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# Labor and Delivery: Television Performances By Pregnant Actresses From 1948-2016

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LABOR AND DELIVERY: TELEVISION PERFORMANCES BY  
PREGNANT ACTRESSES FROM 1948-2016

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Theatre

by

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*to my parents for their love and support,  
to Kirsten for convincing me  
&  
to Kevin for everything*

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This project came out of a research trip in 2011. While working in the Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection as a research assistant for my then mentor and now friend Dr. Kirsten Pullen, I read an interview with Lucille Ball in which she was told by a movie producer to have an abortion so that she could perform in his film. This information sparked a question. What is the history of actresses' reproductive rights? Seven years later, here we are.

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## Abstract

*Labor and Delivery: Television Actresses' Pregnant Performances from 1948-2016*, examines the labor of six pregnant actresses working on United States television. Mary Kay Stearns, Lucille Ball, Jane Leeves, Kerry Washington, and Katey Sagal all worked through pregnancies while filming their respective television shows. These women exemplify the multitude of actresses who maintained their careers and their pregnancies in the television industry. This is the first study of its kind to examine the labor of an actresses' pregnant body on film while she performs a role other than herself. Previous examinations of pregnancy in performance are few but have largely focused on representations of the pregnant body in film and television. My study differs from these projects in that it is solely concerned with how the actresses pregnant body affects and is affected by the constraints of the naturalist genre on television.

This project is the beginning of an archive of televised pregnant labor. It examines how the television industry, television actresses, and television audiences have learned to accommodate the pregnant laboring body. I argue that pregnant laboring actresses and the television industry that employs them show United States television audiences pregnant bodies at work, and for better or worse, the television industry is a model of how to accommodate pregnancy in the workplace. Ultimately, I conclude that given the restraints of naturalism there is no perfect way for the television industry to accommodate actresses' pregnancies, but their pregnant performances provide a national platform for pregnant bodies to be seen working by millions of people.

In examining the pregnant televised labor of these actresses within the fields of theatre and performance studies, this study troubles naturalism as the default television performance



genre. It establishes the history of television pregnancy camouflage techniques and questions the effectiveness of those techniques by examining audience response. This project lays a foundation for deeper analysis of the pregnant body in naturalist televised performance. The ways in which an actress' pregnant body is modified, commodified, camouflaged, or disregarded within the television industry informs how pregnant bodies are discussed and treated outside of the television screen.

## Introduction: A Fertile Idea

On December 19, 1948, Mary Kay Stearns was notably absent from the live television show that she shot with her husband, the writer Johnny Stearns. She was in labor. *Mary Kay and Johnny* was a fifteen-minute television sit-com that aired Friday nights on the CBS network.<sup>1</sup> Even though Mary Kay was unable to participate on screen in the airing of the show, Johnny knew the show must go on. He wrote a fifteen-minute teleplay where he paced the waiting room of a labor and delivery ward waiting for the birth of his child. The episode ended spectacularly with Johnny placing a phone call to his mother-in-law and letting her know that Mary Kay had given birth to a boy named Christopher (Stearns and Stearns).

Stearns is the first actress in television history to have her pregnancy, labor, and delivery aired live. While her significance to television production history cannot be overstated, Stearns is often outshined by her 1950s counterpart Lucille Ball and *I Love Lucy*. Ball's star power and advancements in television production provide insight into why Stearns is forgotten in the shadows of television history. Only one full episode and a few short clips of *Mary Kay and Johnny* are extant. Before 1948 the show aired live, and the majority of the taped episodes were lost in the 1970s when DuMont's corporate successor MetroMedia dumped the DuMont archive into New York City's East River. The whereabouts of NBC and CBS's *Mary Kay and Johnny* (MKJ) episodes are unknown.

When MKJ was first produced in 1948, television technology was in its infancy. Coast-to-coast broadcast was not yet in place and the video cassette had not yet been invented. The majority of television was broadcast live from New York to east coast and mid-west audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary Kay and Johnny* first aired on the DuMont network on November 18, 1947. It changed networks to CBS and then NBC where the final episode aired on March 11, 1950.

The episode was recorded onto kinescope for rebroadcast on the west coast by pointing a film camera at a television and taping the live broadcast. The kinescope, a fuzzy recording, was rebroadcast on the west coast hours later. It wouldn't be until *I Love Lucy* premiered in 1951 that television production would be revolutionized by using film cameras and filming directly onto 35mm film.

Without an archive, details about Mary Kay's televised pregnancy are few. From an interview with Mary Kay and Johnny from the American Television Archive, in the Summer of 1948 a pregnant Mary Kay was both filming her television show as well as starring on Broadway as Lillian Hampton, "a lovely fifteen-year-old with a virginal sort of freshness" in *Strange Bedfellows* (Orodenker). Stearns shot her television show live and then raced from the studio to the Morosco Theatre, changing in the back seat of the car to make it in time for the curtain. Stearns juggled both a weekly live television show and a nightly Broadway performance while four months pregnant, working on screen and off throughout her entire pregnancy.

This dissertation, *Labor and Delivery: Television Actresses' Pregnant Performances from 1948-2016*, examines the labor of pregnant actresses working on United States television. The women of this dissertation all performed on television while pregnant—some of them worked through multiple pregnancies in one series. Lucille Ball gave birth to two children while developing and producing *I Love Lucy*. Jane Leeves and Kerry Washington each worked through two separate pregnancies on two separate seasons of *Frasier* and *Scandal* respectively. After being fired from *Melrose Place*, Hunter Tylo worked through her pregnancy on *The Bold and The Beautiful*, and Katey Sagal worked on *Married with Children* through her pregnancy and subsequent stillbirth of her first child. These women exemplify the multitude of actresses who maintained their careers and their pregnancies in the television industry. Since United States

television began commercial broadcasting in July 1941, women have performed pregnant. Visible or invisible, pregnancy has been a part of television since the beginning because women have been a part of television. Despite the commonality of this phenomenon and availability of an inexhaustible and constantly expanding archive of performances, a full-length study that focuses on pregnant performances of television actresses has never been done.

### **Argument**

My primary goal with this dissertation is to present clear, archive-based research that recovers the untold pregnancy performance stories of six television actresses. Through their televisual pregnant performances, these actresses place pregnant labor front and center on a weekly basis. Through my research I will reveal the impact these pregnant performances had on both television production and television audience reception techniques. The pregnant performances of these six women changed how pregnant actresses are received by the television industry, how visibly pregnant bodies are camouflaged, and how audiences read those camouflaged bodies on screen. This project is the beginning of an archive of televised pregnant labor. It examines how the television industry, television actresses, and television audiences have learned to accommodate the pregnant laboring body. I argue that pregnant laboring actresses and the television industry that employs them show United States television audiences pregnant bodies at work, and for better or worse, the television industry is a model of how to accommodate pregnancy in the workplace. Ultimately, I conclude that given the restraints of naturalism there is no perfect way for the television industry to accommodate actresses' pregnancies, but their pregnant performances provide a national platform for pregnant bodies to be seen working by millions of people.

In this dissertation I also argue for placing televisual performance within the field of theatre studies. From the very beginnings of television experiments in the 1920s to twenty-first century broadcasts, live audiences have been a part of the production process. The first entertainment broadcasts were referred to as “television plays.” In England in July 1930 Luigi Pirandello’s drama *The Man with a Flower in His Mouth* became the first piece of television drama to be publicly broadcast by Baird television and the British Broadcasting Company. A review of the performance in *The London Times* noted the intimacy that was created by the incredibly small stage the actors performed on: “These are conditions such as the most intimate of Intimate Theatres have never dreamed of. Mr. L. de G. Sieveking, the producer, working in inches where other producers work in yards, has made an extremely ingenious use of his material.” (“The First Play By Television”). The critic admits that “at once that plays by television are as yet a subject for men of science, not for critics of the finer points of acting” and ends the review, “Men of the theatre may meanwhile rest in peace. The time for interest and curiosity is come, but the time for the serious criticism of television plays, as plays, is not yet.” (“The First Play By Television”). While television was not yet in a state where the critic could judge the artistry of the broadcast, it is clear that this critic had every intention of treating future televisual performance with the same critical eye as theatrical performances.

Furthermore, in its experimental stages, television was seen as an entertainment meant for outside the home. The technology was not yet small enough for scientists or radio network executives to imagine television being watched in living rooms. Experts believed that television technology would be used in “television theatres” across the United States. These theatres would serve as hubs in which audiences in towns across the country could gather and watch a stage play broadcast live from one location. While television eventually became a home entertainment

technology, in 2002 Fathom Events began broadcasting live and pre-recorded concerts, operas, comedy acts, and the British National Theatre performances to movie theatres across the United States. These broadcasts are what scientists in the 1920s saw for the future of television entertainment.

## **Scope**

As television pregnancy performance has not been the focus of a major study it is important that the scope of this project be clearly defined. This project does not provide enough space to recover a complete history of television pregnancy nor a complete list of all the actresses who have performed on television while pregnant. Numerous actresses have performed on television while pregnant. When I discuss my dissertation project with friends, family, scholars or strangers in the supermarket, my conversation partner inevitably asks if I have ever seen [blank] show with [blank] pregnant actress. With so many case studies available, I chose Mary Kay Stearns, Lucille Ball, Jane Leeves, Kerry Washington, Hunter Tylo, and Katey Sagal because each actresses' pregnancy performance reveals a unique history of pregnant television production.

Each of these women's pregnant performances was a first for television history. Mary Kay Stearns was the first actress to work while pregnant on television, and Lucille Ball was the first actress to have her pregnant television performance nationally broadcast. Jane Leeves was the first actress to have her pregnancy camouflaged by a fat suit, and Kerry Washington was the first black female lead to have both her camouflaged pregnancies broadcast on television. Hunter Tylo was the first actress to take a television production company to court because she was fired for becoming pregnant, and Katey Sagal was the first actress to experience pregnancy loss in front of a national television audience. All of these women's pregnant television performances

are unique and construct a history of pregnant television performance that showcases the ways in which pregnant labor is accommodated on television.

This dissertation is limited to pregnancy performances within the television industry. As this study focuses on television it inherently leaves out actresses who were pregnant while working on films or in theatre and celebrity pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation studies how the constraints of the naturalist genre require accommodations to be made so that pregnant actresses can believably perform characters other than themselves. The television industry is the best candidate for analysis because, the availability of performance texts makes television a ripe archive for analysis. New entertainment technologies have made entire television series of old shows available for viewing. Through the streaming services Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon as well as purchasing DVD box sets I have access to all of the sites of my study. My ability to view the performances on demand allows me a deeper analysis of the performance texts and not rely heavily on second hand retellings of the pregnant performances.

Furthermore, the type of day-to-day labor on a television set is consistent with the day-to-day work of the average person. While working in more privileged conditions, television actresses have to report daily for work to meet weekly production deadlines in a timely manner. As this dissertation shows, television shows are largely produced in chronological order. Writers write scripts for each episode of a television show within a few weeks of that episode being produced. This means that a pregnant television actress will work continuously through her

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<sup>2</sup> *Wonder Woman* actress Gal Gadot made headlines when it was announced that she filmed reshoots of intense physical action scenes while five months pregnant. Broadway star Audra McDonald continued her high intensity tap-dancing routines in the musical *Shuffle Along, or The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* into her seventh month of pregnancy and celebrity singer Beyoncé Knowles-Carter exploded the social internet with both of her pregnancy announcements in 2011 and 2017. All of these sites are prime case studies for pregnancy performance analysis but they are excluded from this dissertation.

pregnancy while story arcs and show narratives are being written for upcoming episodes. A pregnant television actress has to learn to adapt to her changing body and her changing storylines as she goes to work every day.

Television actresses all perform the same kind of labor, playing a character not themselves. Therefore, I have chosen not to examine celebrity pregnancy in general. I acknowledge that celebrity is an inherent aspect of actresses' pregnancy experience. However, I want to analyze the pregnant body at work and the television industry is a consistent form of performance labor that can be tracked and analyzed. With this consistency I am able to track the changes in how the television industry has accommodated actresses' pregnancies, and how audiences have responded to those accommodations over time. Limiting the scope of my study in this manner creates a consistent industry context that is the backbone of my analysis.

Finally, this dissertation excludes discussions of pregnant television characters. Fictionalized pregnancy in performance has been a topic of discussion in several projects. Kelly Oliver's *Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films*, and *Pregnant Pictures* by Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler, are just two examples of texts that work to recover and analyze pregnancy in works of art and fiction. While I acknowledge the power of the representative image, I argue that the factual pregnant body at work is an image that should be given attention by performance scholars.

## **Literature Review**

This dissertation project requires historical performance research. These historical performances include: Lucille Ball's pregnant appearance in the second season of *I Love Lucy*, Jane Leeves pregnant performance as an overweight Daphne Moon in season eight of *Frasier*, Katey Sagal's pregnancy on season six of *Married with Children*, Hunter Tylo's performance in



the courtroom of her 1997 case against Aaron Spelling's production company, and Kerry Washington's hidden pregnancies on the prime-time television series *Scandal*. I examine these performances, using a case history methodology, with a critical eye, interpreting and reviewing them for their superficial offerings as well as their deeper meanings. Case histories function as "micro-narrative[s], examining how power works through retellings of the past" (Pullen, *Actresses and Whores* 5). These micro-narrative pregnant performances are singular moments throughout television history when pregnant labor was visible to a mass audience. They show how power influenced the perception and reception of pregnant labor on television.

In addition to examining these performances of pregnant actresses on television, I examine popular culture and entertainment magazines such as *People*, *Life*, *Time*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. These magazines provide information on what is editorially relevant in popular culture. The editorial demands of entertainment magazines enable a surveillance system of actresses' bodies through their pursuit of photographic evidence of the "baby bump." The main research attraction of these magazines is their weekly or monthly publication, which allows pop culture to keep track of all the happenings in celebrity society. This archive of "what's hot now" allows me to survey the ways entertainment trends have or have not shifted from the early 1950s to 2016. Their frequency of publication makes these magazines especially useful in that I can measure the speed of the trend shifts. I review these magazines for what they generally say about celebrity pregnancy and what they specifically say or don't say about pregnant actresses. Generally, the entertainment press documents the appearance of a pregnant actress in a television series. The entertainment magazines cover film releases, television premieres and the press those events generate. They not only feature the film or television show with a photo shoot of the cast of the film or show, they also report on the red-carpet events and

parties accompanying season premieres and blockbuster film releases. This press coverage provides a wealth of research information from what the actresses say about their characters, what the critics say about their performances and what popular culture has to say about the actress as a celebrity and as a woman.

In addition to entertainment magazines, I also examine video. These visual texts include the television shows that are the sources of my case studies, as well as archived interviews with television actors, actresses and producers from the *Archive of American Television*. These archived materials are not only the source material for my case studies but also provide a “behind the scenes” look at the production requirements and constraints of producing a television show with a pregnant actress. For example, the *Archive of American Television* hosts an interview with Mary Kay Stearns and her husband Johnny in which it is revealed that she was working on stage and in television while she was pregnant.

In addition to popular culture magazines and visuals, I study legal texts concerning pregnancy. I investigate the civil rights of pregnant women and how those rights are interpreted or infringed upon. Gillian Thomas’s *Because of Sex: One Law, Ten Cases, and Fifty Years that Changed American Women’s Lives at Work* is particularly useful in that it explains in layman’s terms ten key court cases that helped bring about federal legal interpretations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978. With this knowledge, I examine how popular culture ideas of pregnancy are informed by federal and state law. I examine overlaps between legal and popular culture representations in order to study where the lines between the two communities begin to blur. In conversation with each other, all of these texts will enable me to construct a popular cultural history of media discourse on pregnancy.

Along with primary source materials I am using academic sources to support my argument. In her dissertation, *Carrying All Before Her:” Pregnancy and Performance on the British Stage in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1689-1807* Chelsea L. Philips examines the personal and professional lives of seven eighteenth-century celebrity actresses. Her study argues that the pregnancies of these actresses “enhanced the demand for these women, and their economic viability, by placing their private lives on public display and winning them popular sympathy and support” (iii). Philips’ work is the first research project of its kind to suggest that pregnancy was not a detriment but an enhancement to the careers of post Restoration-era actresses. Her work informs my reading of the rise in celebrity that surrounds pregnant actresses after their pregnancies have been revealed and the birth of their children. Performance Studies scholar Della Pollock’s 1999 book *Telling Bodies, Performing Birth* is an ethnographic examination of the ritual of giving birth. This text is a first of its kind in the Performance Studies field. I use Pollock’s work to illuminate the story of Katey Sagal’s pregnancy loss in particular. The way in which Pollock analyzes the interviews and first-hand accounts of pregnancy is useful to this dissertation because it shows that while deeply personal, the pregnancy and labor experience has political ramifications as well.

I consult a number of Media and Television Studies texts. Jason Mittel’s *Television and American Culture*, Deidre Pribram’s *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, and Bonnie J. Dow’s *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since 1970* each inform my analysis of how television has influenced American culture. Understanding television’s role in the construction of United States discourse provides a basis for my analysis of pregnancy performance within television. Richard Koszarski’s *Hollywood on the Hudson: Film and Television in New York from Griffith to Sarnoff and Prime-time*

*Television: A Concise History* by Barbara Moore, Marvin R. Bensman, and Jim Van Dyke are texts that provided this work with a concrete understanding of television's trajectory from science experiment to revolutionizing home entertainment.

Renée Ann Cramer's 2015 monograph *Pregnant with the Stars: Watching and Wanting the Celebrity Baby Bump* investigates why and how twenty-first-century popular culture is obsessed with the celebrity baby bump. Cramer's work informs my constructions of television audiences' obsession with spotting Kerry Washington's baby bump during her two pregnancies on *Scandal*. Her notion of celebrities as bodies to be consumed draws on much previous work, especially by performance studies scholars. For example, Joseph Roach's *It* defines celebrity by asking and answering "What is *It* and how do people get it and lose it." His work informs my understandings of how actresses maintain their celebrity status and use it to their advantage both in the work place and popular culture. His work is specifically useful in my construction of Lucille Ball's rise to celebrity during her pregnancy on *I Love Lucy*. Kirsten Pullen's *Like a Natural Woman* is crucial to this dissertation, in part because the research I performed as a research assistant for Pullen's served as inspiration for my project, and because Pullen's reading of the spectacular performances of five Classical Hollywood actresses as labor, and not just natural talent, helps me construct a narrative of pregnant performance that already assumes the televisual performances as physical work. Richard Dyer's *Stars* is a foundational text for this dissertation because it is the first star studies book and fundamentally changed the way film stars are studied. Dyer's created the field of star studies by insisting that the labor of actors and actresses be analyzed and given as much credit for story telling as the work of directors and editors. All of these celebrity studies texts theorize how celebrity culture is constructed and implemented by actors/actresses and production companies over history. These works establish

how actresses and celebrities more generally have the ability to create popular culture. These texts on celebrity culture illustrate the influence that actresses have in pregnancy discourse and why we should not take their pregnant performances for granted.

A study about depictions of abortion on United States television by Gretchen Sisson and Katrina Kimport argues that popular culture, including fictional television productions, has contributed to the ignorance of the United States public in areas of medical care. Sisson and Kimport argue that depictions of medical care on television often favor the dramatic over reality for the sake of a good story. Furthermore, Sisson and Kimport argue that dramatic depictions of health care have real world consequences.

For example, Annas (1995) argues that the American television show *ER's* portrayal of emergency medicine as easily accessible and affordable mitigated Americans' sense of urgency around healthcare reform. Similarly, Turow (2010) found that medical shows significantly underrepresented concerns about the cost of care in a way that diminished public awareness and debate. (Sisson and Kimport 57)

The political ramifications of representations of medical care are abundant and depictions of pregnancy on television only add to this public discourse. The public does not consciously differentiate between fictional representations of pregnancy and real-world experiences.

Therefore, the visible and invisible pregnancy performances of actresses like, Lucille Ball, Jane Leeves, Kerry Washington, Katey Segal, and Hunter Tylo all inform the public discourse of pregnancy.

### **Pregnancy Discourse**

Pregnancy is an embodied process and the performance of pregnancy is reconstituted through what Judith Butler terms the performative act. In the same way that gender is understood as a cultural construct formed around biological sex, pregnancy too is culturally constructed through, within, and around the pregnant body. Butler's performativity is "not a singular or

deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (*Bodies That Matter 2*). Women learn how to be pregnant by citing previous performances of pregnancy and performing them again. Women understand how to perform their pregnancy by watching and listening to pregnant women who have come before them. These citational sources can be found in the wisdom of mothers, online pregnancy blogs, doctors’ advice, and pregnancy guidebooks. However, the most visual source material for pregnant women to quote from can be found on the bodies of pregnant women. Society at large learns what to expect from pregnant women by watching performances of pregnant women’s lives on stage and screen. The pregnant actresses of this dissertation learned how to perform their pregnancies by citing the performances of pregnancy by pregnant stars who came before them.

The pregnant performances of these stars circulate within and inform United States pregnancy discourse and in return pregnancy discourse informs pregnancy performance. Pregnancy discourse and pregnancy performance have a mutual, symbiotic relationship. Discourse is regulated through power structures and determines people’s actions and reception of those actions. It is through discourse that a society’s values and culture are constructed.

Following from Michel Foucault,

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (*The History of Sexuality Volume 1* 100-101)

United States pregnancy discourse is variable and ever changing. The pregnancy performances discussed in this dissertation contribute to the creation and dissemination of United States pregnancy discourse, but also work to thwart that discourse by exposing television audiences to

the bodies that it names. Power wields United States pregnancy discourse to suggest what the physical and emotional capabilities of pregnant bodies are, but the pregnancy performances of my case studies resist and infiltrate that discourse. As medical science and technology advance, so does our understanding of how pregnancy biologically functions. As social perceptions of pregnancy change, so does the public performance or display of the pregnant body. The fluidity of pregnancy discourse can be seen throughout this dissertation project. The way that 1950s *I Love Lucy* audiences felt about the visibly pregnant body is drastically different than the modern tabloid consumption of the celebrity baby bump. However, no matter which era of pregnancy discourse is under scrutiny, the elements of its construction are similar.

For this research project, I argue that pregnancy discourse is made up of three sub-fields: medical, legal, and popular advice. Medical pregnancy discourse consists of information from medical professionals as well as self-help pregnancy guides. These types of science driven texts seek to inform pregnant women and their partners of the dos and don'ts when it comes to the health of the baby and the pregnant woman. In recent decades popular medical research has encouraged women to have children as early as possible. Jean M. Twenge's 2013 article, "How Long Can You Wait to Have a Baby?" published in *The Atlantic* revealed that much of this baby panic developed after the April 2002 publication of Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *Creating a Life* which, "counseled that women should have their children while they're young or risk having none at all." In addition to the book Twenge details an ad campaign that was published the previous fall by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM). The campaign warned, "Advancing age decreases your ability to have children.' One ad was illustrated with a baby bottle shaped like an hourglass that was—just to make the point glaringly obvious—running out of

milk. Female fertility, the group announced, begins to decline at 27.” Multiple media outlets like *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines capitalized on this new research and created a fertility frenzy.

Twenge did her own research and found that much of the widely cited statistics about women’s reproductive odds was based on a 2004 study in the journal *Human Reproduction*. This data source for this study was French birth records from 1670 to 1830. From Twenge, “In other words, millions of women are being told when to get pregnant based on statistics from a time before electricity, antibiotics, or fertility treatment.” Twenge concludes that “baby panic,” which is still active today, is based largely on questionable data.

We’ve rearranged our lives, worried endlessly, and forgone countless career opportunities based on a few statistics about women who resided in thatched-roof huts and never saw a lightbulb. In Dunson’s study of modern women, the difference in pregnancy rates at age 28 versus 37 is only about 4 percentage points. Fertility does decrease with age, but the decline is not steep enough to keep the vast majority of women in their late 30s from having a child. (Twenge)

Despite this new research data, women’s perceptions of their shortened “biological clocks” persists because the false narrative of *Creating a Life* has become a part of pregnancy discourse.

Legal pregnancy discourse provides governmental guidelines for the employment of pregnant women. Two of the most significant contributions to legal pregnancy discourse are Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit sex discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. This amendment came five years after the Supreme Court ruled that women had the right to privacy under the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendment and therefore the right to an abortion before the first trimester of pregnancy. These two statutes fundamentally changed the legal rights of pregnant employees upon their adoption. However, these rights are challenged every year by employees who misunderstand the laws or refuse to accommodate pregnant labor.



In 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Young v. United Parcel Service, Inc.* that under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 employers had to provide accommodations for pregnant employees if the employer also provided similar accommodations to non-pregnant employees (Gillian Thomas 226). This ruling by the Supreme Court worked to clarify the second clause of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act which states,

women affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment-related purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and nothing in section 703(h) of this title shall be interpreted to permit otherwise. (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

During the Supreme Court hearing, Young's lawyer, Sam Bagenstos, argued that the purpose of this second statute was "to say to employers ... you have to treat pregnant workers as just as valued employees as anybody else." (Thomas 226). This interpretation of the statute implies that it is illegal for employers to base employment decisions of pregnant employees on stereotypes of pregnancy. Thus, employers must treat each employee's pregnant performance individually and not rely on popular pregnancy discourse to interpret their pregnant employee's capabilities.

Much of the discourse about the physical and emotional capabilities of pregnant woman is constructed through nonmedical pregnancy guidebooks or popular advice texts. One of the most popular advice texts is Heidi Murkoff's and Sharon Mazel's. *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. Originally published in 1984, the controversial and yet popular pregnancy guide is now in its fifth edition, published in 2016. In 2007 *USA Today* named the book one of the top twenty-five books of the past twenty-five years ("25 Books That Leave a Legacy"). *What to Expect When You're Expecting* is so popular that some obstetrics and gynecology doctors warn pregnant mothers away from the book. Journalist Jodi Kantor's 2005 article "Expecting Trouble: The Book They Love to Hate" cites the Brigham Obstetrics and Gynecology practice in Boston

as a clinic that explicitly tells their patients not to read the pregnancy advice guide because they feel that it does more harm than help. From Kantor's article, the arguments against the book is that it provides too much information that can cause expecting mothers to panic. Despite warnings against the book, it is still widely popular and has spent 607 weeks on *The New York Times* Best Sellers List (*The New York Times* "Best Sellers List Advice Guides"). *What to Expect* is an example of the citational practice of pregnancy performance. For over thirty years, pregnant women have been referring to this text for pregnancy advice and it has been passed around between friends and from parents to children. This text is an example of how domestic pregnancy performance circulates and creates pregnancy discourse. Despite the arguments against the book, *What to Expect* has ingrained itself into United States pregnancy discourse. The guidebook has become so synonymous with pregnancy that Kantor called it the "bible of American Pregnancy" and Lionsgate Entertainment Corporation bought the distribution rights to the book and produced the 2012 romantic comedy film by the same name.

Pregnant and postpartum celebrities also participate in pregnancy discourse construction by giving out anecdotal advice. The rhetoric of celebrity pregnancy advice runs the gamut from pseudo-science to inspirational advice. In 2012 actress Tia Mowry did an interview with NPR to promote her book *Oh, Baby! Pregnancy Tales and Advice from One Hot Mama to Another*. In the interview Mowry gives a bit of advice for pregnant women,

You know, it's up to you. This is your baby. You have the right to do whatever you want and if you have a mother-in-law that's constantly pointing her finger, don't argue with her. Just smile and nod and just say, OK. Thank you. Because you don't want to get into an argument. You're pregnant. You don't need to be stressed. (Martin)

This kind of anecdotal advice is run of the mill for postpartum celebrities. These women are not trained professionals in the medical field. They are giving advice based on their own lived experiences of pregnancy. Pollock talks about this kind of knowledge as "narrative knowing."

For Pollock, “[n]arrative knowing is not something one has but something one does, makes, and feels. It is an elusive, ephemeral property of stories told” (90). These anecdotes, advice books, and celebrity interviews, challenge traditional medical knowledge of pregnancy and birth because they perform different realities and claim space that is usually given to normative medical information.

Anecdotal advice or knowledge about pregnancy also circulates online through pregnancy blogs. Countless internet blogs are devoted to pregnancy and the birth experience. These blogs offer articles such as “Top Pregnancy Fears,” “10 Pregnancy Myths Busted,” and “When Will I Feel Baby Kick?” (*The Bump*). Some websites like *mama seeds* offers some public content, but in order to get more in-depth expert advice and support a user must pay a membership fee. In the online space of the pregnancy/mommy blog, mothers become experts and anecdotal advice becomes sage wisdom. The three distinct genres of medical, legal, and popular advice discourse meld together and form the basis of pregnancy discourse that pregnant television actresses perform upon. Their performances subvert, intervene into, and circulate within this discourse. Each pregnant television performance informs pregnancy discourse and in doing so becomes a part of pregnancy discourse.

### **Gender, Race and Class**

Pregnancy is a biological process. The women of this dissertation all identify as cisgender women and present as such in their television performances. While there have been exceptions (such as Thomas Beatie, the transgender man who became pregnant through artificial insemination and gave birth to three children), the physical burden of pregnancy is placed on the bodies of women. Historically, women have bore the burden of their pregnancies but the weight and cost of that burden has had little attention. Pregnancy and labor has been discussed in the

United States in the abstract, fertility rates, maternal mortality rates, etc., but the personal triumphs and struggles of pregnant women have been largely ignored by the State. My dissertation corrects this by highlighting pregnant women's labor and subjectivity in the entertainment industry. The work that I do in this dissertation analyzes women's bodies for the work that they do on the television stage while also performing the biological labor of creating life. The accommodations, or lack thereof, made by the television industry to support the labor of the women in this dissertation throughout their pregnancies is an example of a support system that exists outside of the traditional familial one. Furthermore, the attention given to these actresses' pregnancies both on the television screen and in the entertainment media, is an opportunity for personal stories of pregnancy to be illuminated for the United States public. These six pregnancy narratives move a public discussion of pregnancy from abstract numbers to concrete bodies.

Pregnancy is a gendered economic issue. As numerous studies on the gender pay gap demonstrate, pregnancy and motherhood contribute to the wage gap. A paper published in *American Economic Review* studied data from the United States 2000 Census and came to the conclusion that for the first decade and a half after schooling ends, particularly for college graduates the gender earnings gap widens considerably. The study also found that as a women's family responsibilities increased so did the gap (Goldin et al. 6). For women, the first fifteen years after their schooling ends is both a time to establish a career as well as establish a family. The societal pressures that women face to have children earlier rather than later cause serious financial damage. Women lose out on promotions, pay raises and financially advantageous job changes because of their caretaking obligations.

