



Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean

Kristi Rowan Humphreys

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Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean examines representations of housework and their relationships with gender in sixty of the most popular television shows of the 1950s through the 1980s, searching for trends, similarities, inconsistencies, and meaning. Much of the critical scholarship addressing mid-century televised housework claims that domestic activities marginalize female characters, removing them from scenes involving important familial discussions and placing them in devalued positions. This book challenges the notion that housework functions primarily as a mechanism through which female characters are marginalized, devalued, invisible, or passive, and instead proposes a different reading of housework in television, one that brings to the fore the loving, sacrificial, and active qualities so crucial and foundational to housework activity in both representation and reality. These qualities, in turn, attach a strength to female characters, and male characters when applicable, that is often ignored in standard feminist analyses of television. This study reveals roughly twenty trends established in four decades of televised housework, from the housewives of the fifties, to the witches and genies of the sixties, to the elimination of male domestic labor in the seventies, to the dominance of male housekeepers in the eighties.

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