 38.

> it was very — it was an exciting new world for me getting into where the government was regulating so darn much in private life.[105]

Leary resembles the female journalist at the beginning of a movie who yearns for a new and exciting story, and pleads with her editor to send her out on the latest scoop. The underlying message in Leary's statement is that she did not want to settle down when the world was going through drastic changes, and if she could avoid settling down for a little longer she would have the chance to open new doors in her career. She was able to take this change because her life was not restricted like that of the female journalist in movies. Ironically, the female journalist in film does live an exciting, often adventurous life—but this comes to a close when she "chooses" to marry in the end. Choice is the operative word in this argument, as it only really applies to the real life journalists. Hollywood wanted viewers to believe women in the movies had a choice about keeping her career and getting married. But in the end, the audience knew, and in fact came to expect, the female journalist to 'choose' marriage over a career.

[105] Ibid., 39.

CONCLUSION

This honors thesis has examined the relationship between the image of the female journalist in film and the image in reality. The main question is, how does image reflect reality? Also, in what ways are the lives and choices of the women journalists in film similar to or different from those of actual women journalists?

I have come to the conclusion that one's image is a doctored representation of what others—in this case Hollywood—perceive to be the truth, as well as the message they wish to portray. In other words, image is an invented tag applied to the female journalist in order to control how viewers receive her. Reality, on the other hand, is the actual existence of the female journalist. The image of the female journalist in film is based on a specific formula created to

best represent the produced image. This formula consists of women reporters who discover that getting married will provide more happiness and fulfillment in their lives than a career.

The difference between the image and reality in this context is that of choice. Women journalists in film do not have the option of choosing a certain lifestyle by the end of the film. Of course they willingly fall in love and get married; however, one can argue that this decision is not one of choice but of obligation. As comedies are made with a formula in mind, there is little variation that can play into the plot. The formula is so well known that the audience comes to know what to expect in a screwball comedy about a female journalist. There is no element of surprise. Real life journalists on the other hand do have a choice of whether they want a family or a career, or both. Their lives are not written out and controlled, and they are not forced to marry and give up their careers. As Mary Ellen Leary demonstrates, it is perfectly acceptable for a woman journalist during the 1940s to work and be single, while taking care of herself before settling down. In addition, as the women discussed earlier exemplify, women were not penalized for being married and having children while working diligently as journalists.

An interesting question to investigate is how much of an effect did the war have on women marrying, having children, and working? If women are called to enter the workforce because of the men going overseas, then did these women really have a choice in whether or not they wanted to have a family and work? Based on the women in the oral interviews they did have a choice, and they all chose to work, either with or without a family.

In comparing the women in film during the 1940s with the real women journalists, one can argue that the real journalists were feminists presented with choices of how to live their lives, as opposed to their representations in film. Following the idea of image versus reality, it is

the uncontrolled life of the real female journalist that causes Hollywood to create a formula in the process of building the image of the ideal woman of the 1940s.

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