“The Dynamics of Gender Earnings Differentials: Evidence from Establishment Data” was issued in May 2017 by the National Bureau of Economic Research and found that there was a substantial slowdown in the average earnings growth for women that coincides with the traditional child-bearing years (Gunn). Furthermore, countless employers—including retail giants Walmart, Pier One, and Old Navy— have resisted making accommodations for their pregnant employees. Following from Gillian Thomas, “A recent study by the National Partnership for Women & Families estimated that more than 250,00 women a year have their accommodation requests denied. These women are left with the Hobson’s choice of risking their pregnancies or having to leave their jobs.” (212). The women of this dissertation are also subject to similar, but more privileged, economic pressures. Contemporary television actresses are paid per episode. Their contracts stipulate how many episodes per season they are guaranteed to work on and their salaries are calculated from that number. Meaning, if an actress performs in fewer episodes because of her pregnancy, she earns less money. Furthermore, actresses maintain popularity through their work. Along with talent, name recognition is a factor when television shows hire their performers. If an actress’ pregnancy keeps her from working, she loses popularity, she loses name recognition, and she loses economic value to the television industry. Therefore, if an actress wants to maintain her career it is important that she balance her familial responsibilities with her professional ones.

For women of color, the economic challenges are greater. In May 2014 the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics published *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. This document noted that in 2012 women who worked full time in both wage and salary jobs “had median usual weekly earnings of \$691, which represented 81 percent of men’s median weekly earnings (\$854).” However, when the data was analyzed further, it showed that, “earnings were higher for

Asians (\$770) and Whites (\$710) than for Blacks (\$599) and Hispanics (\$521)”(2).<sup>3</sup> This data aligns with the information published by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in their 2017 booklet, *The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap*. This document showed that on average in 2017 black or African American women were paid 37% less than white men and Hispanic women were paid 46% less than their white male counterparts. To put it in monetary terms, for every dollar a white man made in 2017, Hispanic women made 54 cents, black or African American women made 63 cents, and white women made 80 cents.

This study examines the pregnant performances of five white and one black actress. This is in large part because of the lack of representation of women of color throughout television history. Diahann Carroll was the first black woman to be cast as the lead in the 1968 situation comedy, *Julia*. Carroll played a widowed single mother and registered nurse Julia Baker. In November 1968, *Ebony* magazine published a cover story about the groundbreaking television series.

To the ghetto Negro who, despite his poverty, has vast television reception, this may not be telling it like it is. But for television it is showing it like it has never been shown before, and for this, NBC, Diahann Carroll and Executive Producer Hal Kanter, *Julia*'s creator, are both thankful and hopeful. Says Miss Carroll: “I’d like a couple of millions of them (white Americans) to watch and say, ‘Hey, so that’s what they do when they go home at night.’” ... As a slice of Black Americana, *Julia* does not explode on the TV screen with the impact of a ghetto riot. It is not that kind of show. Since the networks have had a rash of shows dealing with the nation’s racial problems, the light-hearted *Julia* provides welcome relief, if indeed, relief is even acceptable in these troubled times. (57)

*Julia* was seen as revolutionary because it changed the way that black women were being represented on television and showed positive representations of black maternity and integration at a time when the white American public was still coming to terms with the Civil Rights

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<sup>3</sup> The BLS Report notes that the comparisons of earnings in the report are on a broad level and do not control for many factors that may be important in explaining earnings differences.

Movement. Unfortunately, it would take 44 years for the next black actress to take the lead on television. In 2012, Kerry Washington, a case study in this dissertation, became the second black actress in United States television history to star in her own television series.

Complex black female characters are largely underrepresented in United States television. Thus, black actresses have very few opportunities to star in their own series. This makes the black pregnant actress a much rarer case study than her white counterpart. Because of the systemic underrepresentation of black female characters, this dissertation focuses mainly on the pregnant performances of white actresses. However, two notable pregnant performances by black television actresses were Phylicia Rashad as Claire Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* and Janet Hubert as Aunt Viv on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. During their tenure on these shows, both women worked through pregnancies. Phylicia Rashad's pregnancy was hidden behind counters and she even had a hole dug into the Huxtable's marital bed so her baby bump would not show on the third season of the show. Hubert's pregnancy performance was written into the third season of *The Fresh Prince's* narrative but due to creative and personality differences between Will Smith and Hubert, Hubert was fired and replaced at the start of the fourth season by Daphne Maxwell Reid (Finn).

Both Rashad and Hubert's pregnancies were discussed in entertainment media and Rashad's pregnancy is frequently cited by entertainment news articles that list the ways that "celebrity pregnancies" have been hidden on television (*US Weekly* Staff). Although these case studies speak to my broader points regarding the visible labor of pregnant women on television, they are not significant enough in production technique or audience response to warrant an in-depth analysis. Instead, I examine the hidden pregnant performances of Kerry Washington on ABC's *Scandal*. Washington's place as the star of the television series and her performance on

social media makes her case study fertile ground to examine how hidden pregnancy production techniques are read by savvy audience members and followers of Washington's social media accounts.

Finally, this dissertation examines labor of women who are paid very highly for their work. The actresses of these case studies experience financial privilege that at first glance may make their labor incomparable to the everyday labor of the pregnant waitress, nurse, or professor. However, I argue that despite the gap in compensation, pregnant television actresses are under similar pressures to perform labor as their pregnant everyday counterparts. Pregnant television actresses have to attend work on a daily basis to complete their shooting schedules for each episode that they are featured in. The performance work can be very physically taxing, especially if the pregnancy is hidden and there is no justifiable reason for the nonpregnant character to be filmed in positions of rest. In a 2014 actress roundtable for *The Hollywood Reporter* Claire Danes was asked "What's the most physically demanding thing you've had to do onscreen?" She responded working while pregnant.

I was pregnant for the second season of *Homeland*, and as my baby progressed, the show got more action-packed. At one point, we were shooting in an old sewage factory. I was kidnapped, I was chained to a pipe, it was 4 a.m., I was 7½ months pregnant, and I was like, "This sucks." They were like, "Sorry!" At one point, the baby was on my sciatic nerve, and I was charging down the halls of pretend Langley. (Belloni and Hunt)

The work that Danes' pregnant body had to perform was strenuous. Like Danes, the women of this dissertation also put their pregnant bodies in stressful positions for the sake of their employment. Because of their fame, television actresses enjoy higher wages, more job security, and can potentially command longer maternity leave than more typical pregnant workers. It is very unlikely that an actress who is established on a television show would be fired for becoming



pregnant. However, as the case study of Hunter Tylo shows, loss of employment due to pregnancy discrimination is still a possibility for television actresses.

This dissertation project accepts the premise that pregnant television actresses experience more privilege at work than non-celebrity pregnant women. Instead of examining these actresses' privilege as something to be recognized and critiqued, I want to reframe the advantages given to them in the workplace as the standard to which other industries should aspire. The television industry is far from perfect in its treatment of women, especially women who do not meet heteronormative standards of beauty, but as this dissertation will show, the television industry has found multiple ways to accommodate pregnancy that are beneficial to the industry and to the performer.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

The case studies of this research examine the various ways a pregnant actress can perform her pregnancy. Chapter one, "The Birth of Television Pregnancy" focuses on the history of pregnant television performance. This chapter examines the pregnancies of Lucille Ball. I argue that Ball's first pregnancy was the impetus behind the creation of *I Love Lucy* and Ball's second pregnancy featured on *I Love Lucy* revolutionized pregnancy discourse. Lucille Ball's pregnancies lay the groundwork for this dissertation. The production techniques that were invented to produce *I Love Lucy* are the very first accommodations made by an actress and the television industry to accommodate her pregnancy. While not the first actress to appear pregnant on television, her visible baby bump impacted pregnancy discourse in many ways both seen and unseen. This chapter illustrates the impact that Ball's onscreen laboring pregnant body had on popular culture in the 1950s and how her pregnancy performance created many of the television pregnancy production techniques that are still in practice today.

Chapter two, “Conception Deception: The “Hidden” Pregnancies of Jane Leeves and Kerry Washington” focuses on the different techniques that television productions use to cut out or obscure the pregnant actress’ body. This chapter examines both changes in the television narrative as well as practical production techniques. The case studies of Jane Leeves’ pregnant performance as an overweight Daphne Moon in season eight of *Frasier*, and Kerry Washington’s pregnancies on *Scandal* examine how the laboring body of the pregnant actress is hidden from view and explained through outrageous narratives and camera tricks. It is arguable that removing an actress’ pregnant body through production techniques and/or narrative changes reduces the impact that their onscreen performance has. Audiences are distracted from the narrative of the story by playing a game of “spot the bump” or “spot the way they try and hide the bump.” I argue instead that an audience’s awareness of the actresses’ pregnancies prompts an active critique of how the television industry accommodates pregnancy.

The third chapter of this work, “Labor Pains: Hunter Tylo v. Spelling Entertainment,” focuses on the legal battle between Hunter Tylo and Spelling Entertainment Inc. Tylo was fired from *Melrose Place* after she told the production company that she was pregnant. According to Aaron Spelling Productions, Tylo was fired not because of her pregnancy but because by getting pregnant she had violated a clause in her contract saying she would not go under any physical changes without the production company’s consent. Tylo won the case and, in the process, revealed on the witness stand that she was again eight months pregnant and would have had no problem maintaining a slim and sexy figure for the primetime drama. In this chapter I argue that Tylo v Spelling intervened into pregnancy discourse in two contradictory ways. Tylo v Spelling was seen by many as a win for anti-discrimination law and women’s rights. However, Tylo’s sexualization of her pregnancy in the courtroom made pregnant television actresses’ hidden

pregnancy performances more difficult. Furthermore, this chapter explores how *Tylo v. Spelling* raised public awareness of pregnancy discrimination.

In the conclusion, “A Pregnant Pause: Katey Sagal and Timing” I complicate the idea that the best solution to an actresses’ pregnancy is writing the pregnancy into a television show’s narrative by detailing Sagal’s visible pregnancy on *Married with Children*. Sagal’s first pregnancy was written into the narrative of *Married with Children* (*MWC*) but unfortunately, Sagal’s pregnancy ended in a still born birth at seven months. The writers on *MWC* decided to give Sagal an out and had her character’s pregnancy be a dream of her on-screen husband, Al. This merging of fiction and non-fiction complicates the idea that a solution to accommodating actresses’ pregnancies is to simply incorporate their pregnancies into the television narrative. This case study also speaks to my personal pregnancy and labor frustrations of finding the “right time” to have both a baby and a career. Additionally, I detail lessons that I learned about the dissertation process and pose possible questions for the continuation of this research. Finally, I end the dissertation by arguing that with all of its complications, the television industry serves as an example of an industry that finds ways to accommodate the pregnancies of its employees and can serve as an example for other United States employers.

## The Birth of Television Pregnancy: “Lucy Is Enceinte”

At a time before paparazzi hounded American actors and actresses, before tabloid magazine covers speculated whether or not an actress was pregnant or just ate a big lunch, before the word pregnant or any variation of it could be said on television, *I Love Lucy* set a standard for how actresses’ real-life pregnancies would be performed for a television audience. The techniques in both television production and pregnancy performance that were seen on sound stage and screen in 1952 are still in practice today. In this chapter, I show how Ball became the first actress to require pregnancy accommodations from the television industry. I assert that Lucille Ball’s pregnancy with her first child pushed Ball to be the first pregnant actress to negotiate with the television industry for labor accommodations, and it was these accommodations that made *I Love Lucy* a filmed television sit-com in front of a live studio audience. Ball’s pregnancy negotiations and accommodations gave rise to a new style of television production that revolutionized the television industry. The pregnant actresses who work through their pregnancies are indebted to Ball’s pioneering efforts in the early 1950s. She paved the way for pregnant bodies to be visible on television screens and showed that pregnant actresses can be taken seriously as performers instead of being written off shows or placed behind countertops.

I begin this chapter with historical information on the invention and promotion of television as an entertainment medium starting in the 1920s. I briefly unravel the history of television in order to connect theatrical performance to televisual performance and provide an understanding of the technological advancements *I Love Lucy* brought to the television industry.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A full study of television’s origins in theatrical performance is outside the scope of this project. However, I think it is necessary to briefly show the ties that early television demonstration and

Then, I move to a brief overview of 1950s pregnancy discourse in order to establish the pregnancy discourse that *I Love Lucy* intervenes into in 1952. Next, I historicize and contextualize Desi Arnaz, Lucille Ball and *I Love Lucy's* role in forming the foundation of modern televised pregnancy performance. I discuss how Ball's pregnancy with her first child led to the creation of Desilu productions and the *I Love Lucy* show. I examine how Ball's pregnancy with her second child impacted *I Love Lucy's* production as well as the American television watching public. In this section I analyze the pregnancy episodes produced during the second season of *I Love Lucy* and the public reaction to Lucy's pregnancy and the historically hysteric birth of Desi Arnaz Jr and his fictional counterpart Little Ricky Ricardo. These episodes act as a manual of production techniques from which television producers and pregnant actresses cite when producing their own pregnant performances. I pull apart these episodes to reveal the production techniques that are still in use today as well as explicate how hiding Ball's pregnancy in plain sight became essential to her performance and the comedy of *I Love Lucy*.

Finally, I end the chapter by showing how Ball's televised pregnancy accommodations changed pregnancy discourse in the United State through analysis of contemporary news media about Ball and *I Love Lucy*. Memoirs by Desi Arnaz, Lucille Ball, and television producer Jess Oppenheimer provide salient insight into the lives of the stars and inner workings of *I Love Lucy*. Contemporary critical reviews, fan magazines, and news reports about Lucille Ball's miscarriages and subsequent pregnancies and performance on *I Love Lucy* inform my readings of *I Love Lucy* episodes and the impact of their reception. Finally, biographies, reference books, and

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experimentation had with theatre production as a way of justifying my decision to use theatrical performance as a lens to study Lucille Ball and the other pregnant actresses of this dissertation.

critical scholarship illuminate the long-term impact that Ball’s pregnancy performance has had on televised pregnancy performance and pregnancy discourse in the United States.

## **Early Television**

Television is ubiquitous in our contemporary lives, but it was not always so. In order for television to bring pregnant bodies into our homes at prime time, the medium needed to be developed. On April 8, 1927 *The New York Times* published “Far-Off Speakers Seen as Well as Heard Here in A Test of Television.” The article details that one-day earlier Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover gave a speech in Washington D.C. that was broadcast publicly two-hundred miles away in New York through the “television apparatus developed by the Bell Laboratories of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.” Hoover’s image could be seen on a two by three-inch screen and after his speech was over other men took his place and “conversed one at a time with the men in New York. The speaker on the New York end looked the Washington man in the eye, as he talked to him. On the small screen before him appeared the living face of the man to whom he was talking. Time as well as space was eliminated.” Ten days later on April 18, 1927, a letter to the editor, “Why ‘Television’” by Clyde R. Jeffords from Jamaica, New York was published in *The New York Times*. In his brief letter, Jeffords takes issue with “linguistic monstrosity ‘television.’” He is offended that the new technological invention that broadcasts sound and picture over airwaves was named “television.” Instead, Jeffords assumes this new invention should be given a Greek or Latin name such as, “teleopia” deriving from the Greek suffix opia meaning eye or face. In 1927 television was being teased in the press as something turning from science fiction into science fact. As television experimentation continued, both the Radio Manufacturers Association and theatre practitioners began airing their doubts and fears about the success of television. In April 8, 1928, *The New York Times* article

“Public Warned Not to Expect Television Within Five Years” reported that the Radio Manufacturers Association, believed that television was ““far off, probably five years at least, and only then as a separate, distinct and costly apparatus and not as an attachment to a radio broadcast receiving set.”” The Radio Manufacturers Association wanted to make clear that all of the publicity surrounding the invention of the television was due to “Super-Enthusiasm of Scientists.” The RMA’s article was intended to boost consumer sales of radios by assuaging the fears of the public that the radio they bought on a Monday would become obsolete by Tuesday. As Gary R. Edgerton notes in *The Columbia History of American Television*, the RMA was not wrong in their assessment of super enthusiastic scientists. He writes that “The coming of television involved the most extensive and ballyhooed series of public relations events ever staged around any mass medium in American history” (3). He writes that the majority of the public demonstrations of experimental television were actually press conferences orchestrated by David Sarnoff, the “increasingly powerful” president of the Radio Corporation of America. Essentially, Sarnoff had been building anticipation in the public sphere about television technology for over a decade through the guise of “science.”

Throughout the 1920s *The New York Times* ran stories that reported on the progress of television. Reports raised public interest with details of “experimental” performances of theatrical plays. On May 10<sup>th</sup> 1928, actor Lionel Barrymore is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that with the invention of television, theatre will be “scrapped”. He elaborated, “It won’t be long now until movie actors will have to speak lines just as they do on the stage now. Then television will be the next thing, and we won’t have to have any theatres at all.”<sup>5</sup> On August, 22 1928 a *New York Times* article, “Television Drama Shown with Music” publicized a musical

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note here that Barrymore is referring to the transition between silent and sound film which began in 1927 with Warner Bros. Studio’s production of *The Jazz Singer*.

puppet drama that was broadcast from one room to another in the L. Bamberger & Co. Store. The “symbolic drama” titled *Creative Genius* starred a puppet named “Creative Genius” who brought to life a winged puppet named “The Spirit of Television” This program is claimed as the first “‘synchronized’ image-and-sound drama presented by television” as well as the first piece of text to have been written specifically for television (Koszarski 413). Less than a month later on September, 12<sup>th</sup> *The New York Times* published “Play is broadcast by Voice and Acting in Radio-Television.” This article, written by Russell B. Porter, detailed a forty-minute broadcast of J. Harley Manner’s one-act play, *The Queen’s Messenger* in which the actors were “locked” in a studio room while they “did their stage ‘business’ with cigars, cigarettes, pistols, knives and other ‘props.’” The article continues by paraphrasing an interview that Dr. E. F. W. Alexanderson, consulting engineer of the General Electric Company and chief consulting engineer of the Radio Corporation of America, in which Alexanderson admitted that the technology was not ready for public entertainment but he predicted “that someday we would have special television theatres, a chain of theatres all over the country or the world, without actors, musicians, scene shifters or stage hands, receiving simultaneous identical broadcasts of theatrical and musical performances by radio-television from a central broadcast station.”

This small sampling of articles published by *The New York Times* illustrates the excitement and fervor that were stoked within the public about the future of both theatre and television.<sup>6</sup> It also demonstrates the strong ties that television has had to theatre from its inception. By using theatre as the medium of experimentation, television promoters set television up as a media that would be used for entertainment. They also positioned television as a partner

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<sup>6</sup> In this section I only reference New York Times articles because New York City was the main hub for radio and television development. For more information about the development of television in the United States see Gary R. Edgerton’s *The Columbia History of American Television*. Columbia University Press. 2009.



to popular entertainment. In *The New York Times*'s "Radio Men Regard Television as Ally", published on January 15, 1928, J. Andrew White, President of the Columbia Broadcasting System, is quoted:

The first and most logical application of television apparatus, I think, would be for events such as championship boxing matches, or to carry the picture story of the arrival of a Lindbergh to an audience assembled in a large hall or theatre. Eventually it will arrive in the home, but its most apparent first application will be where great audiences can hear and see such events as they take place. Television should in no way be competitive to the present system of entertainment, but greatly assist the business.

The idea that television technology would be used to enhance popular entertainments instead of compete with them kept recurring in the news media as television technology advanced. White was excited by the business and entertainment possibilities of television as long as it stayed out of the home and did not interfere with his current business, radio. In "No Menace Seen: William A. Brady Welcomes Television as a Renaissance of the Theatre" published by *The New York Times* on February 17, 1935, William A. Brady, playwright, actor and, dean of American theatrical producers, envisions television as the saving grace of theatre. He imagined a world in which television producers would pay large sums of money to broadcast opening nights of Broadway plays in the same way that they paid for the broadcasting rights to boxing matches and the World Series. Furthermore, Brady believed that radio dramas would also gain from television:

The limitations of presenting a drama through a one-dimensional medium—sound—will be remedied and perfected through television. The little accidents of gesture, the grace of physical movement and the mood established by appropriate scenery will be added to make it a complete show. Not only will it mean the triumph of a new artistry, but the salvation of the American theatre. It can't come too fast for me.

Over the centuries, theatre and its practitioners have always adapted to changing technologies. Whether it was the invention of the raked stage and forced perspective, electric lighting, or new digital technologies, theatre finds a way. Representatives of the theatrical community publicly

embraced television because there was no other option. Moreover, Brady's prediction that television would bring artistry to and enhance the radio drama came true with *I Love Lucy*, CBS's television adaptation of the radio show *My Favorite Husband*.

### **Pregnancy and the Hays Code**

On December 8, 1952 Lucille Ball became the most publicly viewed pregnant woman in United States history. Before her appearance on *I Love Lucy's* "Lucy is Enceinte", no other visibly pregnant woman's image had been so widely anticipated or published. Lucy Ricardo ushered in a new pregnancy discourse where it was okay to talk about pregnancy in public; just as long as no one actually says the word pregnant. Before World War II, pregnant women were viewed as taboo, liminal (in the sense of Victor Turner) bodies that were marginalized through ritual. Following from Robbie Davis-Floyd before World War II, pregnant women were expected to remain at home in seclusion. When circumstances required them to venture outside of their homes, they should disguise their pregnancy.

Even the word "pregnant" was too pregnant to be used. Just as people did not die, but "went to sleep" or "passed away," pregnant women were "with child," "p.g.," "in the family way," "expecting," or "baking a bun in the oven." The mysterious procreative powers of nature, made undeniably manifest in the visibly pregnant woman, were apparently too threatening to a society that wanted to believe it had ultimate control. (Davis-Floyd 25)

In Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler's *Pregnant Pictures*, poet, author and feminist Adrienne Rich is quoted retelling a story about her exclusion from society while she was pregnant, "When the [school]master responsible for inviting me realized that I was seven months pregnant he cancelled the invitation, saying that the fact of my pregnancy would make it impossible for the boys to listen to my poetry. This was in 1955" (8). Davis-Floyd and Rich both illustrate that real pregnant bodies were not publicly acceptable in the first half of the twentieth century. But, what about fake pregnant bodies? How were representations of pregnancy received pre-1960?

Hollywood films, the only place where pregnancy was possibly visible, also shied away from depicting pregnancy publicly.

In 1930 the motion picture industry published the Motion Picture Production Code also known as the Will H. Hays Production Code or just the Hays Code. The Hays Code was developed in 1922 after a series of scandals hit Hollywood. Film studios chose to self-regulate/self-censor before the federal government could step in and regulate for them. In an effort to rehabilitate their image the studios invited Presbyterian elder Will. H. Hays to develop a code of conduct that the studios operated under. While the Hays Code was not law, and film studios could bypass the regulations, the likelihood that a movie that had not been approved by the Hays Office would be shown in movie theatres was slim. The Hays Code strongly influenced film representations of pregnancy by directly addressing childbirth, “Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented.” Kelly Oliver’s *Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films* is a study on representations of pregnancy in Hollywood since the 1940s. She writes that many films did not deal with the topic of pregnancy and childbirth because of the Hays Code restrictions and the restrictions were in place because Hays found pregnancy indecent.<sup>7</sup> Oliver notes several Studio System era films that punish their pregnant characters with death. Movies like *Christopher Strong* (1933), *Leave Her to Heaven* (1946), and *A Place in the Sun* (1951) feature women dying soon after discovering that they are

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<sup>7</sup> An in-depth analysis of the Hays Code pregnancy regulations is out of the scope of this dissertation. However, if I were to make an educated guess as to why Hays felt pregnancy was indecent, it would be because of the lack of pregnant, middle-class, white women appearing in public pre-1930. However, as noted above, WWII greatly increased the number of middle-class, white women in the labor market and thereby made their pregnant bodies more prevalent in public. Therefore, it is arguable that by the time Ball’s pregnancy appeared on television, the anxiety over the publicly pregnant body that Hays felt twenty-two years earlier was tempered by the war effort of the 1940s.

pregnant and in *People Will Talk* (1951), Debra Higgins (Jeanne Crain) unsuccessfully attempts suicide after learning that she is pregnant. She writes,

In *Christopher Strong*, Katherine Hepburn's character kills herself in a fiery plane-crash while setting a flying record rather than make her pregnancy public and ruin the career of her lover. In *A Place in the Sun*, a supporting character played by Shelley Winters falls out of a boat manned by her exlover, who watches her drown rather than save her after making his angry and desperate feelings about her pregnancy perfectly clear. In *Leave Her to Heaven*, after her doctor has confined her to bed rest, Ellen (Gene Tierney) throws herself down a staircase to instigate a miscarriage so that her husband will find her attractive again; she is successful in terminating the pregnancy, but eventually dies herself. (28)

At this point in Hollywood's cinematic history, a dead or dying pregnant woman was preferable to the censors than a pregnant woman giving birth. Hollywood's negative depiction of the pregnant woman's predicament further informs the state of pregnancy discourse in 1952.

Pregnancy had been something that was only discussed in the privacy of a doctor's office or one's home. That changed when the first visibly pregnant public figure made her entrance and changed pregnancy discourse. It is through television that Ball's public pregnancy is brought into the intimate space of the living room and becomes a national topic of conversation.

### **Pre, *I Love Lucy***

Mary Kay Stearns is often forgotten about in the history of television pregnancy performances. In a *Wall Street Journal* article from September 15, 1995, staff writer Sheila Muto outlines major television events in "From Here to Immodesty: Milestones in the Toppling of TV's Taboos." In her timeline, Muto notes that the first pregnant character in prime-time television appeared on the 1951 show *One Man's Family* and that in 1952, Lucille Ball's pregnancy is featured in seven episodes of *I Love Lucy* without ever mentioning the word "pregnant." Normally, this article would be among the dozens of other news pieces that forget about Mary Kay's pregnancy. However, its significance lies in the Letter to the Editor, "Mary

Kay & Johnny & Baby Made Three” published on October, 20, 1995. The letter’s author refutes Muto’s 1951 milestone marker saying,

three years before, on Dec 19, 1948, Mary Kay, star of The Mary Kay and Johnny Show” a live domestic comedy on NBC network Sunday nights, gave birth to son Christopher. Mary Kay shared her pregnancy with the network audience for the full nine months. She missed only two performances. The birth occurred shortly before air time, which gave script writer, costar, husband Johnny a timely conclusion for that episode. I can attest to these facts for I was there.

The letter, authored by Johnny himself, not only corrects Muto’s article but also makes a small jab at Mary Kay’s more famous counterpart, Lucille Ball, by continuing, “Incidentally, five years later Lucy of “I Love Lucy,” a filmed series, gave birth to Ricky via Cesarean section. The Mary Kay and Johnny Show was live, and Christopher’s birth was natural.” In this last paragraph, Stearns emphasizes that Mary Kay and Lucy both performed pregnant and gave birth to Christopher and Ricky under completely different circumstances. His distinction between the liveness of Mary Kay’s performance and Lucy’s taped performance illustrates that unlike Lucy, Mary Kay did not benefit from opportunities to rest between production takes.

Furthermore, Stearns wanted to illustrate how Mary Kay’s labor story is more miraculous than Lucy’s because Mary Kay gave birth naturally and “on time” for their live television show while Lucy’s labor was a planned cesarean section that *I Love Lucy* was taped around. Stearns boasting of his wife’s labor nearly fifty years after the fortuitous event is meant to not only correct Muto’s article, but also differentiate the kind of labor that Mary Kay’s pregnant body did from the rest of pregnant television actress history. Mary Kay’s pregnancy performance was the first and in her husband’s eyes the best because she did it without the conveniences of modern television technology.

Mary Kay Stearns is the first American woman to be seen working while pregnant on a national scale. The working pregnant woman was not a foreign concept for U.S. television

audiences as the United States involvement in World War II caused an increase in the number of women in the U.S. labor market. Ruth Fairbanks' "Expecting Trouble: War Production, Physicians and the Pregnant Worker" notes that in 1940 there were 11 million American women working outside their home and by 1945 that number jumped to 19.5 million. Following from Fairbanks:

Women's paid work had been growing since the 1890s, at first mainly among single women but during the war, more married women were employed than ever before. Women also worked on jobs and in industries that were previously all male. During the war, women came to make up over one-fifth of heavy industry workers, which was more than double their share in those jobs before the war. ... Most married women workers entering the labor market were older women with grown children or school age children. However, after years of low birth rates during the Great Depression, the Baby Boom began during the war.

An increase in the number of young women workers also increased the number of pregnant workers. Fairbanks' study examines how American war industry adapted or didn't to the complications of pregnant labor. Federal employment protections for pregnant women would not arrive until 1964 with the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978. The lack of federal regulation meant that each factory was able to set its own policy regarding the employment of pregnant employees. Fairbanks cites a study by Dr. Charlotte Silverman in which the U.S. Children's Bureau studied seventy companies that collectively employed 250,000 women in sixteen different war production industries. Sixty-two of those companies had some kind of policy in place regarding pregnancy, including termination of employment due to pregnancy. Nineteen of the companies terminated pregnant women when they were notified or discovered the employee's pregnancy. Forty-three companies laid-off pregnant women, sixteen on notification or discovery and a few more within the first trimester. Of the seventy factories, only a handful allowed pregnant women to continue to work into their seventh or eighth month (7).

Silverman's study hints at the problem pregnant women in the work force faced. Pregnant women either self-reported their pregnancies to their employers or were otherwise "discovered" to be pregnant. These women had to decide whether or not come clean to employers about their pregnancies or hide them and risk possible health problems to themselves or their unborn child. While some employers were also concerned about the health of their pregnant employees, others objected to pregnant women on the factory floor for visual reasons. Industry employers felt that a visibly pregnant woman was a workplace distraction because it was proof of female sexuality.

They "stated it was not nice for obviously pregnant women to be working in a factory" because of the "bad effect on the male employees." In situations where women worked in proximity to men, employers feared that a pregnant worker's condition would distract male workers from their own duties, through solicitude or voyeuristic observation and comments. D. Fred Adair, who chaired the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Chicago, had written to Dr. Ethel Dunham, of the Children's Bureau, in 1939 that the length of time a woman could work through her pregnancy would depend in part on social considerations of her appearance. One young woman, who had been a riveter before resigning to follow her husband, later left a department store position at six months of pregnancy because she was "starting to show." As she recalled, "People just did not like to see a pregnant woman behind a counter. It was considered gauche, not well taken." (Fairbanks 7-8)

In the early twentieth century, the image of the *visibly* pregnant woman was both a sexual distraction and socially awkward. However, because of the special wartime circumstances, not all pregnancies were problematic. The need for skilled labor was high enough that as long as a woman was not visibly pregnant, she could continue working. This practice became reflected in the recommendations of obstetricians as well. Fairbanks notes that,

[i]n 1947, Dr. Nicholson Eastman revised his popular pregnancy guidebook *Expectant Motherhood*. The wartime experience of women's employment had left some mark upon the practice of obstetrics. Though the book's section on employment was very short, Eastman commented that pregnant clerical workers could work as long as they wished, while women whose jobs required lots of standing or heavier work should begin a leave by the seventh month. "Although employers nowadays are very liberal-minded about such matters," Eastman admitted that there were those who, for aesthetic reasons, wished

pregnant women to stop work before they began to show, which Eastman advised was by the fifth month. (10-11)

WWII created an environment that required including pregnant women in the United States labor market. However, the visibly pregnant woman was still an image that many employers and their patrons had trouble coming to terms with. For United States industry, the pregnant laborer was a good employee as long as her pregnancy was hidden.

On October 13, 1948, *Variety* published a review of *Mary Kay and Johnny*. In the mostly positive review, the author, credited as Stal., writes,

Much of the show's charm is traceable directly to the femme half of the team, who displayed a pleasant personality that prototyped the average conception of a young American hausfrau on the preem show Sunday (10) night. Stearns also handled his lines okay. Story line picked them up with Mary Kay making plans for her first baby, which is due in a couple of months and her difficulties in buying the right baby carriage. It was that simple, but also that good. Whether the gal is actually going to have a baby wasn't made clear, but it would be a neat idea for the series. ("Mary Kay and Johnnie")

While often uncredited and unrecognized, Mary Kay's pregnant performance was the first in a long line of pregnant performances broadcast across the nation for millions of people to see. It made pregnancy visible in a way that it had never been before. Without knowing it, Stearn's "neat idea" for the series became a "neat idea" for the visibility of women's civil and reproductive rights.

Before everyone loved Lucy, Lucille Ball had her "favorite husband." In 1948 Radio and Television network CBS approached Ball to star in a radio series based on the novel, *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat: The Record of a Happy Marriage* by Isabel Scott Rorick (Sheridan and Monush). Ball was interested but wanted to star opposite her husband of eight years, Desi Arnaz. In what would become the first of many battles, CBS laughed off Ball's request citing that her Cuban bandleader husband would be unbelievable as a Midwestern Banker (100). Instead, Richard



Denning took on the role of Mr. George Cugat; husband to Ball's Liz Cugat. *My Favorite Husband* is also where the future writers of *I Love Lucy*, Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Pugh, and Bob Carrol Jr. began working together. The show began airing weekly in July 1948 but in January 1949 Jess Oppenheimer felt the socially prominent Cugats were not relatable to the average American and gave the radio couple a make under. The Cugats became the Coopers and the radio show continued its run until March 31, 1951 (102). During the run of the show, Ball began to hone her comic timing in front of a live audience. Like many radio dramas, *My Favorite Husband* was recorded in front of a live studio audience. Jess Oppenheimer claims in his memoir, *Laughs, Luck ... and Lucy* that he tried to direct Ball to be less stiff in her performance "Lucy was relatively stiff working in front of an audience. She just didn't have the wildly antic quality that I was looking for" (126). To get Ball to open up, Oppenheimer sent her to the school of comic Jack Benny by giving her tickets to see his show. Ball remembers this moment in her memoir as well. Jess Oppenheimer told her that the radio audiences would laugh if she performed at them. "I didn't believe him until he sent me to see a Jack Benny show ... taking my cue from Jack Benny, I began to mug, use my body and turn directly to the audience. It worked" (157). The comic skills that Ball honed during *My Favorite Husband* would serve her extremely well when she transitioned her "mugging" from radio to television.

In the beginning of 1950, CBS began talks with Ball about transferring *My Favorite Husband* to television. Ball liked the idea but only if Arnaz played her husband on the new show. Arnaz and Ball had been trying to find a project to work on together that would allow the both of them to stay together in Los Angeles and possibly start a family. Once again, CBS denied this request believing that the American public would not accept Ball and Arnaz as a fictional couple. Following from Arnaz's memoir, the role of Lucy's husband was a typical American guy with

blond hair and blue eyes. Arnaz knew he could never play that role but began to work with Ball on an idea for their own husband-and-wife sit-com with a husband character written with Arnaz in mind. “However, the network, the agencies, everybody involved said nobody was going to believe that a Latin bandleader with a Cuban Pete conga-drum Babalu image could ever be married to a typical red-headed American girl” (193). This casual racism towards Arnaz can be seen throughout the development and production of *I Love Lucy*. As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, television executives, television audiences and Ball all practice a mild form of white supremacy when confronted with Arnaz’s Cuban heritage.

In order to prove CBS executives wrong, Ball and Arnaz started their own production company in the spring of 1950. Following from Ball’s memoir *Love Lucy*, “Desi and I decided that since nobody else seemed to have faith in us as a team, we’d form our own corporation to promote ourselves. We had our manager constitute our partnership legally. Desilu Productions, Inc., was launched” (160). It is important to note that in all of her accounts about Desilu’s success, Ball gives Arnaz credit for running the business side of things while she just worried about the acting portion. In 1962 Arnaz sold his portion of the company to Ball, making her the company’s new president and Chief Executive Officer. The sale also made Ball the first woman to head a major television and film studio. During this time, Ball developed the popular television series *Mission Impossible* (1966) and *Star Trek* (1966) (Sanders and Gilbert).

Desilu’s first project was a vaudeville act that toured major cities such as, Minneapolis, New York, Omaha, and San Francisco in the Summer of 1950. The show was a mixture of comedic sketches that portrayed Arnaz and Ball as a married couple, clowning routines, and music provided by Arnaz and his orchestra. To prepare for the tour Arnaz and Ball worked with Pepito, the Spanish Clown, who often headlined at the Hippodrome in New York as well as

performed for heads of state across the globe. Pepito developed a clown act for Ball in which she played a man who wanted to audition to be in Arnaz's orchestra. The act included a cello, designed by Pepito, that held a stool, flowers, a toilet plunger, and other props. The finale to the clown act was a xylophone made out of bicycle horns. During the act, Ball would imitate a seal by getting down on all fours, flop around on her stomach, and play the xylophone with her nose. As she notes in her memoir, this act was very physically demanding, "I had to do a real belly whacker, flip over on my stomach three times, and slither off stage" (161). This vaudeville act represented a combination of both Arnaz's musical talents and Ball's gift for physical comedy and gave the couple a chance to work together and show CBS that the American public "bought" them as a couple.

The tour was a success. The July 12, 1950 issue of *Variety* reported that the Ball and Arnaz show at the Riverside theatre in Milwaukee was "cracking records with lusty \$30,000 shaping up." It appeared audiences would buy the idea that Ball and Arnaz were a happily married couple. The surprises continued when while on tour in New York in June 1950, Ball learned that she was pregnant from a radio gossip show. After suspecting she was pregnant, she visited a laboratory under the name of her hair dresser for a pregnancy test to avoid publicity. In her memoir, she writes that American journalist/gossip columnist Walter Winchell "once told me that he had spies in every big medical center in New York who provided him with inside tips about celebrities" (161). Two days later, Ball was in her dressing room at the Roxy when "Winchell came on the air and announced: 'After ten childless years of marriage, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz are infanticipating' I dropped my knitting, ran into Desi's dressing room, and woke him up. 'We're going to have a baby!' Desi sat up, rubbing his eyes. 'How d'ya know? We aren't supposed to hear until tomorrow!' I said, 'Winchell just told me'" (161). This clear illegal

invasion of privacy was not uncommon. Celebrity gossip journalists like Walter Winchell, Hedda Hopper, and Louella Parsons made their living off of finding out celebrity secrets and sharing them with American audiences. Furthermore, their newspaper columns and radio shows could make or break a celebrity's career.

Gossip columnists of the early 1900s practiced a code of ethics that allowed for the revelation of factual material that could be detrimental to a celebrity's career but they would never try and destroy the celebrity. "Contrary to the popular image, early columnists rarely revealed facts that would have destroyed a star. Not unlike anthropologists, these professional gossips worked according to a code of ethics that though not always observed, frequently served to determine what would and would not get into print" (Levin and Arluke 66). However, Walter Winchell was an exception to the ethics rule.<sup>8</sup> Winchell would use his powerful speech to attack his critics. Following from Levin and Arluke, "after a critical article about Winchell appeared in the *New Yorker*, he swore revenge against its editor, Harold Ross. In one of his columns, Winchell alleged that Ross didn't wear underwear. As though this weren't enough, Winchell also used his influence to have Ross banned from the prestigious Stork Club" (65). Early twentieth-century celebrities did not publicly attack the gossip columnists that spoke their secrets and instead actively worked to befriend them so that they would be informed when a piece of gossip about them was going to be published. By her own admission in her memoir, Ball knew the risks of taking a pregnancy test in a New York hospital but she needed to confirm her pregnancy in order to make plans for the rest of her and Arnaz's vaudeville tour. Ball admits in her memoir

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<sup>8</sup> Lucille Ball would face Winchell's wrath in September of 1953 when, on his radio show, Winchell announced a blind item that revealed Ball's membership in the Communist Party. In Ball's official statement to the FBI in the Spring of 1952 she claimed that in 1936 she registered as a member of the Communist Party to please her grandfather but never voted as a Communist or attended any party meetings. For more information about Ball's Communist Party ties, see Ball's memoir *Love, Lucy* and Desi Arnaz's memoir, *A Book*.

that she was excited about being pregnant but also torn because felt that the physical comedy of her clown routine could pose a problem for the health and safety of her child. Despite her reservations Ball and Arnaz continued the tour and returned to Hollywood in July after their Milwaukee performance (161).

On July 15, 1950, the *Los Angeles Times* article “Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz Hope for Twins” reported that Ball and Arnaz “expect to become parents next January after 10 years of marriage. ‘You can tell the world about it, but don’t say child,’ Arnaz said as they displayed two baby sweaters--one pink and the other blue—which the actress had knitted. ‘We’re hoping for twins.’” Unfortunately, not long after their return to Hollywood, Ball suffered a miscarriage. Hollywood insiders Joe Morella and Edward Epstein have written several biographies of film stars such as Clara Boy, Rita Hayworth and Judy Garland. In their biography of Ball, *Forever Lucy*, Morella and Epstein quote press interviews of Ball after her miscarriage. Ball states, “I’m going to a gym to keep in good health and I’m not going to do any comedies that call for physical strain. ... Now I’m going to do only two pictures a year, either very quiet comedies, or somber dramas. Nothing that will make me stand on my head or hang by my eyebrows from a chandelier” (162). Additionally, after being asked if she felt that her vaudeville tour was responsible for her miscarriage she states, “I don’t know. ... I think sometimes things are just meant to be. Yet, I am not going to take any chances, and Desi is going to make it possible so I don’t have to travel to see him.” In her memoir, Ball writes that in the six months after her miscarriage she kept working by continuing her weekly radio show, *My Favorite Husband*, and she urged her radio-television agent, Don Sharpe, to find a way for Desi and her to do a television show together (162).

Ball's contemporary statement to the press about her miscarriage largely contradicts her later self-reporting of a busy work schedule post miscarriage. These two differing reports could be read as either bad scholarship on Morella and Epstein's account, or as bad reporting by Ball as an untrustworthy narrator of her own life. However, I argue that within these differing accounts is a tension between Lucille Ball the domestic housewife and Lucille Ball the film and radio star. Throughout her memoir, Ball notes that she very much wanted to start a family with her husband. In 1949, "Desi and I instituted a 'stay at home' policy. I was still childless, which caused me great heartache. ... We finally decided that Desi would give up his cross-country tours and only take local engagements with his band. We would both consult doctors to see why we did not have children" (157). To become a "better wife" Ball started taking instruction in the Catholic faith, (Arnaz was Catholic) and the couple went as far as renewing their vows in the Catholic church (they had previously eloped and were married by a judge) in hopes that by making their marriage more sacred they would be blessed with a child (157-158). However, Ball's work ethic did not stay at home. In 1949, Ball made three movies, *Little Miss Marker*, *Miss Grant Takes Richmond*, and *Fancy Pants* in addition to her weekly CBS radio show *My Favorite Husband*. Ball worked to support her family but also worked to achieve celebrity. On countless talk shows and in her memoir, Ball has said that she knew she finally "made it" in Hollywood when she read scripts that called for "a Lucille Ball-type role" (159). After spending decades in B movies, Ball was finally making a name for herself in Hollywood. Therefore, the diverging statements given to the press and recorded in her memoir perfectly illustrate the tension between domesticity and celebrity that pushed Ball into producing and starring in her own television show, *I Love Lucy*.

Five months after her miscarriage, Ball was on set at Columbia Studios starring as an Arabian princess in Sam Katzman's *The Magic Carpet*. Following from Ball, Katzman's movies were known around Hollywood as "lease breakers." Lease breakers are terribly written movies that studio heads would give to stars at the end of their contracts expecting the star to reject them thereby letting the studio out of having to pay out the remainder of their contract. Columbia pictures head Harry Cohn, told Ball that if she wanted to be released from her contract with Columbia to go to Paramount studios to star in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*, she would have to film *The Magic Carpet* first. Neither Katzman nor Cohn expected Ball to accept the role and receive her contractually obligated salary of \$85,000. During the five-day shoot for *The Magic Carpet*, Ball discovered she was pregnant with her daughter Lucy, and kept it hidden from Cohn who would have had the legal right to fire her from the film without pay. Prior to the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, there was no law in the United States prohibiting an employer from terminating an employee for becoming pregnant. Accounts of the Hollywood Studio System in Ronald L. Davis' *The Glamour Factory* and Jeanine Basinger's *The Star Machine* corroborate Ball's own account that she could have been fired for being pregnant on the set of *The Magic Carpet*.

Ball revealed her pregnancy to very few people. On set, only her maid/assistant Harriet McCain knew of her pregnancy. At the end of each shooting day Harriet would let out the waist of Ball's costumes "another notch or two" (Ball 164). Ball also had to put her trust in her doctor that he would keep her pregnancy quiet and not tell the press. Unlike her experience in New York a year earlier, news of Ball's pregnancy being published would ruin her \$85,000 pay day. In a 1980 interview with Davis for an oral histories project Ball details her frantic experience hiding her pregnancy while on *The Magic Carpet's* set.

So I didn't tell my agent, I didn't tell anybody but my mother, my husband, and the doctor knew it. And I said, 'Please, I beg of you.' He said, 'Okay.' I said, 'Now you've got nurses here.' He said, 'Don't worry about it. We won't say anything to them one way or another, because the test isn't that well known yet, I just got it today.' Nothing happened. My stomach kept going out a little bit, a little bit, but not so that... and I had on one of these pantaloons things where the tummy was sticking out and I was eating grapes. ... But pot-belly or no, I did the picture [and] collected the money. (Ball OHC 41)

After Ball completed her work on *The Magic Carpet* and collected her final paycheck from Columbia Pictures, she reluctantly revealed her pregnancy to DeMille who told her to "Get rid of it!" (Ball OHC 41).

Ball did not have an abortion. Instead, as she writes in her memoir, "This time I decided that nothing was going to endanger my becoming a mother. I canceled everything except my radio show and sat placidly at home, knitting and waiting" (167). However, even though Ball tried to do nothing, but knit and wait, tensions between domestic and celebrity life arose when, four months in to her pregnancy, CBS green lit a pilot for a domestic television show featuring Arnaz and Ball as a couple. According to Jess Oppenheimer's memoir, *Laughs, Luck ... and Lucy* CBS agreed to a TV show starring Ball and Arnaz after rival network NBC started showing interest in Ball. "Armed with NBC's overtures, [Ball] imposed her own conditions on CBS. ... [Ball] insisted that the show be produced in Hollywood and air only once every two weeks so that she could continue her film career. And Desilu Productions must have a 50 percent interest in the show" (134). The show could potentially air in the fall of 1951 which meant that Ball and Arnaz had to quickly produce the pilot that CBS would use to attract potential sponsors. With very little time, Arnaz and a five-months-pregnant Ball reused portions of their vaudeville routine and with the help of Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Pugh, and Bob Carrol Jr. wrote a pilot script about Ricky Ricardo trying to keep his wife Lucy from ruining his chance at a television show.



The pilot takes place in New York City. Ricky Ricardo is a Cuban bandleader who finally has a shot at getting a television show. However, his fame hungry wife, Lucy, also wants to be a part of the show. Ricky wants Lucy to stay at home and “just be a wife”. Lucy gets her chance to be a part of Ricky’s act when Pepito the clown becomes ill and can’t perform his clown routine. Lucy steals Pepito’s costumes and props and surprises Ricky by doing a version of Pepito’s clown act during Ricky’s show. The pilot ends back at the Ricardo apartment where Lucy, still costumed in her clown suit, attempts to comfort Ricky with promises that she will not take the contract that the television producers offered her and instead will clean the house, hand Ricky his pipe, cook for him and “be the momma for [Ricky’s] children.” For the final joke of the pilot Lucy tells Ricky that she has a surprise for him. Both Ricky and the audience believe that surprise is that she is pregnant with his child. After all, that would explain her wardrobe choice of the oversized robe, oversized coat, and baggy clown suit. Ricky gets excited waiting to hear the news of a Ricardo baby when instead, Lucy pulls a pie off a table and says, “I baked your favorite pie.”

In the thirty-five minute *I Love Lucy* pilot, available on YouTube, Lucy’s costumes are extremely oversized to hide her pregnant figure (The Classics). While lounging at home, Lucy is dressed in extremely oversized men’s pajamas and bathrobe. After returning home from running an errand downtown for Ricky, she is dressed in an oversized coat and, during the vaudeville clown routine portion of the pilot she is dressed in an oversized man’s suit. These costume choices were clearly made to hide Ball’s growing pregnancy belly. Further accommodations were made to the clowning routine for the pilot as well. In their original vaudeville act, Ball showcased her physical comedy by rolling around on the stage and imitating a trained seal. In the pilot episode, Ball omits the big belly flops and instead pulls her hands inside the arms of her

oversized jacket, drops to her knees and begins undulating the top half of her body in a wave pattern from side to side in order to mimic the movement of a seal. She then turns to the xylophone made of bicycle horns and uses her face to honk out a short tune. Finally, she turns towards the audience and barks like a seal. At this point, Ricky enters the scene with a bucket labeled “FISH” and gives Ball a treat who continues to bark and move around the stage like a seal.<sup>9</sup> Ricky lifts Lucy up from her knees, and she takes a bow. I argue that while minor, these adjustments to the clown routine served a bigger purpose that would not be fully realized until the second season of *I Love Lucy*. Performing a physically intensive clown routine during her second trimester proved that Ball could still do light physical comedy while pregnant. Without knowing it, the pilot episode, which was lost and did not air until April 30, 1990 on CBS, set a precedent for the kinds of wardrobe choices and comedy routines that Desilu Productions would have to create to allow Lucy Ricardo to announce her pregnancy in the Fall of 1952.

Before *I Love Lucy* broke ground in 1950s pregnancy discourse, it first changed the way television was produced. Up until *I Love Lucy*, the majority of national broadcasts were produced live in New York city. The East and Midwestern households, containing eighty-five percent of the audience, would receive a decent broadcast while the rest of the United States would watch the show through kinescope. However, because of the impending birth of their newborn child Ball and Arnaz did not want to move their family to New York City to produce the show live. The only solution was to record the show on film stock, which was a very expensive endeavor. The cigarette company, Philip Morris agreed to sponsor *I Love Lucy's* first season. At this time in television history, in order for a television show to be produced, it had to have an advertising sponsor. In exchange for product advertising, a show's sponsor would pay the television network

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<sup>9</sup> There is joke to be made here about Lucille and Loose Seal.

the money to produce the show. This method meant that a television network took very little risk in producing shows and were subsequently not extremely invested in their success or failure. If a show's sponsor ended its contract with a show, the show would most likely be dropped from the network's television line up. In the case of *I Love Lucy*'s first season, Philip Morris payed CBS \$20,500 per episode or roughly \$209,822 in 2018 adjusting for inflation. CBS agreed to contribute financially as well to the show but, because of the film stock expense, adjustments needed to be made to the show's budget. Following from all recorded accounts, Arnaz struck a deal with CBS and Philip Morris. Ball, Arnaz and Oppenheimer all state that Arnaz and Ball agreed to take a \$1000 pay cut each in exchange for producing *I Love Lucy* on film stock and Desilu owning one-hundred percent of the show's negatives and fifty percent of the show's residuals.

In a September 6, 1952 editorial column for *The Billboard* magazine, "Residuals & Motherhood-Or Why I Made My TV Bow on Film" Lucille Ball details her decision to produce *I Love Lucy* on film instead of live. She discusses how the idea that Desilu could earn "residuals" from reruns of *I Love Lucy* even though she is not exactly sure what "residuals" means, "I have already mentioned "residuals" and, on second thought, I will let you in on a little secret—I am not too cognizant of the word's true meaning (Webster was no help), but I do find the extra revenues come in mighty handy around income-tax time." The concept of residuals was so new in the television industry that CBS and Desilu productions didn't really understand the profit to be made from reruns of the show. Eventually, Desilu would receive their largest payout ever when they sold the entire *I Love Lucy* film library back to CBS. Following from Arnaz's memoir, "we sold the films back to them for \$4,500,000. ... The biggest jackpot of our lives. I think the reason CBS agreed [to giving Desilu one-hundred percent ownership of the films] is because they did

not think that filming the shows the way we wanted to do them was going to work” (203). Television and *I Love Lucy* historians give a lot of credit to *I Love Lucy* for revolutionizing production techniques as well as audience watching habits. Their discussions center around the advancements that Desilu made in using a three-camera system to capture multiple angles in one take, new lighting techniques to ensure that all parts of the set were lit equally, and the invention of a four-screened editing device called a Moviola that allowed Arnaz and film editor Danny Cahn to review and edit the episodes more quickly.<sup>10</sup> However, what is missing from these discussions is the less spectacular and less technical reasoning for the creation of *I Love Lucy* as it is known today.

I argue *I Love Lucy* became a filmed television-sit-com in front of a live studio audience because Ball was pregnant. It revolutionized television because Ball was pregnant. The accommodations for her pregnancy that Ball and Arnaz negotiated and gave up a portion of their salary for fundamentally changed the way that television was produced. Not only was shooting on film a win for Ball’s pregnancy but it also made her more comfortable professionally. From her 1952 editorial in *Billboard*, “As a motion picture actress, I am used to film. After a long time appearing in movies, I have an idea how I’m going to look, what clothes set me off best, what is the best ‘angle’” (Residuals & Motherhood-Or Why I Made My TV Bow on Film). Ball was more comfortable performing for a film camera than for a live audience only. With *I Love Lucy* she was able to do both and meet her professional desires. She filmed in front of a live studio

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about the production of *I Love Lucy* see: Sanders, Coyne and Tom Gilbert. *Desilu: The story of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz* William Morrow and Company. 1993., Desi Arnaz’s memoir, *A Book*. Buccaneer Books. 1994. Jess Oppenheimer’s *Laughs, Luck ... and Lucy*. Syracuse University Press. 1999.

audience and was able to feed off of the energy of a live audience while also having the freedom to have elaborate jokes that involved multiple costume changes all within a safety net of film.

Continuing from her *Billboard* article, Ball discussed how recording on film helps her performance. “This brings me to the problem of wardrobe and changes, legitimate opportunities to over-dress. With this in mind, ‘live’ I’m dead. I don’t get a second guess. I’m not geared to be the ‘whirling dervish of the dressing room.’ On film, we break as in a movie and time is available for the most difficult wardrobe changes” (Residuals & Motherhood-Or Why I Made My TV Bow on Film). Costume choices were extremely important for the comedy on *I Love Lucy*. Several of the iconic comedic moments—Lucy stomping grapes—Lucy at work in a chocolate factory—Lucy as the Vitametavegamin Girl—are greatly enhanced by the costumes that Ball wore. These specific episodes and many others have been immortalized by the Mattel corporation through a series of *Barbie* dolls that capture Ball’s likeness as Lucy Ricardo. If *I Love Lucy* was broadcast live, many of these iconic moments would not have made it into the script because the costume and set changes would be too complicated to produce.

The final piece of evidence to illustrate how much Ball’s desire to be a mother impacted her producing decisions comes at the end of her *Billboard* article. In the final paragraph, Ball gave a more personal reason for deciding to produce her show on film, “I’m a mother and in the process of raising a family. At present, film allows me to spend more time at home, and by virtue of having my career registered on film, my dream is an exclusive contract with little Arnazes. The ‘residuals’ will pay the freight. So why shouldn’t I prefer film?” (Residuals & Motherhood-Or Why I Made My TV Bow on Film). In Ball’s own words, putting *I Love Lucy* on film allowed her dream to spend time with her family at home to be realized. Additionally, Ball saw the filmed episodes as “home movies” for her family. Bart Andrews, friend and biographer of

Lucille Ball, documented the time he spent with her in the few years before her death in the biography, *Lucy in the Afternoon*. When Andrews asked Ball about the creation of *I Love Lucy* she said, “I never took the whole thing that seriously. I thought it would be nice for the kids we were going to have to see some home movies. I wanted my kids to see them as they were done” (102). I argue that these statements show how Ball’s desire to be a mother and have a family strongly influenced the decisions she made for her career. As producer of *I Love Lucy*, Ball had an amazing amount of agency and control over her own performance on the show. This kind of agency allowed Ball to become the most well-known pregnant actress in the history of American television. The power she exercised over the production of her own pregnant body has not been replicated on television. However, the production techniques that she crafted in the second season of *I Love Lucy* to conceal her pregnant body are still in practice today.

In her memoir Ball notes that the premiere season of *I Love Lucy* literally changed the way that people watched television. On Monday nights in the United States between nine and nine-thirty at night “taxis disappeared from the streets of New York. Marshall Field’s department store in Chicago hung up a sign: ‘We Love Lucy too, so from now on we will be open Thursday nights instead of Monday.’ Telephone calls across the nation dropped sharply during that half hour, as well as the water flush rate, as whole families sat glued to their seats” (176).

This national devotion that Ball describes is what gave Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball the clout to push for “Lucy is Enceinte” and six other pregnancy related storylines in the second season of their television show.

### **Negotiating Lucy’s Pregnancy**

“Lucy is Enceinte” first aired December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1952 on the CBS network but was originally shot two months earlier on Friday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1952. When filmed, Lucille Ball was

approximately six months pregnant. It was the tenth episode of the thirty-one-episode second season. The episode begins with Lucy Ricardo (Ball) telling Ethel (Vivian Vance) that she is going to the doctor because she feels “dauncy” and that she has “been putting on a lot of weight” and will have to go on a diet. Ethel suggests that Lucy is “gonna have a baby” and Lucy laughs off the idea saying that she has been married for eleven years and that the idea is “utterly ridiculous.” When Lucy returns she is dumbstruck and blissful as she tells Ethel that she is in fact “going to have a baby.” Ethel and Lucy then plan out how she is going to tell Ricky that she is pregnant. The remainder of the episode shows Lucy’s struggle to tell Ricky that she is pregnant.

In the last scene of the episode Lucy is at her husband’s club where she wrote an anonymous note asking the headwaiter to deliver it to Ricky who then reads it aloud to the audience. “My husband and I are going to have a blessed event and I just found out today. I’ve heard you sing ‘We’re Having a Baby.’ Would you sing it for us?” (*Lucy is Enceinte*). Ricky obliges the note and begins by first singing “Rock-a-bye Baby” and in the middle of the number discovers that it was Lucy who wrote the note. At that moment in a very sentimental gesture, Ricky sings “We’re Having a Baby” to Lucy and the episode ends with Lucy and Ricky in tears.

Nearly every memoir and biography that describes this moment in filming the show discusses how that final scene blurred the lines between television and reality. In her memoir, Ball notes how Arnaz was so moved with emotion that he couldn’t finish the song which caused Ball to cry as well. “Vivian started to sniffle; even the hardened stagehands wiped their eyes with the backs of their hands. The director wanted retakes at the end of the show, but the audience stood up and shouted, ‘No, no!’” (179). Producer Jess Oppenheimer recounts the scene as follows,

On the night of the filming ... a strange thing happened. Suddenly, they [Lucy and Desi] remembered their own real emotions when they had discovered at last that they were

going to be parents, and both of them began crying. It was one of the most moving things I've ever seen. When we reached the end of the scene, our director, Bill Asher, remarked sadly to those of us sitting in the control booth that as beautiful as that first take was, there was a problem with it—Desi, overcome with emotion, had messed up the lyrics to “Rock-a-Bye Baby.” Pressing the talk-back button, he made the announcement to the audience: “I’m sorry ladies and gentlemen, but due to technical problems we’re going to have to take that scene over again.” The response to this announcement was immediate and overwhelming. The entire audience, most of whom had been crying right along with Lucy and Desi, jumped to its feet and shouted a thunderous “NO!!!” Bowing to the audience’s instincts, we used the first take on the air complete with the messed-up lyrics. (208)

Watching this scene sixty-five years later, Desi’s flubbed Rock-a-Bye Baby goes unnoticed on the first viewing. What is noticeable is the tears in the eyes of both the lead actors and the crack in Desi’s voice as he struggles to hide his emotions. The audience protest that both Oppenheimer and Ball describe in their respective memoirs is an example of the blurring of real and fictional lines that *I Love Lucy* was based on. *I Love Lucy* was a farcical sit-com with hints of naturalism.

Naturalism in theatre was a movement that started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that refers to theatrical performances that attempted to recreate “slices of life” on stage. To create moments of real life, advocates for Naturalism like playwright Émile Zola and director André Antoine wrote that theatre stages should resemble the settings of their plays as accurately as possible. Sets should have an “abundance of little objects” to make the interior “look more lived in.” For Antoine, knick-knacks give a house setting a sense of intimacy that lends itself to the creation of “authentic character.” In “Commentary on la Mise en Scene” Antoine wrote, “[a]mong so many objects, and with the complicated furnishings of our modern interiors, the performers’ acting becomes, without their realizing it and almost in spite of themselves, more human, more intense, and more alive in attitude and gestures” (53). Here Antoine asserts that the more realistic the setting and props of a performance are the more



intimate and authentic the actresses' performance will be. Therefore, the more impact the performance will have on its audience.

Desi Arnaz felt the same way about the production of *I Love Lucy* as Antoine felt about theatre. In his memoir, Arnaz writes

Making the show look as real as possible was mandatory and an area in which I would not compromise. A vase of flowers which is supposed to look fresh, fragrant and alive in a scene should be fresh fragrant and alive, not phony and droopy. A prop, an appliance, anything that Lucy or Ricky, Fred or Ethel had to work with, had to be real and functional. Our kitchens, refrigerators, sinks, washing machines, ovens, coffee pots, toasters, radios, TV sets were all practical. When the script called for Lucy and Ethel to make their first loaf of bread, that loaf of bread had to turn out gigantic and look like a monster trying to reach out for them as it started to grow out of the oven. I Told James Paisley, our first assistant director, that I wanted it to be real bread, not made out of papier-mâché or rubber and painted to look like a real loaf. Jim had to make hundreds of calls to find a bakery that would attempt this job. Some didn't have a large enough oven and others were afraid the weight of an eight-foot loaf would break down the oven. He finally found one willing to try it. We had to have two loaves, one as a stand-in, each to weigh three hundred pounds. ... A single prop that does not look real to an audience can louse you up. (260)

Arnaz goes on to tell another *I Love Lucy* anecdote in which the show needed to buy two identical sixty-pound tuna fish for an episode in which Ricky and Fred challenge Lucy and Ethel to a fish off. As a producer and actor Arnaz was insistent that the show look and feel as real as possible. This push for naturalism went in to the scriptwriting as well.

*I Love Lucy* is a farcical situation-comedy. However, what made the show funny was the way in which a normal situation at the beginning of the half-hour would blow up in to an unbelievable set of circumstances by the time the credits rolled. This thirty-minute comedic journey was made possible by its writers, Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Pugh and Bob Carroll Jr. In his memoir, Oppenheimer recalls that the writers never tried to manufacture a comedic situation. "Instead, we were looking for a situation where Lucy's and Ricky's problems and

differences of opinion were the same ones that most of our audience had encountered. We called it ‘holding up the mirror’ (180). Arnaz similarly notes in his memoir,

[The writers] began every script with a logical and credible premise, laying the groundwork, the motivation for the wild antics that would follow. The Ricardos' and the Mertzes' involvement always dealt with basic and real human emotions like love, jealousy, greed, hate or fear. The same ones that other neighbors, everywhere, had at one time or another experienced. Therefore, it was easy for our viewers to identify with the characters in our show, who were believable. The situations they got into were credible and, we hoped, funny. (258)

I am emphasizing these memoir moments because they illustrate both *I Love Lucy's* close ties to naturalism and how much the creators of *I Love Lucy* wanted the television program to be relatable to its audience. Relatability is important when examining the impact that Ball's pregnancy on *I Love Lucy* had on 1950s United States pregnancy discourse and beyond. The massive amounts of success that the show received in its first season gave the creators credibility with CBS and their sponsor Philip Morris. This credibility is what allowed Ball, Arnaz, and Oppenheimer to craft the production techniques that have become standard practice when hiding an actress' pregnancy.

In May 1952 as the filming of the first season of *I Love Lucy* was coming to a close, Ball and her husband Desi Arnaz informed producer Jess Oppenheimer that Ball was pregnant with their second child. From Ball's memoir *Love, Lucy*, “Desi and I both walked into Jess Oppenheimer's office elated. ‘Well, amigo,” Desi told Jess, “we've just heard from the doctor. Lucy's having another baby in January. So we'll have to cancel everything” (177).

*I Love Lucy's* first, and what appeared at the time to be the last, season was a national success. The first four shows that aired were among the top ten shows on television. A review attributed to “Rose.” in the October 17, 1951 *Variety* praised the show saying,

It cannot but help strengthen the growing belief that video programming, to save face and sponsors, must of necessity detour into such avenues where the writing and the material,

the human equations and comedy formulas inherent in well-produced situation comedies, will take TV out of its present rut of overproduced spectacles from which any element of anticipation has been dissipated.

In the June 1, 1952 edition of *The Washington Post*, Sonia Stein's article, "Foolish Tops Ghoulish in Monday TV Battle" reported that *I Love Lucy* was being broadcast in thirty-million homes every week and "is America's No. 1 TV show according to all four national TV surveys." Additionally, in the Summer of 1952, Ball was on the cover of *Time Magazine* and had an article written about her in *Look Magazine*. *I Love Lucy* and its red-headed namesake were by all accounts a television phenomenon.

Accordingly, Ball was both elated and upset about her pregnancy. She was extremely happy to be pregnant at forty-one years old. However, she was also saddened by the fact that her pregnancy put an end to the show that finally allowed Ball and Arnaz to appear on screen together.

My feelings were mixed. I felt bad for the cast, the crew, and the writers. I regretted that our dream of working together was again busted. But my predominant feeling was still one of elation. Another baby! And I was almost forty-one! Jess sat looking at us silently. Then he remarked casually, "I wouldn't suggest this to any other actress in the world—but why don't we continue the show and have a baby on TV?" Desi's face lit up. "Do you think we could? Would it be in good taste?" No actress had ever appeared in a stage or television play before when she was obviously pregnant. 'We'll call the CBS censor and see,' said Jess. That wonderful guy said, "I don't see why not," and with his active encouragement, Philip Morris and the network went along with it. (Ball 177)

Even though Ball and Arnaz had creative control over their show, the idea that they would be able to produce *I Love Lucy* with a narrative that either included Ball's pregnancy or that completely hid Ball's pregnancy seemed unlikely to Ball. On the other hand, Arnaz recalled Ball's pregnancy revelation differently. Instead of feeling like the show had to be cancelled, Arnaz writes in his memoir that he immediately got to work on figuring out how to write Ball's pregnancy into the show. Arnaz details a conversation between himself and Oppenheimer where

Arnaz pushes Oppenheimer into the idea of writing in a pregnancy plot for Lucy Ricardo. Oppenheimer is resistant saying, “They’ll never let you do that.” Arnaz responds, “Why won’t they? And who are they?” Oppenheimer: “You know—the sponsor, the network, the advertising agency.” Arnaz: “Well, I don’t see why not, ... What is wrong with Lucy Ricardo having a baby? Lucy and Ricky are married. She’s pregnant. There is no way we can hide that fact from the audience. We have already signed the contracts. This is the number-one show on the air. There is only one way to do it—Lucy Ricardo will have a baby.” Arnaz’s account of the conversation ends with Oppenheimer’s statement, “It’d be a hell of a gimmick ... if they would let you do it” (232-233).

Jess Oppenheimer’s account of Ball’s pregnancy announcement does not mention the above conversation. Instead, he discusses the hesitations that CBS and Philip Morris had with the news and the *joint* plan of Desi and his to write Ball’s pregnancy onto the show,

The news of Lucy’s impending motherhood at the end of our first season was met with utter dismay by the network and our sponsor. Harry Ackerman [Vice President of CBS Programming in Hollywood] pronounced it a complete disaster. And both CBS and the Biow Agency [the advertising agency for Philip Morris] were adamant about abandoning *our* plan to showcase Lucy’s pregnancy on *I Love Lucy*: ‘You cannot show a pregnant woman on television! (198)

The common denominator between all three accounts is the feeling of all parties that to incorporate Ball’s pregnancy into the narrative of *I Love Lucy* was a novel idea that had not been done before. Because of its revolutionary discourse, several weeks of negotiations between CBS, Philip Morris and the Biow Agency took place before Desilu productions had the greenlight.

Arnaz and Oppenheimer recall that they first took the fight to the Biow Agency and Philip Morris. Arnaz writes that agents from CBS, Philip Morris and the Biow Agency all felt that they could not be responsible for putting a pregnant woman on television. The Biow Agency asked, “Can you hide her behind chairs or something or other?” Arnaz responded, “There ain’t

no way I can hide Lucy's pregnancy. By the time fall comes around she'll be as big as the Goodyear blimp. And I still don't see what is so wrong if she has a baby in the show as Lucy Ricardo" (233). The Biow Agency asked if Desilu could "just do one or two shows about it" and Arnaz responded,

No, it cannot be done that way. We need at least eight or ten shows to do them honestly and well, and have any kind of continuity in the series. First, she has to tell Ricky she's going to have a baby. Lucy and Ricky, in our story life, have been married for more than ten years without having a child, so that has to be great news in the Ricardo household and we couldn't do it justice without doing one whole show just about that. Then, even though we will cover the last six months of her pregnancy in eight or ten shows, we certainly could not make them fun and sentimental and honest and real in much less than eight shows. (233)

Arnaz's response to the Biow Agency is interesting because it shows that he cared about the overarching narrative of the show. His concern about series continuity and doing the pregnancy storyline "justice" emphasizes Arnaz's feelings that Ball/Lucy's pregnancy shouldn't just be a single episode gimmick. Instead, Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy and the subsequent Ricardo baby was another opportunity to create as much naturalism as possible on set. Just like the eight-foot loaf of real bread or the two, sixty-pound tuna fish, Lucy's pregnancy needed to be made real for the sake of the audience. Too short of a pregnancy storyline would just "louse it up" and both the stage and television audiences would not buy into the story. Furthermore, Arnaz felt that trying to hide Ball's pregnancy would be impossible because she would eventually grow to be the size of the Goodyear blimp. Arnaz's hyperbole aside, when Ball was pregnant with her first child she admittedly gained a lot of weight. In a March 30, 1952 *Los Angeles Times* article by Lydia Lane, "Lucille Ball Tells Diet, Perfume, Voice, Hair Dyeing and Complexion Secrets" Ball spoke openly with Lane about the Cesarean delivery she had with her first child, Lucie Arnaz. "I had a Caesarean—my baby was three weeks late—I gained a lot the last weeks. Because of the operation, I wasn't allowed to exercise but I was very serious about watching what I ate and I went down

from a size 16 to a 12.” In 1951, a woman’s size 16 dress was approximately: bust 34 inches, waist 28 inches and hip 37 inches; a woman’s size 12 dress was approximately: bust 30 inches, waist 24 inches, and hip 33 inches.<sup>11</sup> In his recollections of his ex-wife’s first pregnancy, Arnaz writes, “[Lucy] used to waddle out of the house, as big as an elephant”; therefore, from past experience, he knew that trying to hide Lucy’s pregnancy would not be successful (201).

Finally, Arnaz had enough of negotiating with the Biow Agency. In an unprecedented move he wrote a letter directly to the head of Philip Morris, Alfred Lyons. The following is the letter to Lyons as it is reproduced in Arnaz’s memoir:

Mr. Lyons, I guess it all comes down to you. You are the man who is paying the money for this show and I guess I will have to do whatever you decide. There’s only one thing I want to make certain that you understand. We have given you the number-one show in the country and, up till now, the creative decisions have been in our hands. Your people are now telling us what not to do unless, in the future, they will also tell us what to do.

At that point, and if this is your decision, we will cease to be responsible to you for the show being the number-one show on television, and you will have to look to your people, to the network and to the Biow Agency for that responsibility. Thank you very much for all you have done for us in the past. Sincerely yours. (234)

Arnaz’s impulse to circumvent the middle-men and speak directly to the head of his sponsor corporation highlights his talent for business that made Desilu a successful and lucrative production company. It also again, illustrates the passion that Arnaz had for having creative control over the show and producing Ball’s pregnancy with some measure of authenticity.

Arnaz’s letter is a thinly veiled threat that created a hostage situation of sorts. Essentially, if the

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<sup>11</sup> Until 1958 there were no regulations on women’s dress sizes. To figure out Ball’s measurements, I searched vintage dress patterns online. I found an Etsy seller, VintagePatternDrawer, who had two vintage 1951 Simplicity shirt dress patterns for sale, a size 12 and a size 16. The measurements of each pattern were listed in their respective item descriptions. For more information on the history of women’s clothing sizes see, Laura Stampler’s “The Bizarre History of Women’s Clothing Sizes”

Biow Agency does not give in to his pregnancy episode demands, Arnaz and Ball would give up creative control of the show and would no longer hold themselves responsible for making *I Love Lucy* a successful show. All of that responsibility would fall to the creative minds at the Biow Agency. The same creative minds were producing poorly reviewed commercials for Philip Morris already. The same October 17, 1951 *Variety* magazine review of *I Love Lucy* mentioned above-ended with a negative review of the Philip Morris commercial. “Philip Morris commercials were less fortunate. The overlong monotonous nose test “formula” is ready for the ashcan. By now it has the same irritation quality that PM attributes to its rival smoke” (Rose). The Biow Agency was not receiving high praise for their creative work. Therefore, it made sense that Lyons, who would be aware of these poor commercial reviews, agreed to Arnaz’s terms. After Arnaz sent the letter, all arguments about the pregnancy episodes ceased from the Biow Agency. Years later Arnaz learned that after Lyons received his letter, he issued a memo to the Biow agency that said “To whom it may concern: Don’t fuck around with the Cuban! Signed, A.L.” (*A Book*. 235).

### ***Lucy’s Race and Gender Problems***

*I Love Lucy* has a race problem. Lyons was not alone in his racist sentiment of referring to Arnaz as “The Cuban.” As noted above, it took a lot of time and convincing for CBS to literally buy the idea of Ball and Arnaz as a happily married “American” couple because of Arnaz’s Cuban heritage. Television critics took notice of Arnaz’s thick Cuban accent as well. During the first season of *I Love Lucy*, Walter Ames wrote “There’s an entirely new language being born in Hollywood and new words are added every time Desi Arnaz opens his mouth on the Monday evening *I Love Lucy* television show. In video circles. Desi’s unique pronunciations are being tagged ‘desi-isms’ (“Television this Week”). Ames continues the article by recounting

some of the different words or phrases that Arnaz mispronounces including “lo-shickle splenation (logical explanation); Fabrierry (February); dunt (do not); parmen (apartment) inner essen (interesting); ... and many others too numerous to mention.” Ames appears to pay Arnaz a compliment by calling his accent a “talent” and comparing his “desi-isms” with the popular catch phrases of Red Skelton and Jerry Lewis. On the other hand, Ames refers to Arnaz’s accent an “Arnaz-ization of the American language”; I read Ames’ use of the term “Arnaz-ization” as a combination of “Arnaz” and “assassination” which, while clever, is not complimentary (“Television this Week”). In his memoir, Arnaz recounts moments where casting directors would mispronounce his name as “Dizzy” instead of “Dehzi” or the time when RKO insisted that he take elocution lessons to get rid of his accent, “I took lessons for three months and at the end of the three months they tested me in the part. My accent came from the sound track as thick and as Cuban as ever” (80, 128). However, as much as Hollywood wanted Arnaz to be whiter, what made him a star was his Cuban heritage. He is the person responsible for popularizing the Conga Line dance in the United States through his performances at La Conga nightclub in Miami and New York City in the late 1930s (61-62). RKO Pictures film studio took notice of Arnaz after he appeared as a Conga playing football player in Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart’s 1939 Broadway musical *Too Many Girls*. RKO had Arnaz reprise his role for the 1940 film version of the movie and that is where he met his future wife Lucille Ball. Arnaz’s Cuban accent, heritage and Latin American orchestra became a feature of *I Love Lucy* in multiple, sometimes cringe worthy, ways. Arnaz writes in his memoir that there were “rules” that *I Love Lucy* script writers followed,

never do a joke if that joke no matter how funny and what a big laugh it could get, would in any way offend even a small segment of our viewers. This eliminated jokes about physical defects, like harelip, nervous twitch and crazy-people jokes, and Polish, Jewish, black, Mexican, Japanese, Chinese and other ethnic jokes. The only ones close to an



ethnic joke were the ones about Ricky's accent, and of course those were in the category of making fun of yourself, which is fine. But even those did not work too well if anybody but Lucy used them. (259)

Jess Oppenheimer notes in his memoir that many of the jokes about Ricky's accent were unscripted. While in rehearsal Arnaz would mispronounce a word and it would get a laugh from the crew. Hearing the laughter, the writers would add the joke into the script. Oppenheimer also details that Arnaz's Cuban heritage influenced story lines as well, "For instance, we could do stories all day long about Ricky being unfaithful to Lucy (or at least about her *thinking* that he was being unfaithful), but to do a story about Lucy's infidelity was quite another thing altogether, because in the Cuban culture in which Desi had been raised, it was accepted that no woman would ever dare to be unfaithful to a man" (173). However, Lucy's inability to be unfaithful to Ricky did not stop her from using Ricky's Cuban heritage against him.

In "Lucy Hires an English Tutor," the fourth pregnancy episode of *I Love Lucy's* second season, Lucy hires an English tutor for herself, Ricky, Fred and Ethel because she wants her baby to be raised in the "proper vocal environment." Ricky comes home to find Lucy reading on her bed, surrounded by piles of books. Lucy speaks to Ricky in "proper English" and he asks her what language she is speaking. Lucy then asks Ricky to promise that he will not speak to their new baby until he is nineteen or twenty years old so that he only hears "perfect English." Then for further humiliation and to prove her point, Lucy has Ricky read a children's book about a tree cutter that allows for some jokes to be made about Ricky/Arnaz's accent. The children's book joke highlights the complexity of the English language for non-native speakers by using words that are spelled similarly but pronounced differently. For example, Ricky reads how the tree cutter cut down some tree boughs but mispronounces boughs as booges. Lucy corrects him and Ricky continues reading about how the tree cutters hands are rough. However, because of Lucy's

previous correction, he mispronounces rough to row (rhymes with bough). Lucy corrects him again but Ricky points out how the spelling between bough and rough are similar. Lucy responds, “That’s right. That shows how little you know about the English language.” The language lesson continues as Ricky gets schooled on the pronunciation of “through” and “cough.” Finally, a frustrated Ricky declares that his child is going to learn to speak Spanish and the entire studio audience bursts into laughter. Lucy goes against her husband’s wishes and hires an English tutor, who also happens to be a composer. However, like all *I Love Lucy* episodes, Ricky gets the upper hand in the end. Ricky makes a deal with the tutor that if the tutor speaks improper, accented English to Lucy, Ricky will get him auditions with every record company in town. The English tutor fulfills his part of the bargain; Lucy fires him on the spot, and the episode ends.

When looked at as a whole, *I Love Lucy* sends a confusing pre-feminism message to its audience. The basic plot of every episode features Lucy trying to find a way to undermine Ricky’s authority only to be brought back into the domesticated life by her dear husband. Whether she attempts to break into show business, buy an expensive dress, create works of art, crash Ricky’s baby shower, or prove that working a job is easier than being a housewife, Lucy’s day is filled by ignoring Ricky and doing what she wants. Historian Stephanie Coontz’s book *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* argues that in the 1950s, “domesticity was the mark of middle-class status and upward mobility. In sit-com families, a middle-class man’s work was totally irrelevant to his identity; by the same token, the problems of working-class families did not lie in their economic situation but in their failure to create harmonious gender roles” (29). Furthermore, “Working-class and ethnic men on television had one defining characteristic: They were unable to control their wives. The families of middle-class

men, by contrast, were generally well behaved” (29). Ricky’s inability to control his wife upset the traditional gender roles of the 1950s, but it did not upset *I Love Lucy*’s audience. Audience’s found Lucy’s crazy antics so enjoyable that it was a top-rated show the entirety of its run on CBS. Audiences accepted Lucy’s defiance of Ricky not because they were an exception but because they were a rule. Ricky’s Cuban heritage made it acceptable and hysterical for his white wife to ignore him.

In her essay “Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy” Patricia Mellencamp argues that what makes Lucy’s resistance to the patriarchal norms of her husband Ricky palatable to 1950s *I Love Lucy* audiences is because of Arnaz’s (and therefore Ricky’s) Cuban heritage. Mellencamp suggests that racism acts as a mediator between Lucy’s feminist strains and American audiences, “Although [Ricky] is ‘tall, dark, and handsome,’ not the usual slapstick type, his representation as the Latin lover/bandleader/crooner and slapstick foil for Lucy’s pies in the face suggests that Lucy’s resistance to patriarchy might be more palatable because it is mediated by a racism which views Ricky as inferior” (91). However, as Mellencamp also points out, no matter what kind of revolutionary comic acts Lucy gets in to, she is ultimately made wrong by the narrative of the story and returns home apologetic. This repeated resolution to *I Love Lucy*’s narratives reestablished 1950s heteronormative gender roles while simultaneously stoking anticipation for the next week’s upheaving of the patriarchy.

### **Producing a Pregnancy**

Incorporating Ball’s pregnancy into *I Love Lucy*’s storyline would allow new narratives for the weekly dismantling of the patriarchy, and with Lyons’s blessing all Desilu had to contend with was the CBS network censors. To fully appease CBS, Desilu had a panel of three clergy men read over the scripts that were about Ball’s pregnancy and give them their figurative

blessing. A Rabbi, a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister approved the scripts including the usage of the word pregnant. However, CBS censors disagreed with the panel and told Desilu that the word pregnant was too vulgar and that they were not allowed to refer to Lucy as being “pregnant” on the air. Thus, throughout “Lucy is Enceinte” and the remaining six pregnancy episodes, Lucy is never referred to and never refers to herself as being pregnant.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Lucy never refers to herself singularly where her pregnancy is concerned. Lucy never says “I am having a baby.” She always says “We are having a baby,” and while she may mean herself and Ricky or even the Ricardos and the Mertzs, in reality “We” meant not just Lucy and Ricky but Lucy and Desi and the entire television watching United States. I argue that, from this very first episode, *I Love Lucy* began to construct a television pregnancy discourse. The script’s refusal to individualize Lucy’s pregnancy and subjectivity turns her into an Everywoman. Lucy, and thus Ball, became the pregnant body upon which the majority of United States television watching audience collectively experienced pregnancy. Thus, Lucy could not, even through language, experience her pregnancy as an individual.

Once negotiations were complete and the pregnancy storyline given the green-light by CBS and the Biow Agency, Arnaz and Ball began creating a new season two shooting schedule. This schedule cut the production company’s vacation time by six weeks so that there would be enough time to shoot both pregnancy and non-pregnancy related storylines before Ball’s pregnancy began to show. Shooting began on July 28<sup>th</sup>. For the second season of *I Love Lucy* the CBS network ordered forty-one, half-hour episodes. During the negotiations for Ball’s pregnancy storyline, Desilu also asked if CBS would allow the production company to air ten

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<sup>12</sup> Enceinte is French for “pregnant.” Enciente also translates to “enclosed.” There seems to be an interesting thought here about pregnant women being enclosed spaces. Spaces that are closed off from other men, other babies. Or perhaps the idea that pregnant women themselves must be enclosed.

rerun episodes from the previous season on the condition that each episode would have a new opening scene filmed for it. These ten episodes became flashback episodes that aired after Ball gave birth, giving her time to recover and de facto maternity leave. Additionally, for *I Love Lucy*'s first season, Desilu shot forty episodes but only thirty-five went to air, meaning that there were an additional five episodes that could be used for the second season. In total, Desilu had to produce twenty-six new shows before Ball went on maternity leave in mid-November. The rushed schedule meant that the Desilu production crew and its stars found themselves rehearsing and shooting ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. Each week the crew would write and rehearse the show and the taping happened at the end of the week, on Fridays. In her memoir, Ball does not comment about the strenuous work schedule but does include a picture of herself asleep on the couch on set with the caption "Free for a few minutes, the expectant mother catnaps on a couch on the *I Love Lucy* set." In the photo a visibly pregnant Ball is dressed in capris and a long white maternity shirt. She is curled up in the fetal position on the couch surrounded by overturned set pieces and mountains of set dressing. While she did not explicitly discuss the hectic schedule, it is clear that it was exhausting work.

Filming of the new season resumed on August 1, 1952 and in the first non-pregnancy storyline episodes, there is no physical indication in Ball's body that she is pregnant. Her costumes interchange between classic 1950s silhouettes without a hint of pregnancy belly. It is not until the first pregnancy storyline episode, "Lucy is Enceinte," that Ball's wardrobe shifts to looser, maternity wear. As I discuss below, Ball's pregnancy was heavily featured on television for seven consecutive episodes. However, off screen Ball's pregnancy performance was not a public one. Very few images of a pregnant Ball were published during her pregnancy. One rare image of Ball in public emphasizes the blur between entertainment and reality. There is a black-

and-white photo of Ball and Arnaz celebrating their wedding anniversary. They are sitting in restaurant and a waitress has brought them a cake that reads “Happy Anniversary Lucy”. The composition of the picture has clearly been staged with the waitress standing in between the couple tilting the cake towards the camera, holding a knife just above the cake and looking directly into the camera with a smile. Arnaz is looking up towards the waitress as Ball gazes across the table at Arnaz with a less than enthusiastic look on her face. In fact, when the image is taken in as a whole, no one in the photograph appears to be excited to be there. The photo gives the audience the sense that this cake and possibly the public celebration of their anniversary is just one more publicity obligation that the couple must do to further promote their stardom.

Putting the emotional state of Ball and Arnaz aside, this photo has another more compelling story to tell. The coat or overdress that Ball is wearing in this photograph is the same one that Ball wears at the end of “Lucy is Enceinte” and again in “Pregnant Women are Unpredictable.” In both episodes, as in her real-life, Ball wears the overdress at public formal events. It is a calf length garment that is accented with black velvet cuffs and collar that are ringed in pearls and rhinestones. The cut of the coat completely obscures her body. It is cut wide leaving no hint of Ball’s pregnancy silhouette underneath. Here again is another example of the blurring between *I Love Lucy* and Ball’s private life. Not only are storylines being pulled from her private life for the television show, but her wardrobe, maternity or otherwise also performs double duty as both her private wardrobe and show costumes (Harris 101). Ball’s multiuse maternity wardrobe created a link between Lucy Ricardo and Lucille Ball for the show’s television audience. By appearing publicly in the same clothing that she wore on the show, Ball further blurred the lines between her private life as Lucille Ball and her public performance as Lucy Ricardo. This blur often manifested itself in the question of whether or not Ball was just as

funny as Lucy. In his memoir, Jess Oppenheimer recalls that many fans of *I Love Lucy* would ask if Ball was just as funny as Lucy in real life. Oppenheimer always responded, “no, not funny in the way that Lucy Ricardo was” (164). Audiences tend to want television actresses’ real-life personalities to be just like their on-screen personas.

As Lucy Ricardo, Ball’s image became extremely accessible. Every Monday night, audiences could count on Ball appearing in their home and entertaining them for a half hour. Before the advent of social media that allowed celebrities to tweet, snap, or publish their every thought online, television was the most intimate medium that granted celebrity access to its audience. In P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power*, Marshall writes, “Like radio, its precursor, television brought entertainment into the home. And in terms of the common space of the family, the television occupied a privileged location in the living rooms of most homes in North America. The television celebrity embodies the characteristics of familiarity and mass acceptability” (David 119). Ball pushed her familiarity further when she appeared in public dressed in the same clothes as her televised persona. These public appearances as pseudo-Lucy further constructed the American public’s understanding of pregnancy. By appearing publicly pregnant on screen and off, Ball became the first example of an actress working while pregnant for the United States public. Through her public appearances in her Lucy Ricardo wardrobe, audiences watching *I Love Lucy* were able to confirm that the pregnancy they were seeing on screen for seven Monday nights in a row was authentic the rest of the week as well, wardrobe and all.

Ball’s blended wardrobe was both a money saving device as well as a sign of the times. The first two seasons of *I Love Lucy* do not have a credited costume designer. When Ball and Arnaz began discussing the idea of *I Love Lucy* Ball approached seasoned film costume designer

Elois Jenson. However, Jenson was still under exclusive contract at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and would not join *I Love Lucy* until the third season. Without a costume designer at the helm and with Arnaz trying to save as much money as possible, Ball was in charge of her own wardrobe. Many of the maternity clothes that Ball wore on the show were repeated throughout the seven-episode pregnancy story line. Black Trousers and wide cut, short sleeve, collared, trapeze style maternity blouses make up the majority of Ball's onscreen maternity uniform. The trapeze style of blouse was common cut in 1950s maternity wear. These blouses are designed so that the fabric flows outward from the neckline skimming across the torso and ending at the top of the thigh. In these shirts, the silhouette of Ball's baby bump along with the rest of her torso is completely obliterated. The only sign that Ball is pregnant is the fact that she is wearing trousers and blouses instead of the classic fit and flare dresses of the decade. The switch in costuming from Ball's classic non-maternity silhouette to that of her maternity wear is drastic. In one week, she transitions from a slender silhouette to an oversized tent. The week to week filming schedule meant that Ball's pregnancy body would not change, at least initially, to actually require her to wear the trapeze tops in the first or second pregnancy episode. The trapeze tops make her appear to be pregnant, but-just how far along in her pregnancy is unclear. The costumes strike a balance between not highlighting Ball's actual pregnant body, as was the job of 1950s maternity wear, but, also conveying to the audience that Ball's character is pregnant. Through this costuming choice Lucy Ricardo's nine-month pregnancy could be condensed into a seven-week timeline.

The frequency of wear for Ball's maternity wardrobe illustrates that ready-to-wear clothing and especially maternity ready-to-wear fashions were in infancy in the fashion market. Kay Goldman's *Dressing Modern Maternity* is a study on early twentieth century maternity fashion and the Page Boy maternity fashion label. Goldman writes that pre-twentieth century



maternity specific fashions did not exist. Women's garments would be altered for the pregnant body and then altered back for the non-pregnant body. It wasn't until 1904 when Lena Bryant became the first designer and manufacturer of maternity specific clothing (18-20).<sup>13</sup> However, the problem with many of Bryant's and other maternity designer's fashions was they had not accurately addressed a maternity garment's need to adjust for a growing stomach or the uneven hemline that occurs because of the baby bump. As a pregnant woman's stomach grows a skirt's waistband needed some way to expand with the stomach. At the same time, if a pregnant woman were to just move the waist of her skirt above her abdomen, the hem of her skirt would be higher in the front than in the back, creating an unprofessional uneven hemline. The solution to this problem came from the subject of Goldman's study, Page Boy Maternity. In 1938, the Frankfurt sisters, owners of Page Boy Maternity, designed and patented a maternity skirt that had an opening in the front that allowed for an expanding abdomen throughout pregnancy but, also had a system of loops that kept the hemline even around the skirt. They also designed a maternity top that opened in the front for breast feeding and was also long enough to cover the abdomen opening in the skirt (Goldman, 22-23).

These similar fashions were featured on Ball's body during the seven-episode pregnancy arc. Goldman notes that in 1953 Page Boy published an edition of their catalog/magazine that contained—"several pages devoted to 'Stork League Hollywood U.S.A.' These pages were filled with stories about Hollywood families who were expecting babies during the spring of 1953. It is not clear whether all the women named were customers of Page Boy, but some were described wearing Page Boy clothes. For Example, ... 'Recent shoppers in Page Boy's Wilshire Boulevard branch included Lucille Ball'" (58). Whether or not Ball was *actually* sporting Page Boy fashions

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<sup>13</sup> Due to a misspelling, Lena Bryant would become fashion retail giant Lane Bryant.

on *I Love Lucy* was irrelevant to the maternity wear manufacturer. Ball's very public pregnancy made her presence in the Page Boy store worth mentioning because she was arguably the most recognizable pregnant woman in the country in the Fall of 1952.

In addition to trapeze tops Ball sported other costumes that simultaneously emphasized and hid Ball's pregnancy. In the episode "Lucy's Showbiz Swan Song" Ricky is planning a Gay Nineties revue for his club. Lucy begs Ricky to be a part of the show, arguing that once the baby is born she will be so busy taking care of it that she won't have any time to be in show business. Ricky rejects this idea which, of course, leads Lucy and Ethel down a hilarious path to convince Ricky to let Lucy be part of the show. In a scene in Lucy's bedroom Lucy and Ethel are trying to decide what kind of performance they should audition with. At the beginning of the scene, Ethel walks in to the Ricardo's bedroom and Lucy is already in the closet looking for a costume to wear for her audition. Lucy knows that she cannot appear in public with her very pregnant profile and she tells Ethel "I am trying to find a costume that won't be too revealing." Then Lucy exits her closet dressed in a barrel costume. The barrel is held on to Ball's body with suspenders and covers Ball's body from her shoulders to the middle of her thighs.

This costume change gets a big laugh. The scripted joke is that she can perform a rendition of "Roll Out the Barrel" but the unspoken joke is the clever way in which Ball's pregnancy bump is hidden from view. In this moment, the show pokes fun at itself and CBS censors. The barrel costume is definitely not revealing and would allow Lucy to go to the audition, but it is also ridiculous and an over exaggeration. This exaggeration joke gets pushed to its most extreme when Ethel tells Lucy that "Roll Out the Barrel" is not a Gay Nineties song and a disappointed Lucy sits down causing her barrel costume to fully cover her from the waist up. Lucy disappears inside the barrel costume completely with only her legs showing out of the

bottom. In this moment, CBS network and Philip Morris executives get what they originally asked for, a pregnant Lucy completely hidden from view. Quickly Ethel goes to Lucy and helps her take off the barrel costume. Lucy then decides that she and Ethel could do an act together with Lucy playing a woman dressed in a hoop skirt with bloomers and Ethel playing the man. Ethel whines, “Oh, but why me? Why can’t you be the man?” and Lucy responds, “Well that should be fairly obvious.” This gets another big laugh from the audience and the scene ends.

This pregnancy comedy replaces the physical comedy during *I Love Lucy*’s pregnancy story arc. Ball was unable to perform the same kind of physical comedy that made *I Love Lucy* so popular in its first season, so her comedy temporarily transitioned from pies in the face to pokes about her pregnancy. The writers of *I Love Lucy* found ways to either work with or work around Ball’s pregnancy. Two out of the seven pregnancy episodes are shows that could theoretically be written for a non-pregnant Lucy Ricardo as well. “Lucy’s Showbiz Swan Song,” and “Lucy Becomes a Sculptress” both have plots that are only tangentially related to Lucy’s pregnancy. In “Lucy Becomes a Sculptress,” Lucy decides that she wants to pass a talent on to her child. A salesclerk convinces Lucy that she is a gifted sculptress but Ricky disagrees. To settle the issue Ricky hires an art critic to come and critique her work. However, Lucy begins to worry that she is not a great artist and with the help of Ethel, tricks Ricky and the art critic by covering her face in clay. When the art critic comes for the evaluation, Lucy is sitting underneath a card table with a head sized hole cut in it. The table is covered with a white table cloth so the only thing visible is Lucy’s clay covered face. Ethel tells Ricky and the art critic that Lucy sculpted a bust of her own face. The critic and Ricky are blown away and the critic tries to buy the bust but the whole plan falls apart once the critic tries to pick Lucy’s bust off the table and finds that it is still attached to Lucy’s body. This episode contains plenty of physical comedy. At

one point, Fred Mertz (William Frawley) is convinced to model as a discus throwing athlete so Lucy can practice sculpting from a live model. When Lucy finishes her sculpture, Fred can't stand up straight and slowly walks out of the room still bent over in the throwing position. Later, when the art critic evaluates Lucy's bust and decides he wants to buy it, Lucy uses only her eyes to communicate a panicked "do something!" to Ethel. Ethel tries to convince the art critic that he doesn't want the sculpture by "messing it up." She moves portions of Lucy's lips in odd directions and squeezes Lucy's face together. In response to each of Ethel's gestures, Ball contorts and holds her face in those positions. This small amount of facial comedy receives big laughs from the audience. Nothing about "Lucy Becomes a Sculptress" is inherently about Lucy's pregnancy. With the exception Lucy's dialogue expressing her desire to pass art down to the child that she is carrying, "Lucy Becomes a Sculptress" is just like any other *I Love Lucy* episode. This kind of writing illustrates that pregnant or not-pregnant, *I Love Lucy* could still do the same type of physical comedy; it just was done by somebody else or in smaller, more localized places.

In "Ricky has Labor Pains" Lucy dresses as a man when she spies on her husband's baby shower turned stag party. Lucy and Ethel go undercover as journalists who want to write a story about Ricky's version of a baby shower for dads, a "daddy shower." Ball wears a three-piece suit unbuttoned to show a vest that skims Ball's torso but does not completely obscure her baby bump. For a few seconds, the outline of Ball's baby bump is viewable when the camera cuts to a close up of Ball dressed in drag.

The close-up of Ball reveals the curve of the bottom of her baby bump, which is highlighted by the hem of the vest. Ball filmed this episode on Friday, October 31, 1952 when she was approximately seven months pregnant and two weeks before she went on maternity

leave. This episode is number five out of the seven pregnancy episodes and the last pregnancy episode where Lucy ventures out in public (besides the final episode in which “Lucy Goes to the Hospital”). Ball’s costume in this scene is the most revealing of any of her costumes during the seven pregnancy episodes. The light-colored vest contrasts against her dark trousers highlighting the roundness of her very pregnant stomach. Additionally, the tightness of the vest and the trousers against her stomach is in direct contrast to the flow of the oversized maternity tops that Ball is normally costumed in. By dressing in drag, the character Lucy is able to enter into a stag party; a male only space that is reserved for beer, cigars, and dirty jokes. By dressing in drag, the actress Ball is able to throw off the obscurity of maternity clothes and domestic spaces and reveal her pregnant body underneath a three-piece suit.

The final episode of the *I Love Lucy* pregnancy narrative, “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” was filmed on Friday, November 14, 1952 and aired Monday, January 19, 1953. In this episode, the birth of baby Ricardo is eminent as are many of the sit-com labor and delivery jokes of television’s modern era. With this episode, *I Love Lucy* established commonly used comedic tropes in situation comedies that feature labor and deliveries. I have identified and named three. The first trope is the labor panic. In a labor panic trope, one or multiple members of the pregnant character’s entourage become frantic once the pregnant character goes in to labor. Panic begins when the pregnant character’s water breaks, when they are on their way to the hospital, or if the pregnant character is already at the hospital and a member of their entourage is trying to find them. The panic usually results in some sort of physical comedy moment for a member of the pregnant character’s entourage. This panic is manifested in “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” in the Ricardo’s apartment.

At the beginning of the episode, Lucy announces to Ricky that she will have to go to the hospital soon and he begins to worry. Lucy tries to calm him by telling him that he should go to the club and perform that night, after all he can't be in the room with her anyway. Ricky doesn't like this idea but he agrees that it is for the best so he doesn't lose his job. Ricky then asks Lucy if she can do him a favor and try and have the baby before 8:30pm. That way he can be there with her and then go perform. Lucy responds that she will try to do her best. Lucy then calls Ethel and asks her and Fred to come to their apartment and act as buffers between her and a very anxious Ricky. When the Mertzes show up, they are just as anxious as Ricky and are no help. Finally, Lucy decides to go lie down and Ethel, Ricky, and Fred "rehearse" Lucy's trip to the hospital so that when the time comes, everything can be carried out correctly without panic. Of course, the moment that Lucy announces that it is time to go to the hospital, everything that was rehearsed goes out the window and pandemonium ensues.

This series of chaotic events gave birth to a now classic comedy trope, that can be seen in more recent television sit-coms. For example, on the third season of *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* Aunt Viv, played by Janet Hubert-Whitten, goes into labor in the twentieth episode, "The Baby Comes Out." In this episode Viv's entire family shows up at the hospital after Viv has already checked herself in. Viv's husband Uncle Phil, played by James Avery, is the last to arrive and, in a panic trying to find her, runs head first into a hospital gurney and catapults himself onto the floor (Smith).

The creation of pregnancy sit-com tropes continues when Ricky and Lucy arrive at the hospital. An overwhelmed Ricky enters sitting in a wheel chair being pushed by a nurse with Lucy behind them carrying her own suitcase. Ricky insists that he is fine but can't answer basic questions like the name of Lucy's doctor, their home address, or Lucy's last name. All of this

information is provided to the nurse by Lucy. Eventually Lucy and Ricky say their goodbyes. Ricky is not allowed to accompany Lucy to the maternity floor and must wait inside the father's waiting room. I call this trope the incapacitated birth partner. Comedies that feature incapacitated birth partner segments usually showcase how the pregnant character must perform the labor and delivery without their birthing partner(s) because they are incapacitated in some way. In the 2008 all-female filmed comedy, *The Women*, the final scene is a labor and delivery scene that features Meg Ryan, Annette Bening, Debra Messing and Jada Pinkett Smith. Messing's character goes into labor and-Smith, Bening, and Ryan are in the room with her. While Messing is in labor she coaches Ryan through a phone call with Ryan's estranged husband as Smith faints and Bening paces the room frantically. As panic engulfs the delivery room, Messing's character is the only one of her entourage that remains calm as she gives birth.

I call the final comedic labor and delivery trope costumed delivery. This trope is enacted when a member of the birthing character's entourage arrives to the hospital in some sort of wacky or silly costume because they did not have time to change clothes. In the last half of "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" Ricky and Fred sit and wait for Lucy to deliver the baby. While in the waiting room, Ricky asks Fred to bring his makeup kit to the hospital so he can put on his "voodoo number" make up. In full voodoo costume, he goes to the Tropicana to perform and then races back to the hospital for his first look at his son, Ricky Ricardo, Jr. When Ricky arrives at the hospital he is wearing a black fright wig with his face painted to resemble a voodoo mask with large teeth and long fangs. He wears a trench coat in an attempt to cover his voodoo costume that is a brown sack dress and a necklace made from shells and feathers. In the waiting room, Ricky is accosted by a policeman and a male nurse who think he is a freak because of the

way he is dressed. Ethel arrives to clear Ricky's name and at last, he gets to see his son, Little Ricky.

Similarly, in season five episode ten of ABC sit-com *Full House* Becky, played by Lori Loughlin goes into labor with twins during a *Flintstones* themed birthday party. She is rushed to the hospital by her husband, Jesse, played by John Stamos, who is wearing a Fred Flintstone costume. This episode also includes the incapacitated birthing partner trope. While Becky is being checked in to the hospital, Jesse begins to feel "labor pains" as well and discovers that he has appendicitis and therefore has to go into surgery. Jesse arrives back to Becky's bedside just in time to see her deliver their twin boys except he is still drugged from the surgery, so-he is goofing around and singing songs instead of being a helpful birthing partner. These three comic tropes were first established by *I Love Lucy's* writers and the performances of Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball.

### **Little Ricky Hysteria**

What was unscripted was the public reaction to the birth of Little Ricky. In his compendium on *I Love Lucy*, author Bart Andrews notes that at the conclusion of "Lucy Goes to the Hospital":

footage of the new baby (James John Ganzer) was accompanied by this voice-over: "Yes, there's a new baby, a wonderful baby at the Ricardos. And we at Philip Morris rejoice in the blessed event. We know that all our millions of friends join with us in extending congratulations and good wishes to the Ricardos. May their lives together be filled with as much joy and laughter and carefree happiness as they have brought all of us week after week. To Lucy, to Ricky, and to the new baby: love and kisses from Philip Morris and from all America." (267-268)

This congratulatory note by Philip Morris on behalf of the entire country is wrapped up in a discourse of fiction and reality. While this voice over featured the fictional Ricardo baby and congratulated the fictional Ricardo family, it was tongue-in-cheek congratulations for Lucille



Ball and Desi Arnaz on the birth of their real-life son, Desi Arnaz Jr. earlier that same day. Philip Morris' congratulatory message is a complete reversal from their reluctant stance nine months earlier and was a pre-cursor to the \$8,000,000 contract that Ball and Arnaz signed with CBS and Philip Morris at the beginning of March 1953. For that large amount of money, Ball and Arnaz agreed to continue producing weekly episodes of *I Love Lucy* for two and a half years ("Lucy's \$8,000,000"). The eight million dollars was not pure profit but instead would go towards the production budget. Such a long-term contract is evidence that CBS and Philip Morris had faith in Arnaz's, and Ball's ability to produce television that would draw a large audience and sell their cigarettes. The births of Desi Jr. and Little Ricky not only impressed the executives at CBS and Philip Morris, but also captured the attention of the entire United States.

At 8:00 A.M. PST on Monday, January 19, 1953 Dr. Joseph Harris delivered Desi Arnaz Jr. by scheduled cesarean section.<sup>14</sup> The events of his birth were detailed in Eleanor Harris' 1954 Lucille Ball biography. Lucy arrived at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital Sunday night, January 18<sup>th</sup>. During the operation she was given a local anesthetic and was conscious through the Caesarean section. Harris quotes Jim Bacon, a reporter for the Associated Press, who was outside the operating room in the corridor and heard the doctor announce that the baby was a boy. Then, Harris reports that Lucy fell asleep (Loc. 1041). The media blitz that took place after the announcement of Desi Jr.'s birth was unparalleled. Bart Andrews writes that "Seven minutes after the baby's birth, it was broadcast in Japan. Los Angeles school officials went around to classrooms to announce the blessed event to the students. A spokesman for the Associated Press claimed, 'We covered the birth on a wartime basis, with hourly bulletins.'" (106). The new family

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<sup>14</sup> Dr. Joe Harris is the name of Lucy Ricardo's doctor in "Lucy goes to the Hospital."

of four received a reported 1 million instances of congratulations through letters, telegrams, gifts and telephone calls (Harris).

The premiere publication of *TV Guide* featured a baby Desi Jr. on the cover with the headline, “Lucy’s \$50,000,000 Baby” the estimated amount of revenue that commercial tie-ins would bring *I Love Lucy*, Lucille Ball, and Desi Arnaz (Harris). One of the commercial tie-ins was an “I Love Lucy Baby Doll”. The November 30, 1952 edition of the *Los Angeles Times* featured an advertisement for a baby doll that is just like the one seen on *I Love Lucy*. The Hertel and Barnett store advertisement reads,

Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz introduce the fabulous “I Love Lucy Baby” Doll. Just as it appears on the “I Love Lucy” T.V. Show. Lucy and Desi play Mommy and Poppy with this wonderfully lifelike doll on the “I Love Lucy” Show. Lucy feeds her, diapers her, watches her cry real tears, pacifies her. YOUR OWN LITTLE GIRL too can do all these things with this amazing baby doll.

In an effort to boost Christmas sales, this ad was published in November, before the first pregnancy episode of *I Love Lucy* was aired in December. Furthermore, the direct targeting of little girls indicates that even the pregnancy episodes of *I Love Lucy* were intended for the whole family. A little girl would only want the “I Love Lucy Baby” if she were able to watch the pregnancy episodes and know that Lucy Ricardo was also going to have a baby. The production and licensing of these dolls illustrates just how celebrated Ball, and therefore Lucy’s, pregnancy was. With the sale of this doll, little girls, or boys, across the United States could pretend that they were Lucy Ricardo and mother their baby doll like Lucy mothers her baby on television.

In their respective memoirs, neither Ball nor Arnaz celebrate the birth of their son with the same weight that biographers, historians, and the rest of the world. The most quoted anecdote that Ball and Arnaz do share about the birth of their son is actually about the birth of their television son and not their biological one. After hearing the blessed news of Desi Arnaz Jr.’s

birth in the morning, a record setting 44 million people watched and waited with Ricky Ricardo for the birth of Little Ricky. “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” received a 71.7 Nielsen rating or 71.7 percent of the United States television owning households tuned in for Little Ricky’s birth. Ball and Arnaz both compare their 44 million viewers to the 29 million viewers who tuned in the next day to watch the inauguration of the 34<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower.<sup>15</sup> For Ball, Arnaz, and historians, these numbers illustrate the kind of national phenomenon that *I Love Lucy* was. This kind of mass viewership was unprecedented. It was more important for families to watch a fictional character give fictional birth to a fictional child than it was to see the inauguration of the President of the United States of America. Some of the decrease in viewership can be explained by timing. Lucy Ricardo gave birth Monday night, after work and dinner. Whereas, President Eisenhower was sworn in in the middle of the Tuesday work day. However, it is meaningful that Ball’s real life and fictional performances of pregnancy garnered more media attention than the spectacle of a presidential inauguration. Ball’s performance had the ability to capture and sustain an audience’s attention for seven weeks, culminating in the highest television ratings the United States had ever seen up to that point in television history. A compelling performance has the power to change people’s perception of the world, even if ever so briefly. In Joseph Roach’s *IT* he quotes Michael Quinn, ““The shift of perception that celebrity allows ... is a key one, and is extraordinarily powerful: the audience’s attitude shifts from an awareness of the presence of fictional illusion to the acceptance of an illusion, however false, of the celebrity’s absolute presence.”” Roach continues, “Behind the refractory celebrity of which Quinn speaks lurks the prior condition of It, emerging from an apparently singular nexus of personal quirks, irreducible to type, yet, paradoxically, the epitome of a type or prototype that

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<sup>15</sup> The ratings information is available through multiple sources including: Bart Andrews’ *The I Love Lucy Book*, Michael Karol’s *The Lucy Book of Lists*, multiple 1953 news articles.

almost everyone eventually wants to see or be like” (6). Ball’s pregnancy performance gave her that It factor. It helped that her fictional illusion was grounded in reality, but the personal quirks of her pregnancy made everyone in the nation want to see her. Her pregnancy briefly made her a more powerful figure than the Leader of the Free World.

The majority of newspaper headlines about the birth of Desi Arnaz Jr. focused on Ball’s ability to stick to the script of her fictional birth. The *Los Angeles Times*, *The Austin Statesman*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The New York Times* all featured headlines that included a nod to *I Love Lucy*’s script. For example, *The New York Times* headline read “Lucille Ball Adheres to Television Script; Comedienne Gives Birth to 8 ½-Pound Boy”. On January 20, 1953, *The Chicago Tribune* published “Lucille Ball Has Baby Boy, Makes TV Script come True.” The article states,

Jan. 19– Desi Arnaz, 4<sup>th</sup>, television’s baby of the year, was born today to actress Lucille Ball—and according to script, it was a boy. The 8-pound, 9-ounce boy, born by Caesarean section, thus followed the plot of Miss Ball’s television show. ... Arnaz, waiting in an adjacent room, did not have to be told that he was the father of a boy. “Such a chorus from the doctors and nurses,” said Arnaz. “It seemed like they all shouted at one time, ‘It’s a boy!’”

These articles all focused on the real-life gender tension felt by Arnaz, Ball, and *I Love Lucy* producer Jess Oppenheimer with quotes from Ball saying, “We really don’t care what it is, but as long as we already have a girl, it would be nice to have a boy,” Miss. Ball said before the operation. “I’ll have one on television, anyway.”<sup>16</sup> *I Love Lucy* historian, Bart Andrews, notes that producer Jess Oppenheimer been waiting on hold for thirty minutes to hear the birth news when Arnaz told him “Lucy followed your script! Ain’t she something?” Oppenheimer replied with, “Terrific! That makes me the greatest writer in the world. Tell Lucy she can take the rest of

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<sup>16</sup> “Lucille Ball Adheres to Television Script; Comedienne Gives Birth to 8 ½-Pound Boy. *The New York Times*. Pg. 27. Jan 20,1953. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. Accessed on Sep 27, 2017

the day off!” (106). *The Washington Post’s* “Lucy’s Timing is Excellent” begins by dispelling the notion that the timing of the birth of Ball’s and Lucy’s respective babies was coincidental. The un-authored article reports that Desilu timed the release of “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” with the cesarean birth of Ball’s child but does concede that it was a coincidence that both babies were boys. It also suggests that the “advance fanfare for this telecast (coupled with bits of news that Lucille had her baby that morning) pushed the ratings of the episode to “hit an all-time high. Trendex reported at 68.8 rating, with approximately 44 million TV viewers watching.”

Arnaz and Ball’s push to accommodate her pregnancy on seven episodes of *I Love Lucy* created national fervor for the show. In December, a month before the Arnaz/Ricardo children were born, Larry Wolters argued that “in the half dozen years of the TV area nothing comparable with *I Love Lucy* has happened” and that Ball’s real-life pregnancy could, “be turned into a tremendously exciting and humorous event on TV probably was expected by few.” Wolters continues to detail the dedication of *I Love Lucy* fans by first telling the story of a group of women who were trying to find a date to hold a party and decided that “any night would do except Monday, when they would all have to follow *I Love Lucy*. Then Wolters moves to discuss the dozens of questions he has received about the birth of Lucy’s baby. The question he received most often was ““Since Lucille expects her baby in a month or so and her pregnancy was just announced on TV, how are the births of the real baby and the TV baby going to be timed? If they have it in a month on TV, she will have been pregnant only three of four months.”” Wolters response, “Nope, not the way we figure it. She was pregnant for perhaps six months. Her husband, the dope, just didn’t know it.”

The audience’s question and Wolters’ answer reveals how far television literacy has developed since 1952. That is to say, television as an entertainment medium was still so new in

1952 that audiences didn't take the passage of time for granted like audiences do today. While Wolters' answer to the question is humorous it is incorrect. Audiences are told that Lucy experiences the first symptoms of pregnancy in "Lucy is Enceinte". That is what causes her to go to the hospital in the first place. While the passage of time is never directly commented on, a full nine months of pregnancy was performed in seven episodes of *I Love Lucy*. Therefore, I maintain that Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy not only changed U.S. pregnancy discourse, but also changed the way that audiences experienced the passage of time on television. Thus, a new convention of televised entertainment was created.

In addition to questions about the timing of the birth, some viewers believed that the baby seen at the end of "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" was Ball's real life newborn. Nearly a week after the fictional and factual births Walter Ames answered the question in his *Los Angeles Times* column.

I hope this item puts an end to a lot of arguments that arose following *the I Love Lucy* show Monday evening. That was NOT Lucille Ball's newborn baby that was shown at the tall end of the program. My telephone rang constantly all day Tuesday from readers wanting me to settle arguments over the baby. I put my supersleuths on the story and can now report the baby was hired through a casting service. It was an expensive venture for the show, the 10-second spot probably costing Desilu Productions at least \$400 [roughly \$3700 in 2018] for the hire of the infant, nurses, welfare workers and limousines.

The carefully and coincidentally timed birth of Ball's fictional and non-fictional child created a hysteria that capitalized on the already immensely popular show. What might be considered a publicity stunt today, not only boosted the ratings of "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" but it made the second season of *I Love Lucy* the most watched television series of the 1952-1953 season ("List of most watched television broadcasts.").

Aligning Ball's pregnancy with the pregnancy of her character garnered the show and its stars a lot of social and political commentary from the United States public. Ball and Arnaz have

never publicly commented on using the second season of their show to make political statements about pregnancy in the United States. However, the popularity of their show meant that the seven weeks of pregnancy storylines fomented public opinions that spanned the love/hate spectrum. In the January 16, 1953 *New York Times* article “Nearing Birth of (?) Arnaz is Engendering Interest of the Fans of ‘I Love Lucy’” journalist Jack Gould comments on how well *I Love Lucy* treated the topic of pregnancy:

The deliberate parallel between the lives of the off-stage Lucille and the on-stage Lucy undoubtedly is unique in theatre annals for a number of reasons. First, it hardly would be possible without television and, second, the matter of approaching motherhood, although one of the oldest themes for the dramatist, seldom has been treated with the light touch. It is not revealing any great secret that both the Columbia Broadcasting System and the Philip Morris Company, sponsor of “I Love Lucy,” have received letters from a number of viewers who for several reasons have taken exception to the subject of pregnancy as the main point of interest for a comedy series. As the matter has been handled on the screen in the current episodes of “I Love Lucy,” however, there seems no grounds for valid objection. Rather there should be applause. Miss Ball and Mr. Arnaz not only have handled the topic of their approaching baby with a great deal of taste and skill but also have been thoroughly amusing in the process.

Gould’s writing praises Ball and Arnaz for their ability to take the sensitive topic of pregnancy and make it both relatable and funny. Gould continues his article by not just praising the pregnancy narrative but recognizing how Ball’s inclusion of her pregnancy worked to change the discourse of pregnancy in the United States, “Far from ridiculing motherhood, “I Love Lucy” has made it appear one of the most natural and normal things in the world. ... In short, one of the oldest and most familiar stories is being told with a new brightness and charm. And why not?”. Gould’s statement that *I Love Lucy*’s pregnancy storyline positioned pregnancy as a natural and normal event is in reaction to negative and horrific representations of pregnancy only seen in Hays Code censored Hollywood films. *I Love Lucy*’s depiction of pregnancy through Ball’s

actual pregnancy was a breath of fresh air compared to 1930s and 1940s films of pregnant women killing themselves because of their pregnant shame.

What is undeniable is that Lucille Ball's real-life pregnancy on *I Love Lucy* broke many social rules and agitated 1950s pregnancy discourse in the United States. This agitation can be seen in a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article "44 Million See Lucy Show Day Her Son Is Born" published January 24, 1953. In this article, author Larry Wolters published a sampling of letters about Ball's pregnancy performance from his readership. Mrs. K. Moelk from Maywood was less concerned with Ball's pregnancy and more upset by the lack of interesting plot points noting "While I find the recent Lucy episodes neither commendable nor nauseating I do feel the lack of plot material made it very boring. They undertook a large order when they chose her to be the leading authority on pregnant peccadillos and, if it was a gamble, I would say they lost." G.B. Ward in Chicago went for a more personal attack by saying, "Lucy looked like a barrel on two sticks. A woman's place is in the home at that stage . . . I will never want to see Lucy again."<sup>17</sup> A reader published as H. A. F from Wilmette took a more educational, modern, approach to Ball's pregnancy, "Those who are horrified by the current Lucy episodes seem to forget that in these days babies are no longer brought by the stork. These episodes, far from being objectionable, are highly educational to children. The natural questions raised by these stories should make it easier for parents to tell children about childbirth." Finally, Wolters ends this section of his article by answering a question from a reader. Cal Tice from Detroit asked, "What can you possibly like about Lucille Ball and her sex exhibitions?" Wolters answered "We're not going to argue with 68.8 per cent of the total TV audience in this case." Even though these opinions were written over sixty years ago, they feel very familiar in their structure, sharpness of tongue, and wit.

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<sup>17</sup> I have to wonder if G. B. Ward was literally referring to the episode when Lucy is dressed in a barrel costume or was making a comparison between Ball's baby bump and an actual barrel.



These letters to Wolters are predecessors to live tweeting, comment boards, and internet trolls. They are evidence of a public interacting with their entertainment in a way that is familiar to both the cheers and boos of 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama and the “likes” and “hate following” of the twenty-first century internet. Ultimately the answer to all of these critiques of Ball’s public pregnancy is “everybody else likes it so your opinion is moot.” It took Ball putting her pregnant body on television to make pregnancy something that could be negatively or positively discussed in a public forum such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. This kind of open and honest communication between audience and entertainment is evidence of the intervention that Ball’s pregnancy performance had on pregnancy discourse.

Walter Ames of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote “Lucille’s Impending Motherhood Adding Vigor to TV Series” that was published on September 14, 1952. In the article Ames visited the set of *I Love Lucy* and writes to reassure audiences that Ball’s “impending motherhood” was not going to negatively impact the show. He reports that Ball is still performing the “zany stunts that endeared her to the nation’s [television watchers] and zoomed the show to the top spot in practically every city in the country.” In an interesting deference to 1950s pregnancy discourse, Ames makes a point of refraining from calling Ball pregnant when he calls her pregnancy a “maternal problem” and writes, “Besides Lucille’s er, shall we say, condition, nothing much has changed with respect to the series.” These linguistic moves to avoid using the word pregnant are interesting because it is unclear if Ames knows of CBS’s censorship of the word pregnant and is poking fun or if he is really trying to not use “pregnant” in his writing. I am inclined to argue that he is purposefully not using “pregnant” because of its inherent vulgarity. The article is published too early for the CBS censorship to be public knowledge and if he did know about the CBS censorship, he would have been foolish to leave that information out of the article.

Further evidence of the impact that Ball's pregnancy had can be seen in two critiques of *I Love Lucy* written over a year apart by *Chicago Tribune* television critic John Crosby. On November 8, 1951 Crosby wrote "They Don't Give Arnaz Much to Do." In the article Crosby criticizes *I Love Lucy* for "[reducing] the role of husband to roughly that of the male spider" and notes that, "The show, I'm forced to concede, is very competently put together, is written almost too professionally (which is to say, cynically), and, as long as Miss Ball is in there, it'll always have quite a few laughs in it. But I think it's a terrible waste of her talents and her husband's." Crosby's low praise for the show doesn't exactly dismiss it altogether but also doesn't inspire audiences to watch it. However, over a year later on December 25, 1952 the *Chicago Tribune* published Crosby's "It Isn't the Formal, It's Lucy—She's a Wonder to Behold". In this review Crosby praises the show for its "manic informality and improvisation" that is reminiscent of the silent film era. Crosby has had a change of opinion about Arnaz's role in the show, saying "Desi is not in his wife's league but he has great charm and his contribution to *I Love Lucy* musn't be underestimated." He says Ball is a "joy to watch", a "wonder to behold" but more importantly, he briefly discusses the reception of "Lucy is Enceinte." He opens his critique with "The news that Lucille Ball was about to have a baby was whispered demurely into roughly 12 million homes recently on the CBS-TV "I Love Lucy" program which, all the surveys hold is still the Nation's No. 1 program." Not only did Lucy/Ball's pregnancy change Crosby's professional opinion but it also kept their show in the number one spot throughout the holiday season. Crosby's interpretation of Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy announcement as a demure whisper across 12 million homes indicates that the announcement was largely received by him and the public as being in good taste. A month later, Crosby defended Ball and *I Love Lucy* again in his *Chicago Tribune* article "You Can't Say More Than You Can on TV." In this piece, Crosby takes on

“stuffiness” inside the broadcasting industry. At the end of the article he tackles the “squeamishness” that surrounded *I Love Lucy*,

There was a torrent of protests—not a few of which were sent to me—that pregnancy was not a fit topic for television. I doubt this. The whole sequence was filmed under the supervision of a priest, a rabbi and a minister and they found nothing objectionable. The trio of clerics approved the use of the word “pregnancy” but a CBS censor cut it out, thus achieving a level of holiness above and to the right of the church.

The torrent of protests that Crosby received combined with the concerned letters to the editors of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* are evidence that Ball’s pregnancy was not loved by every single television-watching American. However, I argue that Ball’s televised pregnancy started a national conversation about publicly displayed pregnancy and that this conversation is much more important to the development of pregnancy discourse and the production of pregnant television actresses than the question of who liked or didn’t like the show.

The ability of *I Love Lucy* to have such an impact comes from its popularity and its accessibility. In his *New York Times Magazine* article “Why Millions Love Lucy” published in March of 1953, Jack Gould remarks, “It is in the smooth transition from sense to nonsense that ‘I Love Lucy’ imparts both a warmth and a reality to the slapstick romp which comes as the climax. The viewer has a sense of being a co-conspirator rather than a spectator in a completely unimportant yet amusing high jinks.” This article is a longer more critical examination of *I Love Lucy* by Gould. Gould begins his critique of the reality of *I Love Lucy* in his previous article “Nearing Birth of (?) Arnaz is Engendering Interest of the Fans of ‘I Love Lucy’” quoted from above. At the end of that article Gould comments, “That ‘I Love Lucy’ as an item of theatre has not been hurt by the introduction of the anticipated birth goes without saying. One of the great drawbacks to the vast majority of TV situation comedies is their brittleness and artificiality. Since it is rooted in reality, ‘I Love Lucy’ should be able to go on and on.” Here Gould credits

the perceived realism for *I Love Lucy*'s success over other television shows and that realism is bolstered by the pregnancy narrative that was included in the show.

The pregnancy narrative did more than bolster the ratings, advertising deals and production budget for *I Love Lucy*. It directly influenced opinions about pregnant women. While some viewers sided with G.B. Ward from Chicago thinking that pregnant women were not suitable for public life, Harris notes that when Desi Arnaz Jr. was born, Lucy received only twenty-seven letters disapproving of the pregnancy (Loc. 1061). These letters are contrasted against the thirty thousand letters from fans and other pregnant women that Ball received while on maternity leave. One letter that Lucy received from a fan highlights the impact that Ball's pregnancy performance had on women, "One woman whose life was devoted to charitable work for American GIs in Korea had planned to forego her position because she was pregnant and embarrassed to meet the public. Inspired by the show's treatment of Lucy's pregnancy she wrote that she would continue until her baby arrived" (Andrews 105). Without meaning to, Lucille Ball shattered a glass ceiling of representation in the workforce. Long before the Pregnancy Discrimination Act would become law in 1978, Ball showed a television network, a major advertising company, and the United States television audience that a woman could work and be successful while pregnant. However, it is important to remember that Ball had more agency than most women in her position in the 1950s. She co-owned her own production company and already had a number one rated show going into the second season of *I Love Lucy*. In many ways, she and Desilu productions were better equipped to negotiate for herself and Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy because she was a proven television star and the co-head of her own production company. If we look past the high television ratings and positive press coverage it

becomes clear that Ball's televised pregnancy did not have an immediate discourse changing effect that today's listicles would have you believe.<sup>18</sup>

Almost a year after Ball gave birth to Desi Arnaz Jr. and Lucy Ricardo gave birth to Little Ricky, Ball appeared on the television game show *What's My Line* (WhatsMyLineCBS). *What's My Line* was a panel game show in which a civilian contestant appeared before a panel of celebrity guests. The celebrity guests had to guess in ten questions or less what line of work the civilian contestant participated in. Each show contained two rounds of civilian contestants and then a third and final round where the celebrity panel would be blindfolded and a celebrity contestant would take the stage. Then the blindfolded celebrity panel would have to guess who the celebrity contestant was. On February 21, 1954 Lucille Ball took the stage in the final round as the celebrity contestant. One panelist of note was journalist Dorothy Kilgallen who was approximately eight months pregnant and this show was to be her last before she went on maternity leave. According to Jackie Jackson's article, "Why Lucy Was 'Enceinte' in the Nineteen Fifties" published in the online magazine JaQuo, when the show opens, the panel normally waves to the audience from backstage and then walks in and takes their seat behind the panel. However, due to Kilgallen's pregnancy, the show began and the panel was already in place. Seeing as it was Kilgallen's last show before her maternity leave, the game runners of this particular show had some fun with their her and the rest of the panel earlier that night.

In a move that would become clear at the end of the show, the previous two civilian contestants were a film censor and a maternity wear salesman. These occupations are obvious

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<sup>18</sup> Listicle is the name for an article that is written in list form. The titles of these articles usually contain a number like "Top Ten" or "Top Twelve" followed by a general nondescript statement meant to entice the reader to click on the link. For example, "10 Female TV Characters Who Were Ahead of Their Time" was posted online by Makers.com and accessed on January 10, 2017.

references to Ball's televised pregnancy a year earlier. During the portion of the show when the panel is guessing the occupation of the maternity wear salesman, one celebrity panelist, Steve Allen, asks the salesman if any of the panelists could use the product that he works with. At this point the studio audience bursts with laughter as they, and the television audience playing at home, have already been made aware of the maternity salesman's line of work. During the laughter, the salesman leans over to the host of the show who whispers that Kilgallen is pregnant and then the salesman answers the question in the affirmative. The more questions the panel asks the more the audience giggles with an awkward kind of embarrassed laugh until finally, the panelist, Arlene Francis, guesses that his job has "something to do with motherhood" specifically avoiding the word pregnant or pregnancy. Finally, when Ball takes the stage Francis suspects that the celebrity guest might be Ball, and again chooses her words very carefully when she asks, "Were you not too long ago interested in the same kind of clothes that the previous contestant had as his profession on this program?" The answer, of course, was yes.

Ball's appearance on *What's My Line* illustrates that the discursive effects of her televised pregnancy were memorable in the short term and revolutionary in the long. Francis' hesitation to discuss pregnancy and Kilgallen's hidden pregnant body are evidence that 1950s pregnancy discourse still had a long way to go before pregnancy and maternity were discussed with ease in the public sphere. However, Ball's pregnancy is still revolutionary in the fact that it happened and that its happening set a precedent for future television producers and pregnant television actresses to follow. The accommodations to television production that Ball's first pregnancy pushed for revolutionized the television industry and the public display of Ball's second pregnancy fundamentally changed how the pregnant body was publicly received. Lucille Ball's pregnancies not only impacted pregnant women in the 1950s but set the stage for how the

television industry would handle both the representation of pregnancy and the labor of pregnant actresses for years to come.

## **Conception Deception: The “Hidden” Pregnancies of Jane Leeves and Kerry Washington**

Sixty-five years have passed since Lucille Ball broke ground with her pregnancy performance on *I Love Lucy*, and in that time pregnancy performance on television has become a common occurrence. While Ball and Arnaz had to convince CBS and Philip Morris that their baby narrative couldn't fail, contemporary pregnant actresses perform inside a set of pregnancy concealment conventions that more often than not do just that. In this chapter, I examine the failed concealment of actresses Jane Leeves' and Kerry Washington's pregnancies.

Leeves and Washington each worked on their television shows, NBC's *Frasier* (1993-2004) and ABC's *Scandal* (2012-2018) respectively, throughout the majority of their pregnancies with the help of accommodations made by the production staff to the shows' narrative, costuming, and cinematography. Concealing both women's pregnancies was necessary for the narrative integrity of each show, but the concealment did not hide the celebrity actresses' pregnancies from the shows' fan base. Within these failures, a friction developed between the shows' writers, who were tasked with constructing shows' pregnancy camouflage narratives, and the fans/entertainment media who openly critiqued the failed production techniques. Fans of *Frasier* and *Scandal* were aware of Leeves' and Washington's pregnancies through entertainment news, social media, and the shows themselves. Additionally, the production techniques used on *Scandal* and *Frasier* to hide Washington's and Leeves' pregnancies failed because they are widely known techniques for concealing television pregnancy. I assert that the failure of the production techniques (camera angles, costuming, and usage of hand props) used to conceal Washington's and Leeves' pregnancies created an aesthetic distance between audience



and television show that created spaces for critique and public discourse about pregnant labor on television.

I begin this chapter with an analysis of Jane Leeves' failed pregnancy concealment on the eighth season of *Frasier*. I detail how *Frasier's* production team used props, set pieces, and clothing to hide the first months of Leeves' pregnancy. Then I move to a more in-depth discussion of Leeves' historic, and yet largely ignored by traditional entertainment media, pregnant performance as the first pregnant actress on television to have her pregnancy covered over with a prosthetic fat suit. I interrogate both the eating disorder narrative and the functionality of the prosthetic as a means of appropriately and effectively hiding her pregnant body. I show how fans of *Frasier* created spaces of discourse and critique about Leeves' pregnancy performance when the traditional entertainment media did not. I do this by examining news coverage of Leeves' pregnancy and online forum posts written by fans of the show on fan sites.

Then, I move to discuss the two hidden pregnancies of *Scandal's* Kerry Washington. Both of Washington's pregnancies were hidden through the use of props, costuming, furniture, camera angles, and her castmates' blocking. However, *Scandal's* strong social media following, built in large part by Washington, compromised the effectiveness of the concealment techniques. I begin this section with a brief history of black female leads on television to contextualize Washington's place as the second black female lead in primetime television history. Then, I detail the specifics of the production techniques used to hide Washington's growing pregnant body and entertainment medias' reaction to the failed concealment. Next, I briefly detail the history of black maternity discourse and theorize why Washington's pregnancies were not written into *Scandal's* narrative. Finally, I show how Washington deliberately contributed to the

failure of the pregnancy concealment through the use of entertainment media and her social media presence. I believe that Washington capitalized on the entertainment frenzy caused by her pregnancy to promote her pregnant performance and pregnant labor on *Scandal*.

At the end of this chapter I discuss how the failed concealment techniques create an aesthetic gap. In this gap a national discourse arose that recognized the pregnant performances of Leeves and Washington as work. This space of critique is important because it forces fans into discourse that does not take the labor of the pregnant actresses for granted. Whether the critique of the pregnant performance is positive or negative, television audiences are critically thinking, forming opinions, and sharing those opinions on a national scale about pregnant television labor. The conversations that fans and entertainment media have across space and time about the labor of Leeves and Washington speaks to a larger national discourse about the role of the pregnant body in the work force. I conclude that the next step in the conversation about hidden pregnancy performance is to ask why their pregnant performances had to be hidden at all.

### **Eating for Two**

When filming began on the eighth season of the NBC sit-com *Frasier* (2000), Jane Leeves was pregnant. This was a problem for the show's narrative. *Frasier's* seventh season cliff hanger left Daphne Moon (Leeves), and Niles Crane (David Hyde Pierce), in a RV running away from Daphne's wedding. While the cerebral comedy's series long "will-they-won't-they" romance had finally decided on a "they will," it was far too early in the fictional romance for Daphne to be pregnant. In fact, the season eight premiere began exactly where the season seven finale left off. Daphne and Niles start season eight by stealing the RV and driving off into the sunset. A few minutes into their drive, they decide that they should actually turn around and go back to the wedding so that they can explain their budding romance to their jilted lovers. Thus,

there was no room in *Frasier's* narrative for a pregnant Daphne Moon. *InStyle's* Juliette Hohnen interviewed Leeves when she was five months pregnant and starting work on the eighth season. During the interview Leeves revealed that she was “a bit freaked out” about telling the producers she was pregnant because she knew her character had “more to do this season.” Leeves’ fears were unfounded and as she pointed out in the interview, the producers were well aware that Leeves was interested in having children. “When I got married the producers said, ‘well we’re sure you’re thinking about children. Just let us know as soon as you know!’” Hohnen asked Leeves how her pregnancy would be incorporated on the show and Leeves answered, “It won’t be. They’re gonna hide it. And all I have to say is, ‘Good Luck!’ It’s simple now because I’m five months pregnant and there’s just a little bump, which I can cover with a coat. But when it gets to those final three months, they’ll be changing their tune.” The solution to Leeves growing pregnancy body was to create a narrative that allowed Daphne’s body to grow with her. With the blessing of the producers, Daphne fattened up.

*Frasier's* writers gradually worked this story arc into the season to lend some believability to the changing narrative. This meant that Leeves pregnancy had to first be hidden through well placed hand props and costuming. In the season premiere episode, “And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon” some *Frasier* fans spotted Leeves barely noticeable pregnancy. On the online forum “Straight Dope Message Board” a user named “lee” started a thread on October 24, 2000 at 10:12 PM called “Frasier Spoilers Please!!” Lee missed the premiere of the season and wanted to know what happened. Lee even offered to pay for a tape of the show if someone would send him a copy. Twelve minutes later, forum user “missbunny” came to lee’s rescue and despite not “usually” watching the show she details the events of the episode. At the end missbunny adds, “by the way, Daphne is so obviously pregnant! I wonder why they didn’t try to

hide it as is normally done on shows when the character isn't pregnant." This comment sparked a debate in the rest of the thread, between viewers who did notice and viewers who didn't notice. The viewers who did notice Leeves' pregnancy pointed to very specific costuming details. In response to missbunny, user "wring" wrote, "um, sad to say, but they did try to hide it. When was the last time you saw Daphne with a large shirt bulky button-down shirt on over pants? When was the last time you saw a woman out for a formal evening NOT take her wrap off to dance? I could see it in her face more than anything anyhow." Forum user Kiki added, "When Daphne and Niles got up to dance she turned sideways and you could tell that she was pregnant. I didn't think they didn't do a very good job of hiding it but she'll be having the baby soon so it doesn't matter I guess." User "AWB" quotes Kiki and then speculates on how Leeves' pregnancy would be handled by comparing it to another television sit-com hidden pregnancy, Laura Lane from *The Nanny*. "Maybe they'll do like they did on 'The Nanny' when Lauren Lane [who played the character of CC Babcock] got pregnant and just casually hide it, and occasionally make it obvious that they're hiding it as a joke." The last post on the thread comes on October 26, 2000 at 12:40pm from user "Ivar" and also happens to concern Leeves' pregnancy, "Jane Leeves is so obviously pregnant, and she never used to walk around in baggy clothes like that."

The discourse that took place on the "Frasier Spoilers Please!!" and other online fan communities warrants special attention precisely because it exemplifies how fans engaged with the performances they watched on *Frasier*. Like the 1952 letters to the editor that commented on Lucille Ball's pregnancy, fans of *Frasier* are interacting with their entertainment on a more thoughtful level. However, that critical engagement is not spectacular and should be understood as an ordinary phenomenon. The forum users on "Straight Dope Message Board" are

participating in this fan community as part of their everyday lives. “Straight Dope Message Board” is an internet forum that is hosted by *The Straight Dope*, an online question-and-answer newspaper column that is published in the *Chicago Reader* and syndicated in other newspapers across the United States. This message board is not a fan community exclusively dedicated to *Frasier*, yet it is a space in which a community of dedicated *Frasier* fans developed. In his paper on online music fan communities, music scholar Paul Théberge argues that the importance of online forums is not their spectacularity but their “everydayness.” He suggests that internet fan clubs promote a form of “daily interaction” amongst fans and that “[t]hrough the cultivation of a kind of fluctuating, quotidian rhythm, fandom becomes not so much spectacular but banal in its effects” (487). Throughout the thirty-six-hour life of the “Frasier Spoilers Please!!” thread, multiple users commented multiple times asking and answering questions from other users. For these message board users, the failed concealment of Leeves’ pregnancy was a part of their everyday conversations.

To borrow from Stuart Hall’s “Encoding, Decoding,” television shows like *Frasier* produce messages that are then received by audiences. Those messages, in order to be successful, have to then be decoded by audiences. However, the meaning of the message that is encoded by *Frasier*’s writers and producers, is not necessarily the same meaning that is decoded and received by the television audience. In a mere thirty-six hours, a handful of fans became television detectives and decoded the character anomalies that pointed to Leeves’ hidden pregnancy. Daphne’s baggy clothes were a key indicator that Leeves had a body to hide because Daphne was usually costumed in figure flattering clothing that conformed to her silhouette. From the beginning of the season, fans of the show, and some self-reported casual viewers, were able to recognize the tell-tale signs of a hidden pregnancy. This audience exemplifies the modern

television literate audiences who have knowledge of classic hidden pregnancy signs and are able to read television episodes as if they were Sherlock Holmes.

Daphne's baggy clothing was part of a larger scheme to conceal Leeves' pregnancy. Several different production techniques were implemented in the season eight premiere, "And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon: Part 1." First, Leeves is costumed in a pair of khaki pants, white undershirt, and an oversized tropical print button down. The busy tropical print works in combination with the large size of the shirt to distract from Leeves' midsection when her torso is in view of the camera. In addition to her costuming, hand props are used to hide Leeves' stomach. In a scene in the kitchen between Niles and Daphne, Daphne makes coffee while she and Niles discuss how they should proceed in their new relationship. During a moment of serious discussion between Niles and Daphne, Leeves pulls a jug of milk from the refrigerator and holds it in front of her stomach and then sets it down on the counter so that it blocks her baby bump from the view of the camera and the television audience. This piece of kitchen choreography was also noticed by television critic Nick Griffiths who wrote "among the funnier moments" of this premiere episode "are the desperate attempts to hide actress Jane Leeves' (Daphne) pregnant bump ... (The milk-carton moment is a particular treat; it's clearly going to take more than a milk carton)." Griffiths' comments indicate that the milk jug prop was more of a red herring than camouflage, and that spotting the methods used to conceal Leeves' pregnancy was just as entertaining as the show.

This single kitchen scene from the season eight premiere also included the standard blocking and camera tricks used to conceal actresses' pregnancies. As Daphne prepares the coffee, she turns to face the coffee maker which is placed in a spot that is hidden by the refrigerator and requires Leeves to turn her back on the camera. This places Leeves' problematic

pregnant stomach out of view when she performs the stage business of making coffee, which she does throughout the entirety of the kitchen scene. Camera angles are also used to cut Leeves' pregnant stomach out of frame in this scene. As Daphne tells Niles that she feels they need to get to know each other romantically before engaging in sexual activity, the camera is solely focused on her body from the chest upwards. The audience can hear Niles reacting agreeably to Daphne's dialogue but does not get to see him as he is cut out of the frame. In the next shot, the camera shows both Daphne and Niles from the thigh up with the milk jug still blocking Leeves' pregnant stomach. Then, Daphne turns her back on Niles, and the camera to do more coffee business while Niles throws a silent fit indicating to the audience that Daphne's abstinence plan was not as well received as he pretended. Throughout this kitchen scene, if Leeves' stomach is not blocked by a hand prop, a fellow actor (at one point Frasier, Kelsey Grammer, enters the kitchen and steps in front of Daphne blocking her full body from the camera) or a piece of furniture, Leeves' stomach is out of frame.

From the beginning of the season, *Frasier's* producers implemented all of the classic pregnancy camouflage conventions in an attempt to hide Leeves' obvious pregnancy. Using these conventions indicates that the producers wanted to keep Daphne as part of the season eight narrative which means that Leeves' pregnant body couldn't be written off the show. Therefore, producers began the season by using ordinary objects to hide Leeves growing body. The blocking and props used to cover Leeves' body suggests that the producers wanted to avoid drawing attention to Leeves' pregnancy. The producers were unsuccessful because no matter how subtle the changes in costume, blocking, or camera angles were, they distracted audiences from the show's overall narrative and indicated that the producers had something to hide.

As the season and Leeves' pregnancy progressed, the camouflage conventions implemented by *Frasier's* producers were not enough to hide her weight gain. As Leeves predicted in her interview with Juliette Hohnen above, the writers "changed their tune" and wrote in Leeves' weight gain. In season eight, episode nine "Frasier's Edge" Frasier and his father, Martin (John Mahoney) begin to notice that Daphne is gaining weight. Daphne and Niles are going out on a fancy date night but Daphne struggles with zipping up her dress. She enters the living room in a red, knee length, three quarter sleeve, body hugging dress. The dress obviously does not fit and shows how much Leeves stomach has grown. When Daphne enters, struggling with her zipper, Frasier says to Martin, "Is it my imagination or has she gained weight since breakfast?" Martin responds, "Which seating? Eight, nine or ten?" This bit of dialogue gets a big laugh from the audience and is a sign to indicate to audiences that Leeves isn't just gaining weight but that it is a character choice for Daphne driven by narrative. With this narrative change, the producers are indicating that Daphne and therefore Leeves is still integral to the production, but they can no longer rely on their audience to willingly suspend their disbelief about the changes to Leeves' body. Therefore, a solution is to incorporate the weight gain and have the writers create moments in the show where other characters comment on it.

I argue, that these moments also allow the television and studio audience in on the "Daphne is fat, but Leeves is pregnant," joke. By showing the television audience Leeves' pregnant body but talking about it as weight gain from over eating, *Frasier's* writers made the audience coconspirators of the season long fat joke. Making the audience complicit was important because it created an excuse for the fat jokes that are at Daphne/Leeves' expense. By inviting the audience into the joke, the writers excused fat jokes that might have normally been seen as offensive or funny because Leeves wasn't actually fat she was *just* pregnant. Another



example of *Frasier's* writers creating inside jokes for its fan is from an episode when Leeves was on maternity leave. When Leeves left the show, the writers wrote a plot that sent Daphne away to a weight loss spa. In the episode "It Takes Two to Tangle", Roz asked Niles how Daphne was doing at the spa. Niles reported that Daphne had lost "nine pounds and twelve ounces" which was the weight of Leeves' baby when it was born. While the context of this particular joke is not a fat joke, it is a joke that only fans of both Leeves and the show would be able to participate in fully. This move to bring the audience behind the scenes and in on the joke is an inversion of the typical relationship audiences have with television shows.

Typically, television shows are produced with set narratives that the television audience interprets in various ways. These set narratives are usually self-contained and the show gives the television audience all the information needed for their interpretation. For this season of *Frasier*, the writers created an inside joke with the audience and fundamentally changed that relationship. In order for the inside jokes to be successful, audience members also needed to know that Leeves was pregnant. Through this newly constructed, non-normative relationship, the writers of *Frasier* are able to utilize what queer scholar, Alexander Doty describes as the "just a joke escape hatch" (81). In Doty's *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*, Doty discusses how comedy is inherently a queer genre because it, "it encourages rule-breaking, risk-taking, inversions, and perversions in the face of straight patriarchal norms" (81). While, Daphne's body was not queer, it was comedic because it was a perversion of Leeves' pregnant body. The writers were comfortable making fat jokes about Daphne because the jokes were about a fictional distortion of Leeves. Furthermore, Doty suggests that even though comedy allows for rule-breaking it also recuperates traditional narrative closure through "the genre's 'it's just a joke' escape hatch" (81). The jokes about Daphne's weight gain could, and sometimes were, understood as being

offensive and hurtful fat jokes. However, through the “just a joke escape hatch” the writers of these potentially offensive jokes can escape because both Leeves and the audience are in on the joke. This inside joke relationship between *Frasier’s* writers and its fans was outside the norm of television production conventions but it created a space that brought overt attention to Leeves’ pregnant body and labor. As Leeves’ pregnancy progressed, *Frasier’s* writers and producers took the weight gain narrative one giant step further and Leeves became the first pregnant actress to have her pregnancy hidden by a prosthetic fat suit.

### **The Fat Suit**

Fat suits and fat storylines are common techniques of narratively hiding a television actresses’ pregnancy. In 1991 *Seinfeld* actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus was pregnant while shooting season three of the NBC sit-com. Head writer and star of the series, Jerry Seinfeld, suggested that Dreyfus’ character Elaine “get fat” which caused the then five-month pregnant Dreyfus to burst into tears. The show went in another direction but years later Dreyfus admitted to Seinfeld that a “fat Elaine narrative would have been funnier” (Lee). In 2011, when filming began on the fifth season of AMC’s period drama *Mad Men*, actress January Jones was eight months pregnant. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* Jones details her feelings about, the showrunner, Matthew Weiner’s plan to hide Jones’ pregnancy with a fat suit. “I loved it. I didn't want to try to hide it, I thought it would become comical and weird. ... It was definitely difficult, but I love what he did with the character's story” (Hunt and Belloni). Actress Jaime Pressly recently had her 2017 pregnancy weight gain written into the storyline of CBS comedy *Mom*. Pressly, who was pregnant with twins, told *Entertainment Magazine’s* Lynette Rice, “I never figured I would hide behind tables because that never works, and [executive producer] Chuck Lorre is not known for being that cheesy.” Like Jones and Leeves, Pressly wore prosthetics but felt that the writers

of *Mom* were more sensitive to Jill's (Pressly's character) weight gain and didn't make her the butt of the season's jokes. Pressly's character's weight gain is triggered after a traumatic event and according to Pressly, "They don't make fun, ... The writers are very careful. For everything we talk about on the show, there's a fine line between what's right and what's wrong, and what we what can and cannot say." While a commonly accepted way to conceal a pregnancy, fake weight gain as pregnancy camouflage is a problematic practice.

Kathleen LeBesco's 2005 "Situating Fat Suits: Blackface, Drag and The Politics of Performance," places fat suit performance relative to drag and blackface performance traditions. In the article she works through the idea of the fat suit as a type of "fat drag" performance that allows the performer to "don fat suits (or occasionally even gain a few pounds) in order to tell the story of a fat character" (232). However, it is questionable if Leeves and the writers of *Frasier* were meaning to tell the story of a fat character or simply find a way to hide Leeves' pregnancy. Katharina R. Mendoza's "Seeing Through the Layers" differentiates between fat suits used in films to tell stories about fat people and fat suits used in films with "disguise" narratives. She writes, "Obviously there is more to the fat suit phenomenon than simply making mock, and so I extend reading fat suit performances to the narrative arcs that contain them, which I find undermine the potential critical consciousness in ways more insidious than cheap fat jokes" (280). Mendoza's distinction is important for my research. Fat Daphne is pregnant Leeves in disguise. I contend that the intent behind the use of the fat suit on *Frasier* was to first and foremost to conceal Leeves pregnant body. The writers were not trying to tell a story about Daphne's weight gain. They were using fatness as a narrative device to camouflage Leeves' pregnancy. The cheap and offensive fat jokes that it allowed for were a narrative side effect.

This, of course, does not excuse using fat shaming for laughs and even fans of the show found the use of a fat suit unnecessary as seen below.

Leeves is the first actress in television history to have her pregnancy concealed by a prosthetic fat suit yet, there are not many entertainment news articles about Leeves' experience working in the prosthetic. In a May 2011 interview with *Working Mother*, Ilisa Cohen asked Leeves "Was it tough being pregnant while starring on *Frasier*?" Leeves responded, "During my first pregnancy, they put me in a fat suit and gave Daphne a weight problem, which was great. But those suits weigh a ton, and eventually, you're like 'I can't put this on anymore.'"<sup>19</sup> Leeves' answer illustrates the physical toll that wearing a fat suit took on her pregnant body. Unfortunately, this brief statement made eleven years after she wore the suit is the only interview about her fat suit experience in the archive.

A few years later, Leeves was negotiating her contract renewal for *Frasier*. In 2002, Nicholas Wapshott for the *United Kingdom Times* newspaper reported that as part of her new contract, Leeves "insisted on a contract which would allow her to become pregnant again and that if she did, the pregnancy should be written into scripts of the television comedy." This brief mention of Leeves' new contract stipulations hints that Leeves' fat suit experience was undesirable and she did not want to be forced into repeating it. However, just like her interview comments above, this article is the only mention of her new contract stipulations. The entertainment media was not concerned with the physical burden that the fat suit created for Leeves' pregnant body. This is not surprising, and the lack of interest shown by the entertainment media in Leeves' experience speaks to the importance of the fan discussions even

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<sup>19</sup> In 2004 during the eleventh and final season of *Frasier*, Leeves became pregnant with her second child. The writers wrote her pregnancy in to the script and Daphne and Niles became parents to a baby boy named David after David Angell, a producer of *Frasier* that died with his wife on American Airlines Flight 11 in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

more. Online fan forums are the only archives where Leeves' fat suit/pregnant performance, is discussed. In this instance, they are the evidence of how Leeves' pregnancy performance circulated within pregnancy discourse.

### **Gendered Fat Suit Performances**

Leeves' most memorable fat suit moment during the eighth season of *Frasier* is in the episode, "Hungry Heart." After coming home from dinner with Niles, Daphne falls down in the living room of Frasier's apartment. Niles attempts to lift Daphne from the ground except he is not strong enough. As they both struggle to get Daphne off the floor Daphne says, "Look at me! I'm a tub." Niles responds, "Darling no. You might be perhaps, a little bit sturdier but I love you no matter what your size." The two continue to struggle to get Daphne off the ground with Niles pushing against Daphne's back as she sits on the ground with her legs stretched out in front of her. Niles can't lift Daphne on his own and collapses underneath her. He rolls out from under her and Daphne lays prone on the ground in her full fat suit glory. Daphne doesn't move and it is unclear if Leeves can move or if the fat suit has actually incapacitated her ability to stand on her own. When Martin and Frasier are called upon to help Niles lift Daphne off the floor, it genuinely appears that the three male actors work to lift Leeves up off the ground. The joke behind this physical comedy is that it took three Cranes to lift Daphne off the ground. A scene that is played up for laughs may also be a necessary way to get a pregnant Leeves dressed in a heavy fat suit up off the floor. Daphne finally makes it to a standing position; she and the television audience look down and notice that she is wearing two different shoes. This entire scene can be read as a tongue-in-cheek joke not just about weight gain but about mobility issues that pregnant women have from gaining weight during their pregnancies. Leeves was in the third trimester of her pregnancy at this point in filming and her performance in this scene is physically

intense. While the plot joke is about how unfit Daphne is, for the physical comedy of the performance to be successful Leeves had to be in total control of her very pregnant and fat suit covered body.

Leeves' pregnant work on *Frasier* has been undervalued or ignored while work of male actors in prosthetic fat suits is praised. Gary Oldman's facial prosthetic and fat suit transformation for his 2017 portrayal of Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour* received high praise by the various news outlets *Vanity Fair*, the United Kingdom's *Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. *The Hollywood Reporter* described the amount of time and physical labor that Oldman endured getting into and out of costume as "grueling" (Ritman). Alisha Rouse for the *Daily Mail* stated that Oldman "suffered for his art" to become Churchill. Her article reported that it took Oldman four hours every morning to transform into Churchill partly because he had to shave his head daily and cover his body in glue. I do not deny that Oldman's Churchill transformation and performance was a physical undertaking. It is clear from the evidence that the Golden Globe and Oscar Oldman won for his portrayal were well earned. I take issue, however, with the disparity between the high amount of press coverage for Oldman's fat suit performance and the almost negligible coverage given to Leeves' performance.

### **Armchair Critics and Cultists**

Instead of television critics and entertainment news discussing the labor-intensive process of Leeves' transformation into and performance as fat Daphne it was the fans of *Frasier* who provided critique. In the online forum *Frasier Online*, fans of *Frasier* shared their feelings about Daphne's season eight pregnancy on the 2011 thread, "What happened to Daphne season 7-11?" "Eddie2012" wrote that Daphne, "of course she would never be a believable character in the real world, but the cover-up of JL's pregnancy is completely silly - there ARE pregnancy clothes that

don't look like a tent.” User “Allison Chains” agreed saying, “I did not care for Daphne at all after she and Niles got together and the ridiculous storyline behind her pregnancy weight gain seemed well below *Frasier* standards” Forum user “mickeba” argued that the “fat farm storyline was ridiculous, insensitive and insulting to Jane. It was far below the standards of *Frasier*” and Eddie2012 responded,

Funnily enough, [Jane Leeves] wears some nice clothes during her second pregnancy that did a lot more to hide a belly (when there was no need for that) than that hideous purple velvet suit or that inflatable-tent-jumper. Yikes! I didn't know such clothes exist. They could easily have used a plot involving some emergency or else that required Daphne to return home for some time.

Each of these comments illustrates the level of critique that *Frasier* fans watch the show with. They are critical of the methods that the producers employed to hide Leeves’ pregnancy and irritated that the producers tried to hide it at all. By suggesting an alternative plot than the one written, fans of *Frasier* are taking ownership of the story. An alternative plotline that sends Daphne to England on an emergency saves their show from bad storylines at Leeves’ expense.

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst consider this kind of fan discourse “cultist” level discourse. The cultist is a fan who has knowledge that is available in mass circulation press and magazines but then fills the missing pieces of that information in on fan forums and websites. Thus, a regular fan of *Frasier* may have known of Leeves pregnancy through entertainment media. A cultist would have heard the pregnancy knowledge and then dissected episodes of *Frasier* to spot when Leeves began showing signs of pregnancy. Furthermore, cultists circulate and produce texts within the site of their community “on the basis of the characters and situations depicted in the television programmes and films” (172).

Cultists of *Frasier* produced their own narratives because the fat Daphne storyline was “silly” and “ridiculous.” When the writers of *Frasier* failed them, they took matters into their

own hands and removed the distraction of Leeves' pregnant body from the plot. This shows that the consistency and authenticity of *Frasier* was more important to the cultist fans than Leeves' ability or desire to continue working through her pregnancy. Eddie2012 was not alone in his suggestion that the season would have been better if Leeves' was written off the show during her pregnancy. The online forum *Reddit*, contains a subgroup called "Frasier" with a thread called "Janes' Pregnancy." Reddit users on this thread were debating the way in which Leeves' pregnancy was hidden as recently as October 2017. One user, "HonkyCat84" also wished Daphne had been written off the show commenting,

I always wished they would have had an "emergency" she had to tend to, like maybe having to go back to Manchester to help a sick family member or something. Or maybe she could have needed some time away from the Cranes to sort out her feelings and decided to go back home for a breather. I know the fat camp thing had comic relief, but I just didn't love the storyline.

To again borrow from Hall, *Frasier* fans who "didn't love" the fat Daphne storyline are operating within an "oppositional code." Fans are reading against the grain of the text written and produced by *Frasier*. They understand both the connotative and denotative meanings of the show's storyline but refuse to read it in that manner. This kind of critical response is interesting and important because it comes from a non-traditional source whom have sought out spaces to discuss a performance and phenomenon that traditional media largely ignored. Inside these fan communities, discourse however positive or negative, sophisticated or unsophisticated is being generated about the viability and efficacy of keeping a pregnant actress employed through her pregnancy.

It is also important to note that fans of *Frasier* were able to suggest writing Jane Leeves off for the duration of her pregnancy because Leeves was a member of an ensemble cast.

Daphne's story arc did not carry the show and therefore her absence, while conspicuous, would



not have critically changed the direction of the show. This is an important distinction because it shows that the writers had a choice in how to deal with Leeves pregnancy and they chose to keep Leeves employed for the majority of season eight. However, not all television show writers have the luxury of choice. What happens when the actress that becomes pregnant is the first black female lead on television in over forty years? What is a show runner to do when the lead of a prime-time drama becomes pregnant? How does television handle that kind of *Scandal*?

### **Kerry Washington as Olivia Pope**

Kerry Washington's performance as the Washington D.C. fixer Olivia Pope began in the Spring of 2012. ABC's *Scandal* is the brainchild of creator, head writer, and executive producer Shonda Rhimes. Rhimes is also the showrunner of the long running, medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*, its spinoff *Private Practice*, and is the executive producer of the legal drama *How to Get Away with Murder*, *The Catch* and *Off the Map*; all of which were/are broadcast by ABC. In 2017, Rhimes became the third Black woman to be inducted into the Television Hall of Fame (Scott). Rhimes created *Scandal* after meeting Judy Smith, a Washington D.C.-based crisis manager. Smith represented: Monica Lewinsky during the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, former football player and convicted dog fighter Michael Vick, British Petroleum after the Gulf oil spill, and the family of murder victim Chandra Levy (Tucker, 2012). Smith also serves as co-executive producer of *Scandal*. Together, Rhimes, Smith, and Washington are a team of black women that have made network television history. *The New York Times* January 2013 article by Tanzina Vega, "A Show Makes Friends and History: 'Scandal' on ABC is

Breaking Barriers” notes that Washington was the first African-American female lead in a network drama in forty years.<sup>20</sup>

Washington’s performance changed ABC’s audience landscape. Following from Vega, *Scandal* found success among African-American audiences. It’s Nielsen ratings in its second season showed that among African-Americans, *Scandal* was the highest rated scripted drama “with 10.1 percent of black households, or an average 1.8 million viewers, tuning in during the first half of the [second] season.” Vega credits Washington’s casting for the show’s success. She quotes Joan Morgan, a *Scandal* fan and author of *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, as saying “There’s an audience of African-Americans who just want to see themselves in a good story, not necessarily a race-specific show.” Morgan continues, “It’s not about this being a black show ... It’s about seeing the show where black women and other women are represented less about race and more about who they are.” Kerry Washington’s performance as Olivia Pope changed the discourse of African-American female performance on network television.

*Scandal* is not a show that revolves around race. While there are plot lines that deal with racial injustice, the show is not driven by it. Instead, Rhimes and Washington have worked to create a complex character who is much more than a stereotypical, angry, black, exotic, jezebel. As Brittney Cooper, co-founder of Crunk Feminist Collective and assistant professor of women’s studies at Rutgers University, states in Vega’s *New York Times* article, “The few black women we’ve seen in prime-time roles in scripted shows, they have to be morally above scrutiny, and she’s not. ... She’s the most complex black female lead we’ve ever seen in prime time. You’re not getting an archetype, you’re not getting a stereotype, you’re getting a fully-fledged human being.” Cooper’s emphasis on Olivia’s complexity is important because of the long history of

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<sup>20</sup> The first African-American female lead in a network drama was Teresa Graves and starred in *Get Christie Love!* which premiered in 1974 on ABC.

oversimplified and stereotyped black characters. Rhimes' writing of and Washington's portrayal of Olivia creates a nuanced, three-dimensional performance of black femininity that rejects the historically stereotypical black female character roles.

However, Olivia Pope has faced criticism. Rachel Alicia Griffin's "Olivia Pope as Problematic and Paradoxical: A Black Feminist Critique of *Scandal's* 'Mammification'" tackles the critique that Olivia Pope is just another example of the mammy archetype. Griffin confronts the mammy critique by acknowledging the inherent mammification that comes with Olivia's job as a fixer. Olivia takes care of her mostly white and privileged clients' problems at the expense of her own private life (41). Furthermore, Griffin notes that Olivia also nurtures and cares for her employees, risking her own career so that they stay out of trouble (42). However, Griffin moves to redeem Olivia from the image of the mammy through "de-mammification." In this section Griffin notes, "Despite mammification, Olivia also destabilizes the mammy as an all-encompassing, controlling image of Black womanhood. From a Black feminist perspective, this does not nullify how Olivia is mammified; rather, de-mammification importantly humanizes her character beyond the confines of the dominant imagination" (42). Griffin moves to show that while Olivia cares for her employees, they also care for her and risk their lives for hers even when she does not ask for their help (43). Olivia also defies the mammy archetype through her "intelligence and mastery of semantics" (45); something that the traditional mammy is thought not to have. Given the history and abundance of stereotypical black female characters on film and television and the dearth of black female leads it is unsurprising that the character of Olivia Pope faced criticism during the first few seasons of *Scandal*. A quick surface reading of Olivia does show some of the stereotypical traits of the mammy and jezebel. Olivia is a care giver to her white friends and her white clients and she is involved in an affair with the white, married,

President of the United States. However, a more nuanced reading of Olivia over the entirety of *Scandal's* seven seasons shows that Rhimes' writing and Washington's characterization of Olivia fights against those surface criticisms. Through Rhimes and Washington, Olivia is given a complexity that compels audience members, myself included, to root for her and want her to succeed. Either way, Olivia and Washington's portrayal of her is a first of its kind for television, and that makes the concealment of Washington's pregnancies that much more complex than any other previous pregnancy concealment.

### **Black Maternity**

Neither Washington or Rhimes has ever publicly commented on why Washington's pregnancies were not written into *Scandal's* narrative. However, the United States has a long and fraught discursive history about black maternity, and an Olivia Pope maternity storyline would have inserted itself in that discourse with some problematic results. I argue that if Rhimes decided to write Washington's pregnancy into *Scandal's* narrative, she would have been confronted with the two stereotypes that her characterization of Olivia worked so hard against; the jezebel and the mammy. As noted above, Olivia has been criticized for being both a stereotypical jezebel and mammy, and those critiques have been dismissed in favor of viewing Olivia as a complex character that experiences love, desire, and friendship. The characterization of Olivia as mother adds more fuel to the fire of the jezebel and mammy criticisms. Instead, a childless Olivia reframes the black female experience as one of independence and self-reliance.

Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body*, discusses the legal policies of the United States that criminalize black maternity and tells a story of the "systematic, institutionalized denial of reproductive freedom" that has "uniquely marked Black women's history in America" (4). Roberts details the images of black women that form the backdrop of the United States

reproductive regulation of black women. Of particular interest are the jezebel, mammy, and the black unwed mother stereotypes. Roberts links the image of the jezebel to mythical constructions of immoral black motherhood. She argues that since slavery, black women have been seen by white men and women as lascivious wanton creatures who are bad mothers because of their unquenchable thirst for sex. The myth of black women's uncontrollable sexual desire means that they also lack the "inclination to control their own fertility" and therefore require government regulation. At the time of Washington's pregnancy, there were only two good narrative options for the father of Olivia's child. Both of them were white men, and one of them was married and the President of the United States. Already facing criticism for her sexual desirability and sexuality, having a child with either man would have strongly characterized Olivia as a jezebel.

Roberts' conception of the mammy stereotype as an unfit mother stems from the black women's caretaking duties of white families. "The demands of work within white homes undermined Black women's own roles as mothers and home makers. Black domestics returned home late at night (if not on weekends alone) and had to entrust their young children to the care of a neighbor, relative or older sibling" (15). Because black women were taking care of white families as a means of employment, they had no time to take care of their own. In turn, black mothers were seen by whites as incompetent and in need of moral guidance from white mothers (15). By not giving Olivia a child, Rhimes and Washington were free to explore narratives that did not place Olivia in the position of being a bad mother or a mother at all. Furthermore, by not giving Olivia a child, Washington is able to keep the details of her own identity as a mother private. If Olivia were to become a mother, inevitable comparisons would be made between Washington's private performance of motherhood and her onscreen maternity. Olivia Pope is not maternity material and there is evidence of this in *Scandal's* fifth season.

The decision to keep Olivia Pope out of the baby business was cemented in the season five episode “Baby, It’s Cold Outside.” In this episode, Olivia has been acting as First Lady for President Grant (Tony Goldwyn) as the two are publicly dating. However, Olivia is tired of being saddled with the soft and fluffy First Lady duties and wants to take part in policy creation. In the episode, Olivia discovers she is pregnant and gets an abortion thereby ending any possible chance that she would be stuck as President Grant’s First Lady. Rhimes has never directly addressed why Olivia got an abortion, but at *Scandal’s* 2016 panel at PaleyFest, a television showcase sponsored by the Paley Center for Media, Rhimes commented that “Olivia is on a journey,” and her relationship with President Grant, acting as his First Lady was a “farce.” “To basically be an appendage of him was never going to work ... For Olivia, the breaking free of that, while painful, was the first step of realizing that she was not who she was supposed to be” (Wagmeister). Following Rhimes comments, it is evident that having a child would have drastically changed the journey that Olivia was on. Therefore, the only option left for *Scandal* was to conceal Washington’s pregnancies.

### **Concealing Kerry**

In October 2013, four months after marrying former NFL player Nnamdi Asomugha, *Us Weekly* announced that Kerry Washington was pregnant. The article cited a “pal” who reported that Washington was four months along and was keeping her baby bump hidden under roomy dresses (Takeda). This announcement prompted a flurry of other entertainment news and gossip magazines to report the pregnancy and begin to speculate on how her pregnancy would affect *Scandal*. *Vanity Fair’s* Josh Duboff argued that it was unlikely Rhimes would incorporate the pregnancy because she had a history of hiding her female leads’ pregnancies. Ellen Pompeo was infamously confined to a hospital gurney during her season five hidden pregnancy on *Grey’s*

*Anatomy*. However, Duboff did concede that an Olivia pregnancy could be possible because Rhimes also likes to defy her audiences' expectations. Richard Lawson for *The Atlantic* wrote that the timing of Washington's pregnancy was great because she would give birth around February sweeps, the time of the year when Nielsen collects weekly diaries from television viewers which are used to determine advertising rates for local stations. Lawson suggested that if Washington had her pregnancy written in on the show, ABC would profit greatly in audience viewership. In the fall of 2013, it appeared that everyone had an opinion of what should be done about Washington's pregnancy.

Ultimately, Rhimes chose to hide Washington's pregnancy on *Scandal's* third season. Both Rhimes and Washington have been notoriously tight lipped about their decision-making process for hiding both of Washington's pregnancies. Therefore, it is impossible to confirm whether or not Washington had influence over the decision. That being said, it should be noted that Washington is a very private celebrity figure and that hiding her pregnancy would be beneficial to maintaining her privacy.

As *Scandal* season three began airing in the Fall of 2013 it picked up right where it's finale ended in the Spring. When the season began filming, Washington was only one or two months pregnant. This meant that the first few episodes did not require pregnancy camouflage. It was only in the fifth episode of season three, "More Cattle Less Bull" that Washington's pregnancy, and the means of hiding it, started to show. In this episode, Washington and her torso are only in frame for one brief fifteen second walk down the hallway of her office. Olivia is dressed in her signature white coat which is buttoned up concealing Washington's small pregnancy bump. Additionally, Olivia is carrying an oversized Prada handbag that also helps to distract from her slightly enlarged abdomen. For the rest of the entire episode, Olivia is framed

by the television camera from the chest upwards. This episode was the beginning of *Scandal's* long and entertaining journey of finding ways to conceal Washington's season long pregnancy.

Large coats and oversized handbags were key costume elements used to hide Washington's pregnancy throughout the season. On their own, these two costume elements are not pregnancy red flags. Olivia is known and admired for her fashion sense. Her wardrobe is one of her many selling points as a character. Rachel Alicia Griffin argues that Olivia's wardrobe is evidence that Olivia is not a stereotypical mammy. "Olivia offers a sharp contrast as a beautiful Black woman confidently dressed in a parade of elite designers including but not limited to: Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, Escada, Dior, Ferragamo, Armani, and Gucci (Galanes, 2013; Mitchell, 2013). Importantly, her wardrobe serves as a testament to her poise, persona, and chic style" (45). Therefore, it was an important character element that Olivia maintain that style throughout her pregnancy. In a 2016 interview Washington shared that to maintain Olivia's expensive, high-end wardrobe the costumer buys the same styles and designers that Olivia wore before Washington's pregnancy and alters them. "There's nothing high-end for professional women who are pregnant, so for the show, we wind up just buying the same clothes. We will cut out the front of Armani trousers and put in a pregnancy panel. That's what we do for everything" (Foxman 419). Throughout both of Washington's pregnancies, Olivia's style never changes and she is never seen wearing anything that could remotely be identified as maternity wear.

As the third season and Washington's pregnancy progressed, Washington's blocking positioned her into the background of scenes. Her stomach began to be covered by chairs, lamps, and laptops. In episode six, "Icarus," Olivia has a prolonged conversation on the phone with her father sitting on her couch in her apartment. Washington's blocking for this scene either keeps her hunched over with her elbows on her knees, thereby blocking her stomach with her arms, or



leaning back with a laptop on the coffee table in the foreground covering everything but her head. In episode fourteen, “Kiss Kiss Bang Bang,” Olivia is having a conversation in the Oval Office with the President (Tony Goldwyn) and First Lady (Bellamy Young). Olivia is sitting on a couch doing paperwork. Washington is barely in frame and a large vase of flowers covers the part of her torso that is in frame. The camera moves and positions Washington in the center of the frame while at the same time Goldwyn sits down on the other end of the couch between Washington and the camera and puts his foot up on the coffee table. This casual move causes Goldwyn’s knee to cover Washington’s stomach, thereby obscuring her pregnancy from television audiences. Unlike *Frasier* or *I Love Lucy*, which were filmed as traditional sit-coms in front of a live studio audience with fixed camera positions, *Scandal* is shot from multiple angles, on a closed set. Therefore, *Scandal*’s production crew were able to be more creative with how they filmed or concealed Washington’s pregnant body. It is these kind of unique camera angles that got *Scandal* a lot of attention for its style of pregnancy camouflage.

In April 2014 *People* magazine’s Nate Jones published an online article, “All the Ways *Scandal* Has Hidden Kerry Washington’s Baby Bump, by the Numbers.” The article lists all the objects that hid Washington’s baby bump and the number of times they were used. It also includes GIFs of those items in action. The list includes: two lamps, two phones, six assorted knickknacks, three sets of coats and bags, one pillow, one White House guard booth, and four instances of other characters blocking her pregnancy stomach. Joyce Eng and Sadie Gennis from *TVGuide* posted, “The 20 Most Ridiculous Ways *Scandal* Has Hidden Kerry Washington’s Pregnancy.” This article is similar to *People Magazine*’s in that it includes GIFs of the twenty different examples that it lists but differs in that it also includes humorous commentary about each one. For example, one of the GIFs shows President Grant and Olivia Pope in the Oval

Office in the background and in the foreground, there is an unfocused piece of furniture. The unidentified piece of furniture blocks Washington's lower half and only shows Olivia from the chest upwards. The commentary included with this GIF is "Don't adjust your screen. This is actually happening." Washington was aware that hiding her pregnant stomach became a bit of a spectacle and participated in the fun when she was doing promotion for the sixth season of *Scandal*.

### **Promoting Pregnant Labor**

Kerry Washington is a private individual but is very adept at using social media to promote her work. When *Scandal* was on its first and second seasons, it was not seen as a network success. It premiered midseason in 2012 and was not highly rated by critics (McNamara "Scandal has become must-tweet TV"). However, by the end of the second season, the series became a hit. Its success is a combination of Rhimes' storytelling, great acting, and Twitter. In a 2016 interview with *InStyle* editorial director Ariel Foxman at South by Southwest Conference Washington disclosed how she got her entire cast to live tweet the episodes,

Shonda is my social media she-ro, ... While we were filming the first season, I emailed Shonda and said 'You're the boss, could you ask the whole cast to live tweet it so that they all join in because they'll feel like they have to?' I truly believe that we wouldn't have had a second season if it wasn't for that engagement." (Rosen)

Washington's active engagement with her audience while watching the episodes weekly turned *Scandal* into appointment television. That is to say, fans of the show make a point of watching *Scandal* live when it airs as opposed to watching it through DVR or another streaming service (McNamera). Washington's strategy of making the television audiences experience interactive was so successful that the other Shonda Rhimes shows on ABC adopted live tweeting for their weekly showings as well. In her roles as Olivia Pope and social media guru, Washington changed the face of the ABC network's prime time television.

When compared to other pregnant television actresses, Washington has by far received the most press coverage concerning the various camouflage conventions implemented to hide her pregnancies. I argue that this is in large part because Washington is the lead performer on *Scandal*. *Scandal* does not exist without Olivia / Washington and therefore anything that hides Olivia as a character or Washington as an actress, like set pieces or co-star's knees, is going to be noticed. Additionally, Washington decided to participate in the media coverage of her baby bump concealment during the promotional tour for the sixth season of *Scandal*.

During the production for the first few episodes of *Scandal's* sixth season (2016) Washington was pregnant with her second child. In a January 2017 interview with *Good Morning America* host Michael Strahan, Washington joked that “You could play a really fun game for the first five episodes of find the bump” (ABC News). She gave further details that her pregnant body was hidden by flowers, Prada purses, big coats and capes. Washington's strategy of playing along with *Scandal* fans and armchair television critics by making fun of her pregnancy production limitations both encourages viewership and publicly acknowledges the labor she performed while pregnant. The many ways that Washington's body was hidden from view was already in the discourse from her previous pregnancy performance. Washington capitalized on that discourse by reaffirming its existence while simultaneously unmasking her laboring pregnant body by pointing audiences directly to moments where they could “find the bump.”

Washington also only promoted her pregnant body on social media if it was work related. On her *Instagram* page, Washington shared images of her red-carpet appearances where her pregnant body was in view. However, she did not share any personal images of her pregnancy with her fans. Furthermore, Washington refuses to engage publicly about her personal life

saying, “I have a relationship with my fans and they know that there’s a certain way I don’t talk about my personal life,” she said of her social media presence. ‘If they want to engage with that other BS, that’s fine. But over here, this is what we’re doing. This is my world, this is my voice, and if you want to be at this party, these are the rules of this party’” (Rosen). At Washington’s party there is no talk of her personal life. Washington got very quietly married in 2013 and pictures of her two children have never been made available on her social media. Washington very specifically uses her social media as a promotional tool for her work. I argue that sharing specific images of her pregnancy through social media further emphasizes Washington as a publicly pregnant figure mediated through her labor on television. The only pregnant images of Washington that are publicly available are images of her working. Whether she is walking a red carpet at an award show, or performing as Olivia Pope on television, Washington’s pregnancy was only seen by the public within the context of labor.

I argue that Washington’s openness with entertainment news and social media is a strategy to make her pregnant labor more apparent. This strategy is in line with this statement that she gave to *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2014. When asked what her most challenging scene to perform was, Washington responded,

All of last season was a challenge for me, on a few levels. For one thing, I was going through this amazing physical transition, this physical journey of having a baby, that my character was not going through. And I work very physically. What I do is often grounded in the body. That meant I had to figure out how to be this woman while my instrument was changing and evolving every day. It was like seeing the keys on a piano jump around on a daily basis. It was tough for me to even maintain Olivia’s walk because of the changes. (Tomashoff)

This statement is a moment of openness from an otherwise private celebrity. However, she is using the question given to her by *The Hollywood Reporter* as a platform to speak honestly about her work, her process as an actress, and the difficulties of the pregnant labor she had to perform.

She is actively drawing attention to her pregnant performance and demanding that it be understood as something more than just talent but as actual physical work. By keeping her pregnancy otherwise private, Washington constructed an image of her pregnant body that can only be associated with her labor as an actress.

## **Conclusion**

Jane Leeves and Kerry Washington's pregnancies were hidden in plain sight. For both women, literate television audiences were able to read the signs of hidden pregnancies and interpret them in ways that made both pregnancies more visible than hidden. This visibility created a tension between the fictional worlds of their television shows and the factual worlds of their real lives. Both actresses kept their pregnant bodies out of the public spot light as much as possible. Leeves was pregnant before the advent of social media and didn't have an option to publicly promote her pregnancy. However, her currently limited social media presence indicates that she would not have posted pregnant selfies to the internet. Washington's strict use of social media to promote her labor as an actress means that the only public images of her pregnancy were strictly curated and published within the context of her work. Therefore, the tension between Leeves' and Washington's pregnancy facts and their hidden pregnancy fictions does not arise from external displays of pregnancy; rather, this tension is created on the television show itself.

The United States television watching public has become aware of the means of production for hiding a pregnancy. The curtain has been removed and fans of television know when their favorite shows are hiding the pregnant bodies of their favorite actresses. Fans of *Frasier* and *Scandal* were keenly aware of the *mise en scène* of their respective shows and could easily tell when something was out of place. For *Frasier* fans, Daphne's baggy clothing was a

red herring long before the writers began her weight gain narrative. *Scandal* fans were able to quickly tell that something was different with Olivia when she kept being pushed to the background of scenes, behind furniture, and lamps, instead of taking her rightful place in the foreground.

By paying attention to the means of production and identifying the hidden pregnancies of their favorite television shows, television fans are in effect distancing themselves from the narrative. They are creating an alienating tension between fact and fiction that prevents them from fully immersing themselves in their weekly entertainment and identifying with the characters on television. As seen above, failed pregnancy camouflage alerts television audiences to the laboring pregnant body and prompts them to become critical of their source of entertainment. Their responses to the gestic moments indicate how they feel about the labor of pregnant actresses and the labor of pregnant women more broadly. However, what has not been seen in the pregnancy discourse discussed in this chapter is a recognition of why these gestic moments of failed pregnancy performance have to exist in the first place. Fans and entertainment news both point to the flaws of pregnancy concealment conventions but have not made the crucial second step of discussing why actresses' pregnancies need to be concealed in the first place. Jane Leeves' and Kerry Washington's pregnancies prompted an active critique of the television industries handling of pregnant actresses' bodies and brought awareness of pregnant bodies as laboring bodies to television audiences, but those same audiences still haven't asked themselves why the United States television industry and its viewers need to hide actresses' pregnancies at all.

## Labor Pains: Hunter Tylo v. Spelling Entertainment

In February of 1996, actress Hunter Tylo signed a contract to appear on the prime-time television series *Melrose Place*. This new job was an exciting opportunity for Tylo, who was hoping to make the transition from day-time drama to prime-time notoriety. In March of 1996 Tylo became pregnant with her third child, Izabella, and informed her new bosses at *Melrose Place*. A few weeks later, Tylo was terminated. In turn, Tylo hired women's rights lawyer Gloria Allred and sued the show's producer Aaron Spelling and Spelling Entertainment Group (SEG) for breach of contract and employment discrimination on the basis that she was terminated solely because of her pregnancy. In December 1997, she was awarded nearly five million dollars by the California Superior court in Los Angeles county.<sup>21</sup>

On the surface, this lawsuit appeared to be a straightforward fight against pregnancy discrimination in the workplace. Tylo was hired by SEG. She became pregnant, and then she was fired by SEG. However, a few factors, legal and personal, complicated the proceedings. First, Tylo was the first actress to sue a production company over pregnancy discrimination. A precedent for how pregnancy discrimination law applied to actresses, essentially employees hired based on their physical attributes, did not exist. SEG fired Tylo because her pregnancy breached a clause in her contract that said she would not make any change to her physical appearance without the production companies' consent. They argued that a pregnant Tylo could not convincingly play a sexy, husband stealing "vixen" (Laabs 13). During the trial, William Waldo, lead counsel for SEG, used the phrase "vixen, seductress, adulteress" or just "vixen" to describe the character that Tylo was hired to perform. "Sexy vixen" became a key phrase used throughout

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<sup>21</sup> Tylo v. Spelling Entertainment Group BC149844 California Superior Court, Los Angeles County. Spelling Entertainment appealed the award amount and it was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount.

the trial by both sides (Brozan). In turn, Tylo's lawyers argued that Spelling Entertainment could have accommodated her pregnancy in the same manner that they accommodated the pregnancies of other *Melrose Place* actresses. Second, during the trial, Tylo revealed that she was eight months pregnant with her fourth child, Katya. At the time of her revelation, Tylo's pregnancy barely showed. She often wore short skirts to court that contradicted the fact that she was pregnant and "shattered the defense's contention that she couldn't be sexy and expecting at the same time" (Smith et al. 110).

In this chapter I argue that *Tylo v Spelling* intervened into pregnancy discourse in two very specific but very contradictory ways. *Tylo v Spelling*, while establishing no legal precedent, demonstrated that the television and film industry would be held accountable to the same standards of anti-discrimination law as other United States industries, and was seen by Tylo, her lawyers, members of the media, and women's rights organizations as a win for civil rights. Incongruously, Tylo's sexualization of her own courtroom pregnancy performance made pregnant television actresses' hidden pregnancy performances more difficult. By conforming her pregnant body to heteronormative beauty standards, Tylo sets an impossible standard for other pregnant actresses to follow. Instead of demanding that SEG accommodate her pregnancy, Tylo showed that she didn't need the accommodations because she didn't look pregnant. As I discussed in the previous chapter, television audiences are able to spot the typical tricks that television production teams use to hide pregnant actresses' bodies. Therefore, the more an actress is able to hide her pregnancy, the less accommodations a television show has to make. Her pregnant performance of non-pregnancy set a dangerous example for future pregnant television actresses in that it showed television producers an alternative to accommodating



actresses pregnancies; make the pregnant actresses accommodate the television production companies.

I begin this chapter by explaining the history of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978. Knowledge of these two pieces of legislation are essential to understanding the legal underpinnings of Tylo’s case. Next, I detail the facts of Tylo’s trial as presented in court documents. Finally, I analyze the legal arguments and performative gestures made by both the plaintiffs and the defendants as well as the media coverage and response to the trial verdict.

The sources of this chapter are a mix of popular news articles, Hunter Tylo’s memoir *Making a Miracle*, legal documents from the trial, and case studies of the trial published in law journals. Steven Shiffrin’s & Gregory R. Smith’s “Antidiscrimination Laws & Artistic Expression,” Lisa Stolzy’s “Only a Little Bit Pregnant: The Pregnancy Discrimination Act from a Performer’s Perspective” and Diane Klein’s “Pregnancy Discrimination in Show Business: Tylo v. Spelling Entertainment Group” are all articles published in law journals that specifically examine Tylo V. Spelling. Klein acknowledges SEG was liable on the account that they did not accommodate Tylo’s pregnancy and Stolzy argues that pregnancy discrimination is not inherently justified in the entertainment industry. Shiffrin and Smith, who represented SEG during the appeal of Tylo’s court judgement, argue that under the First Amendment television producers have the right to control the casting process as part of their artistic freedom. They feel that producers should not be required by antidiscrimination laws to use actors or actresses whom they view are not right for the part.

These documents detail the legal arguments made by both parties and inform my reading of the trial’s anti-discrimination triumphs or, depending upon interpretation, constitutional

failures. Finally, I include news articles about the trial as a way to gauge the impact that Tylo's trial had in public discourse. I argue that the more publicized the trial was, the greater impact it had on domestic pregnancy discourse. Despite her lack of high-profile celebrity, Tylo's employment discrimination trial brought her fifteen minutes of fame. While she wasn't necessarily able to spin her fifteen minutes into a more long-term star status, her trial brought national awareness about pregnancy employment discrimination to the United States public.

### **The Pregnancy Discrimination Act**

Civil Rights Attorney Gillian Thomas provides a brief history of the creation of the "because of sex" portion of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII "prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin" as well as established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Thomas writes that on February 8, 1964, the eighth and final day of debate over the 1964 Civil Rights Act, congressman Howard Smith, a Democrat from Virginia, stepped onto the floor of the House of Representatives and proposed, "After the word 'religion' insert 'sex' on pages 68, 69, 70 and 71 of the bill" (1). When Thomas made this proposal, it was met with general laughter and a joke from the bill's floor manager, Emanuel Celler of New York, about how at his house women are not in the minority. "I usually have the last two words," quipped Celler, "and those words are, 'Yes dear.'" Following from Thomas' account, one of the twelve female representatives, Michigan Democrat Martha Griffiths, supported the proposal by appealing to the bill's staunch opposition. It appeared that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was going to pass. Thus, Griffiths warned the senators opposing the sex provision, "Title VII would afford more rights to black women than to white women. 'A vote against this amendment today by a white man is a vote against his wife, or his widow, or his daughter, or his sister'" (2).

Griffiths' warning worked. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed with the sex provision and became the law of the land.

Thomas argues that despite the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act with the sex provision included, there was still much debate in the United States courts over what sex discrimination was. Even after the passage of the act women still found themselves risking their jobs and their health insurance by becoming pregnant. From a 2016 data brief from the National Partnership for Women & Families (NPWF), prior to the passage of the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) it was uncommon for employers to support their female employees who became pregnant. Employers would fire them, require them to take unpaid leave, or deny them medical insurance coverage for any pregnancy-related conditions. Thus, many women put their employment at risk if they became pregnant. In 1976 the National Partnership for Women & Families led the Campaign to End Discrimination Against Pregnant Workers and proposed the PDA which passed in 1978. The passage of the PDA gave pregnant women and federal enforcement agencies legal recourse to combat pregnancy discrimination (1).

The passage of the PDA expanded “the Title VII definition of discrimination based on sex to include discrimination based on ‘pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions’” (Stolzy 493). The PDA made pregnancy a “protected class” at the federal level. Protected classes are groups of people who possess the same “protected characteristic”. Protected characteristics are traits or attributes that the United States government has stated are “off limits” as justification for an employment decision. Meaning, that if an employer makes a decision about an employee based on a protected characteristic, the employer is practicing employment discrimination (“Employment Law: P.” 258). The United States government has declared that protected classes include: men and women on the basis of sex; a group of people which share common religion;

national origin, or race/color; people over forty; and people with physical or mental handicaps (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Additionally, the EEOC clarified that sex-based discrimination includes discrimination against a person based on their gender identity, including transgender status, or because of sexual orientation (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Incidentally, this definition means that anyone can qualify as a protected class.

However, it is important to note that not all state pregnancy discrimination laws are the same. In 1993 the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law. The FMLA is a federal law that grants twelve weeks of unpaid job-protected leave to employees who have worked at their place of employment for more than a year and the company they work for has more than fifty employees (Ruiz). However, FMLA only covers pregnancy if the complications from pregnancy are determined to be a health risk to the pregnant woman or the child ([fmloonline.com](http://fmloonline.com)). A federal law that covers pregnancy leave or pregnancy specific accommodations is not in existence.

All states must adhere to the federal laws but can also enact pregnancy leave/accommodation laws for their state. For example, the state of Texas does not have any additional pregnancy accommodations or pregnancy leave laws outside of those mandated by the federal government. California, on the other hand, instituted Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL) in 2012. PDL is four months of leave taken either all at once or intermittently. It can be paid or unpaid. The employer must pay for the continuation of insurance coverage and the PDL covers accommodations that need to be made because of severe morning sickness or postpartum depression. In August of 2016, the NPWF published *Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws That Help Expecting and New Parents*. This document contained a map of the United

States and “report cards” that graded each state on their improvement upon federal pregnancy and maternity laws. California was the only state to receive an A.

Despite the laws in place to protect against sex and now pregnancy discrimination, pregnant women are still discriminated against by their employers. In the 2015 fiscal year (October 1, 2015 -September 30, 2016), the Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPA) and the EEOC, which is responsible for enforcing federal employment discrimination laws, reported that they received 5,797 charges of pregnancy discrimination combined (“Pregnancy Discrimination Charges EEOC & FEPAs Combined: FY 1997- FY 2011”). Fifteen years earlier, in 1996, the EEOC and FEPA reported a combined 3,743 charges of pregnancy discrimination. One of those charges came from actress Hunter Tylo.

### **Pre-Trial Facts**

In her memoir, *Making a Miracle*, Tylo details her path to working with *Melrose Place*. She writes that at the beginning of 1996, she was looking to change up her acting career. She had been performing as Taylor Hayes, the globally renowned psychiatrist, on *The Bold and the Beautiful* for six years and working with acting coach Ivana Chubbuck for four of those years. Tylo notes that she felt that her work with Chubbuck had greatly improved her acting skills. She felt that she was no longer relying on stock responses and gestures in her acting; rather she used her life experiences to genuinely react to staged situations in what she described in her memoir as “method acting.” Tylo was tired of playing Taylor Hayes and wanted to explore creating new characters. Tylo saw *Melrose Place* as an opportunity to advance her career and spend more time with her family. After being hired by SEG, Tylo quit her job at *The Bold and the Beautiful* and prepared herself for a new work experience (Tylo 12).

In February 1996 Tylo signed a contract with Spelling Entertainment to appear on the prime-time drama *Melrose Place*. When the contract was signed, Tylo's role was undefined. In a memorandum addressed to the court, Tylo's attorneys cite the contract. They note that the contract indicates a blank line next to the word "role," and that Tylo would "render exclusive services in a recurring role for the 1996/97 season for a total of eight episodes, which were guaranteed" (Allred et. al 2). The contract also stated that SEG would have the option to renew Tylo's exclusive contract for an additional three years for a total of four years (Allred et. al 2).

Around March 20, 1996 Tylo learned she was pregnant and around March 29, 1996 Tylo's business manager, Marvin Dauer, informed Frank South, the Executive Producer of *Melrose Place* (Allred et. al 3). On April, 10 1996 SEG informed Tylo that she was terminated from her role on *Melrose Place* (Allred et. al 3). In her memoir, Tylo directly quotes the fax that she received from SEG.

STI [Spelling Television, Inc.] has been advised by our representatives that you are pregnant. Although we wish you much joy in this event, your pregnancy will result in a material change in your appearance during producing of a substantial portion of the 1996/7 season of the Series. Your material change does not conform with the character you have been engaged to portray. This character is by necessity not pregnant and your material changes would not meet the requirements for the portrayal of the character. Accordingly, STI is hereby exercising its right to terminate the Agreement pursuant to Paragraph 10(a) of the Standard Terms and Conditions of the Agreement. (43)

In their fax SEG clearly stated that Tylo's pregnancy was the reason she was terminated from *Melrose Place*. However, it is important to tease out the small distinctions SEG made in their legal argument for justifying Tylo's termination. SEG argued that they did not fire Tylo simply because she became pregnant. She was not terminated "because of her pregnancy per se, but because of an inevitable appearance change..." (Allred et al. 6). While it may seem like a minor distinction, SEG felt that Tylo's pregnancy would materially change her appearance in such a way that did not align with the character she had been hired to play and therefore she had

violated her employment contract. As I discuss below, this distinction was important to both sides of the case because it raised debate on the ability of a pregnant woman to portray a sexy “vixen.”

On May 13, 1996 Tylo’s attorneys filed their complaint against SEG in the California Superior Court (Klein 223-224). Tylo maintained that she had been fired “solely because of her pregnancy in violation of ... her right to be free of pregnancy discrimination ...” She asserted that at the time of her firing no specific character had been developed for her on *Melrose Place*, and no one from SEG made any attempt to contact her about “her pregnancy, her delivery date, or whether any accommodation would be necessary” (Stolzy 490). In Allred’s memorandum to the court, part of Executive Producer Frank South’s deposition is recreated. South is asked if he discussed any portion of Tylo’s pregnancy with her manager, Marvin Dauer. From his deposition, South never asked when Tylo’s due date was, how pregnancy might affect Tylo’s body during the filming of the first eight episodes, nor did he “think about, perhaps calling Hunter [Tylo] to find out from her whether she thought that her pregnancy would be visible during the filming of the first eight episodes.” Additionally, South testified that when he told Fox Television executives, the network that owned *Melrose Place*, of Tylo’s pregnancy, there was no discussion of incorporating the pregnancy into the storyline (Allred et al. 3-4).

In July 1996 *The Bold and the Beautiful* rehired Tylo and employed her until November 12, 1996, when she delivered her baby. During that time, her character, Taylor Hayes, was not pregnant and the producers of *The Bold and the Beautiful* filmed around her pregnancy (Allred et. al 4). In August 1996, *CNN.com* reported on Tylo’s firing with comments from Tylo, Allred

and SEG.<sup>22</sup> In a written statement, SEG told *CNN.com* that the production company offered Tylo a different role on *Melrose Place* for the Fall of 1997 if the show was picked up for a sixth season. Tylo and Allred rejected the offer saying that it missed the point because Tylo was currently pregnant and was denied a job because of it (“Melrose’ No Place for Pregnant Actress”). The following fourteen months were filled with trial preparations, depositions, the birth of Tylo’s third child and the conception of her fourth as both sides constructed their arguments for the courtroom.

### **Artistic v Reproductive Freedom**

Tylo v Spelling gets to a tension at the heart of this dissertation project, a production company’s artistic rights versus actresses’ employment and reproductive rights. On one hand, a production company has the right to produce/tell the stories that they want to tell for artistic or financial reasons. Shiffrin and Smith unsuccessfully argued on appeal that SEG had rights under the First Amendment because “speech designed to entertain has historically been protected under the First Amendment” (11). Their argument boils down to two points. One, SEG had the right to fire Tylo because her pregnant appearance conflicted with their desired expression of speech. Second, choosing who to cast in an ensemble of actors for a television production is a “core editorial function” that SEG was exercising when they fired Tylo (12). On the other hand, actresses have the right to reproduce and maintain their employment throughout their pregnancies. Allred et al. argues that SEG’s First Amendment rights are not absolute. While the government is not allowed by law to tell SEG what kinds of television shows to produce, it can tell SEG what kinds of shows they may not produce (i.e. obscenity). Furthermore, the government is not allowed to tell SEG what which actors/actresses to hire, but it can tell them

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that throughout this chapter, I refer to the title of newspaper, magazine, or publisher exclusively if the article was authored anonymously.



what grounds they may not use when they refuse to hire an actor/actress. Ultimately, Allred et al states that SEG is free to use their creative license to create the best television programming they can, but they cannot use it in their employment practices as an excuse to discriminate against members of protected classes (13).

Throughout this dissertation, this tension between producer and actress has played out in several different ways. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz were co-creators of *I Love Lucy* and therefore had the most say in both the artistic vision of the show and the accommodations made for Ball's pregnancy. Jane Leeves had less input in how her first pregnancy on *Frasier* was handled but added provisions in her contract for her second pregnancy to be written into the show. It is unclear what kind of input Kerry Washington had on *Scandal* regarding her two pregnancies, but she and Rhimes work together very closely and it is likely that Washington took part in the discussions about her pregnancy accommodations. Tylo had zero say in her firing. What makes Tylo different than the rest of the case studies is the amount of time she had to cultivate a relationship with the producers. The rest of the pregnant actresses of this dissertation had a working relationship with their production companies of a year or more before they became pregnant. Tylo had about six weeks.

Tylo's newness to *Melrose Place* likely made her a less valuable commodity. Spelling Entertainment was not under any narrative or fan pressure to keep Tylo on the show because her character never existed. When she worked while pregnant on *Bold and the Beautiful* she was already performing an established character and the producers were financially and artistically invested in her. Additionally, Tylo's star power was not strong enough to warrant the effort that accommodating her pregnancy would require. Having only experience performing on daytime

television and commercials, Tylo was an unknown quantity on primetime television and therefore replaceable.

Three distinct arguments were made during the trial. SEG's attorneys used stereotypes and assumptions about pregnancy to argue that a pregnant Tylo would have been unable to authentically perform a sexy, husband stealing, vixen. Tylo's attorneys used SEG's own history of accommodating actresses' pregnancies to argue that Tylo's pregnancy could have easily been accommodated. Tylo used her sexuality and uncharacteristically slim, eight-month pregnant body to convince the jury that she could have portrayed a sexy vixen with or without accommodations. Each of these arguments contributed to the contrary interventions that Tylo v Spelling made into United States pregnancy discourse.

### **SEG's Defense**

On November 10, 1997 Tylo v Spelling went to trial (Gliatto and Tomashoff 89). SEG's main point of defense was that a "slender, non-pregnant body" was a "bona fide occupational qualification" (BFOQ) for employment on *Melrose Place* (Klein 219). Under Title VII an employer is legally allowed to discriminate in their hiring practices if the employer can demonstrate that the protected class of the employee conflicts with the companies "primary function as a business" (Stolzy 496-497). Meaning, that SEG argued that a non-pregnant body was required for Tylo's employment on *Melrose Place* and portrayal of the Taylor McBride character. Taylor McBride's storyline was that of a married woman who is new to *Melrose Place* but quickly makes a name for herself when she steals the husband of Amanda Woodward (Heather Locklear). This line of argumentation suggested to the court that SEG's practice of firing Tylo was not discriminatory because a non-pregnant body was "reasonably necessary to the normal operation" of *Melrose Place's* production (Allred et al. 9). BFOQ and SEG's

argument also played into questions of authenticity and preyed on jury members' stereotypical beliefs about the impossibility of a pregnant body being sexually desirable. This misogynistic and objectifying argument is based in Western pregnancy discourse that views the pregnant body as grotesque. This view can be tracked back to the "Roman terra-cotta figurines found at Kerch depicting ancient hags, their faces contorted by laughter, their stomachs swollen in pregnancy" as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his discussions of the carnivalesque, grotesque, and the author François Rabelais (Clark and Holquist 303). Bakhtin's association of pregnancy with grotesque realism took the beautiful mysticism out of pregnancy and replaced it with mucus.

In his opening statement, lead counsel for SEG, William Waldo, mobilized the misogynistic and objectifying bias that pregnant bodies cannot be attractive. "This is a specialized industry where appearance does count. Could Roseanne [Barr] credibly ... say 'I was discriminated against because I wasn't hired to play Miss America?'" Waldo stated that the character Tylo was hired to play, Taylor McBride, had to be "so strikingly beautiful she could convince the audience she could steal the husband of Heather Locklear, one of the most beautiful women in Hollywood" (Caruso). Additionally, Waldo detailed Tylo's pregnancy weight gain during the time period that she would have worked on *Melrose Place*.<sup>23</sup> "[B]efore she became pregnant, she weighed 111 pounds. When 'Melrose Place' began shooting in July, Tylo's weight had gone up to 135 pounds, Waldo said. And by the time the eighth episode had been shot, she weighed 144, Waldo said" (Caruso). To go along with these numbers, Waldo produced visual aids. He showed charts to the jury that illustrated Tylo's forty plus pound pregnancy weight gain over time (O'Neill). By detailing her weight gain to the jury, Waldo was playing into fat shaming

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<sup>23</sup> The information about Tylo's weight gain was part of her pre-trial deposition.

stereotypes that assume weight gain is a deterrent to sexual desirability. Convincing the jury to associate Tylo's pregnancy with impossible sexual desirability was key to SEG's BFOQ defense.

Tylo's attorney's response to the BFOQ defense was outlined in Allred's memo to the court and asserted that *Melrose Place* was in the business of storytelling and a pregnant adulteress storyline was good business. Again, citing the deposition of executive producer Frank South, Allred et al. contended that the "normal operations or 'essence'" of *Melrose Place* involved relationships "Allred questioned "[h]ow can defendants argue with a straight face that it was 'reasonably necessary' for Ms. Tylo not to be pregnant, when she was to play an adulteress? Would it not be reasonable for an adulteress to become pregnant?" Furthermore, Allred et al. cited deposition testimony from *Melrose Place* creator and owner of SEG Aaron Spelling who said that if Lisa Rinna, the actress who replaced Tylo after her termination, were to become pregnant "[W]e [Spelling] would probably write that into the script because that would be a great twist ..." (9). Allred et al.'s critique of SEG's BFOQ defense states that SEG had no grounds because their business was to make up stories, and they could have made up a story around the characters' adultery that worked with Tylo's pregnancy instead of terminating her because of it.

In addition to the BFOQ defense, SEG's attorneys called actress Lisa Rinna to testify in court about the requirements of her performance as the "vixen" Taylor McBride. At the time of the trial, Rinna was a few months along in her pregnancy with her first child and it had been announced that her pregnancy would be worked into the storyline of *Melrose Place*. When asked on the witness stand by the defense to describe her role as Taylor, Rinna said, "I had to wear less clothing, use my sexuality, my body and my looks in a way I'd never done before," Rinna continued that "To go head-to-head with Heather Locklear, you'd better pull out all your stops" (Gliatto and Tomashoff 90). Rinna's testimony and Waldo's opening statement set Locklear up

to be the beauty that a pregnant Tylo was to be compared to. It also placed the responsibility of the success of the husband stealing storyline on the shoulders of the actress playing Taylor McBride. Both Rinna's testimony and Waldo's opening statement suggest that if *Melrose Place* audiences did not believe that Taylor McBride could steal a man away from a character played by Locklear, then that was the fault of the sexuality of the actress, not the production. By that logic and working under stereotypes of grotesque pregnancy, it was obvious to SEG that a pregnant Tylo could not portray Taylor McBride. Audiences would not be able to see past her pregnant body and buy into the reality that she could not out sex Locklear.

Rinna's testimony is interesting because it demonstrated that SEG and Tylo's attorneys believed that a performance of such over the top sexuality was just as much based in performance technique as bodily appearance. During Rinna's testimony, she was asked by SEG's lawyers if she believed that she could have performed such a sexually charged role if she had been pregnant. However, Tylo's attorneys objected to that line of questioning and the judge did not allow her to answer (Hartlaub). During cross examination, Tylo's attorney Nathan Goldberg played a love scene from an episode called "Great Sexpectations" and asked Rinna what she was trying to portray in the scene. Rinna responded, "I would say ecstasy, pretty much" (Hartlaub). Both sides of the trial understood, or at least pretended to, that Rinna's performance was more than her looks, an idea that a quick glance at this trial might not illuminate. With so much of the trial's discussion mired down in misogynistic and objectifying stereotypes of heteronormative sexuality, it is refreshing to also see that both sides of the aisle believed that they were fighting about a pregnant actress' right to work; not just look pretty.

## Allred et al.'s Argument

I contend that in his opening statement Tylo's Co-counsel Nathan Goldberg was setting up their team's accommodations strategy. Goldberg began by describing Tylo as a working mother who was fired because she got pregnant. While he did acknowledge her celebrity, he worked hard at painting Tylo as a regular woman who was suffering an injustice that any of the jury members might be able to identify with. Goldberg worked to strip Tylo of her celebrity and play up the idea that at her core she was an ordinary working mother. He argued that the material changes in appearance clause in her contract was closely related to an actor's inability or incapacity to fulfill the terms of the contract and, because Tylo returned to *The Bold and the Beautiful* after her termination she was not incapacitated by her pregnancy (Tylo 311-314). This line of argumentation allowed Goldberg to show that the only difference between Tylo working for *Melrose Place* and Tylo working for *The Bold and the Beautiful* was the willingness of *The Bold and the Beautiful* to accommodate Tylo's pregnancy.

On November 24, 1997 Locklear took the stand as a witness for the plaintiff. Goldberg questioned the actress who was put on the stand to show that SEG practiced a double standard by accommodating Locklear's pregnancy in the Spring of 1997. SEG's lawyers objected to Locklear's testimony in full saying that while she is a "talented actress," she was not involved in any of the decisions the producers made to fire Tylo or shoot around other actresses' pregnancies (O'Neill). During the testimony, SEG's lawyers objected sixteen times to Goldberg's line of questioning, but they could not stop Locklear's damaging testimony (Baldwin). Locklear testified that she told SEG that she was pregnant in February 1997 and they dealt with it by filming her from the chest up, and using props, furniture, clothing and body doubles to conceal her pregnancy (Frankel). While on the stand Locklear estimated that SEG used a body double for

her character in anywhere from five to ten episodes, (Baldwin) and that SEG moved up the production schedule by two weeks to accommodate the timing of Locklear's due date (O'Neill).

One piece of Locklear's testimony was particularly damaging to SEG's defense. Goldberg asked Locklear to describe how she played the role of a "scheming super-vixen" while pregnant. Locklear responded, "I acted." With this answer, Locklear's pregnant performance on *Melrose Place* became evidence that given the same kind of production support, Tylo could have also acted and played the role of Taylor McBride. In a very straight forward manner, Locklear's testimony demonstrated that SEG was capable of accommodating both Locklear's and Rinna's pregnancies, and legally speaking, this was a problem for SEG's defense. The entire foundation of SEG's defense was that Tylo's pregnant body was too grotesque to play a sexy vixen. Except, two pregnant actresses on SEG's payroll had performed or were going to perform the role of a sexy vixen while pregnant. There was no way around it. SEG's treatment of Locklear's and Rinna's pregnancies demonstrated a double standard.

Allred et al.'s memo to the court argues that the first eight episodes of *Melrose Place* were filmed between July and August of 1996 and that during this time period, Tylo's pregnancy was barely visible (4). Allred et al. also notes that Locklear's character on *Melrose Place* was a "lithe, sensual character who is very scantily dressed in the show" (5). The defense argument that Tylo's pregnancy could not be accommodated because her character was supposed to be a "lithe, sensual character" is discredited by Spelling's own response to Locklear's pregnancy, "[w]e'll just shoot around it" (5). Again, this evidence points to the double standards put in place by SEG. If SEG was so willing to accommodate Rinna's and Locklear's pregnancies, why was Tylo so quickly terminated?

If the only points of interest in this trial were the testimonies of Rinna and Locklear, the ramifications of this trial would be clear. It would be clear that Tylo won the trial because SEG was in the wrong and violated the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 when they fired Tylo. Tylo could easily be heralded as a woman fighting for the rights of women and her victory could be hailed as a victory for all pregnant actresses and pregnant workers. However, this trial arguably made performing while pregnant more complicated because of Tylo's own sexualized pregnancy performance in the courtroom.

### **Tylo's Performance**

On the third day of the trial, November 12, Tylo began her testimony. In her memoir, she details her outfit. She wore a cream-colored suit "with two little bows on each side of the pockets at the waistline. It had silk lapels and a short skirt that was tailored, sophisticated, and sexy." (258). Tylo's performance of sexiness on the witness stand was key because in her opening testimony she revealed that she was almost eight months pregnant. According to Tylo the reaction from the courtroom was one of astonishment:

The jury gasped. Opposing counsel Bill Waldo's face turned four shades of red. He tried wagging a pen with his fingers to appear nonchalant and then began scribbling furiously on a legal pad. Sally Suchil, in-house counsel for Spelling Entertainment, looked stricken. How could her litigators not know this? Bill Waldo's second chair, Linda Edwards, a prim and proper woman with tightly curled hair and thin lips that went white when she became angry, tilted her head and pulled in her chin as if a huge truck had whipped by her on the highway. (259)

Tom Gliatto and Craig Tomashoff remarked that Tylo "provoked gasps" when she revealed she was eight months pregnant and that she was her "own body of evidence" that SEG was wrong to terminate her from *Melrose Place* (90). Ann W. O'Neill reported that "[s]pectators in the



courtroom gasped with surprise” when Tylo testified about her pregnancy. By all accounts, Tylo’s eight month long fourth pregnancy surprised the court.

Up until her revelation, Tylo’s courtroom performance of hidden pregnancy was flawless. Her pregnant body was indistinguishable from a nonpregnant actresses body. All of the stereotypical pregnancy hiding techniques of oversized clothes and handbags were missing from her hidden pregnancy performance. The courtroom audience did not have any hidden pregnancy signs to read. Tylo’s pregnant body passed the test of nonpregnant believability. For the previous three days of the trial and eight months of her pregnancy, Tylo had been starring in her own soap-opera, playing a fictional nonpregnant character of her own design. She took responsibility for her pregnant body to appear nonpregnant and completely surprised her audience. Nothing about how she was costumed or how she carried herself indicated to the audience or to SEG’s attorneys that she could possibly be pregnant. This is where it gets complicated.

Tylo’s pregnancy announcement and hidden pregnancy performance is not the feminist embrace of pregnant sexuality that I want it to be. Instead, Tylo’s pregnant performance in the courtroom is an acceptance of all things misogynistic, objectifying, and heteronormative. The comments that Tylo made to the press during the trial and wrote in her memoir illustrate a performance of sexuality that did not defy heteronormative standards of beauty. In his report on Rinna’s testimony, Peter Hartlaub commented that Rinna wore a “conservative black pants suit with a white shirt buttoned nearly to the top.” Hartlaub then commented on Tylo’s clothing. “Tylo, on the other hand, was dressed like she was still auditioning for the [vixen] role,” and “[d]espite being nearly eight months pregnant, she wore a bra-like leopard top with a mesh see-through blouse and long black skirt that was slit to the top of her thigh.” When asked about her clothing outside of the court house Tylo said, “I don’t dress any different when I’m pregnant ...

This is how I dress” (Hartlaub). Inside and outside the courtroom, Tylo worked to erase her pregnancy from view and highlight her more voluptuous assets.

In her memoir, Tylo writes very specifically about this leopard print bra outfit. She writes that she wore the outfit to undermine the testimony of *Melrose Places*’ executive producer Frank South. Throughout the trial, South contended that Tylo’s pregnancy and subsequent grotesque weight gain justified her termination. By wearing this revealing outfit, Tylo wanted to show South he was wrong.

The next day I took my seat in the chair on the outside of our table. I was extremely close to the jury, almost within arm’s length in our small courtroom. I noticed, more than once that one of the two men on the jury could not take his eyes off my cleavage. I was sure he believed that I could play a “sexy vixen” right then. The other male juror kept looking and smiling at me too. I wanted to show Frank South to his face that he was dead wrong, and I did. I could tell that he was affected by that outfit. He couldn’t look me in the eye, but I saw him checking me out. I saw Waldo checking me out. ... They were all checking me out that day. (272)

Tylo continues her discussion of her leopard print outfit and its effect on the courtroom. After a lunch break was called and the courtroom was released,

every man and woman on the jury turned back to check me out and I obliged by turning around to gather up some papers that were on my chair. I knew my bottom fit quite nicely into my size-four skirt and was very muscular and firm from the five sets of squats I was doing every morning before the trial. (Tylo 273-274)

In spite of their length, I have included these two moments from Tylo’s memoir to illustrate how her performance of sexuality played into heteronormative ideas about sexuality. In May 1996 when Tylo first filed her complaint with the court, she told *People* magazine “They’re saying, ‘If you can’t act with your butt, we don’t need you’” (Gliatto and Tomashoff). A year and a half later, Tylo was showing the court that at eight months pregnant, she could still act with her butt. She was doing the thing she had reprimanded SEG for expecting eighteen months earlier. Tylo’s courtroom performance undermines the notion that Tylo’s trial was a pro-feminist project.

Instead it shows how she received pleasure from being objectified by the men and women in the court room. Rather than empowering pregnant women by stating that pregnancy is sexy no matter what size, Tylo tells readers of her memoir how during her fourth pregnancy she was “able to keep [her] exercise regimen and eat properly” which resulted in a weight gain of only fifteen pounds by the trial and twenty-two pounds overall (259). Tylo’s commentary about her minimal weight gain, size four skirt, and exercise regimen of five sets of squats every day appears to be a positive commentary on how she was able to discipline her pregnant body into sexual desirability. However, what is actually at work is the misogynistic notion that pregnant bodies must be disciplined, or they will turn into stereotypical, fat, grotesque, unruly bodies incapable of being sexually desirable.

In her memoir Tylo writes how she literally puts her assets on display for the consumption of the jury members, her captive audience. In her leopard print bra, she felt sexually desirable as she used that same objectification and male gaze to her own economic advantage.

Tylo’s overt performance of sexuality for economic gain is not unlike the performances of sexuality that are associated with striptease. In *Naked Result*, performance and dance scholar Jessica Berson argues that striptease dancers must appear “primed and primed to appeal as objects of desire” but must also feel sexual desire, “striptease dancing also asks performers to experience desire themselves: at its best, dancing sexy requires feeling sexy.” Berson continues her discussion by pointing to the tension that strippers feel between dancing with agency while being gazed upon as an object:

Negotiating the seeming contradiction between moving as a desiring, autonomous subject and as a looked-upon object is the often unarticulated project of many female dancers working in many different dance idioms; the problem of being always/already submitted to the male gaze faces concert dancers as well as strippers. However, this problem is more acute in striptease than almost any other kind of dance or movement: the male gaze

is the very pretext under which the dancing takes place, and the incorporation of the body and its labor into a calculation of economic exchange fuels its continuation. (71)

Tylo's sexually charged court outfit and butt displaying performance mimicked the tension that is felt by striptease dancers. In displaying her body, she becomes an object to be looked upon by the jury, but by being looked upon as an object, Tylo increased her chances of economic gain because she proved to the jury that she could simultaneously be sexually desirable and pregnant. The trick was hiding her pregnant stomach while revealing her buttocks and breasts.

Tylo's hidden courtroom pregnancy and overt sexual performance became integral to her court case. Tylo's body was exhibit A in the attack on Spelling Entertainment's material change defense. Tylo's lawyers capitalized off of Tylo's hidden pregnancy and used it as part of their trial strategy. The fifteen pound weight gain in her eighth month of pregnancy made little to no material change on her body during the trial. How could they effectively argue that pregnancy changed Tylo's body so drastically when evidence to the contrary sat in front of the jury every single day of the trial?

The lack of a press release about Tylo's fourth pregnancy further suggests that Tylo and her lawyers kept her pregnancy a secret so that they could use it in court. Tylo did not release a statement to the press nor did she take part in any press coverage about her pregnancy prior to the trial. If she had notified the press that she was pregnant with her fourth child before the trial started, this would have allowed Spelling Entertainment's defense to work on a counter strategy. However, the three accounts of the court's reaction at her pregnancy revelation is evidence that no one outside of her immediate family and her lawyers were aware of her pregnancy. By dropping this bombshell news day one of her testimony, Tylo set in motion a strategy of performing sexual desirability throughout the remainder of the trial.

## The Verdict

On December 22, 1997, the jury returned a verdict in Tylo v Spelling Entertainment. The jury was instructed to answer questions; three of which Tylo included in her memoir:

Question number one: Did plaintiff prove that she fully performed or had the ability to perform all of her obligations as described in the contract?

Answer: Yes

Question number two: Did defendants prove that they terminated the contract in accordance with its terms and/or in the manner authorized by the terms of contract?

Answer: No

Question number three: Did plaintiff prove that defendants breached the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing by engaging in bad-faith conduct, separate and apart from terminating her contract?

Answer: Yes (Tylo 295)

The jury awarded Tylo \$4 million for emotional distress and \$894,601 for economic loss (“Spelling: Toll Tylo Win”). National news outlets reported on Tylo’s win. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *CNN.com* reported on Tylo’s victory.

Tylo’s hidden pregnancy performance successfully convinced a majority of the jury, at least nine of the twelve panelists, that she could act like a sexy vixen. Juror, Pete Ortiz, told Ann W. O’Neil, “Even if she gained 47 pounds or whatever, she’s still a beautiful person. ... She’s still a working mother, she’s still an actress, pregnant or not.” Jury forewoman Freddie Moore said, “The majority of jurors felt she could still play a vixen ... We all agreed that Ms. Tylo was fired because she was pregnant” (O’Neil “Actress Fired Over Pregnancy Wins \$5 Million”).

In addition to the jurors, O’Neill spoke with Louis Meisinger, the attorney who in 1997 represented Warner Bros film studio. Meisinger believed that Tylo v Spelling Entertainment Inc. would have an impact on the television industry, ““If nothing else, this decision will cause producers to pay even more attention to the wording of their contracts [with actors]”” O’Neill from the *Los Angeles Times* agreed with Meisinger’s assessment writing that the case, “put

studios on notice that contracts detailing how actors and actresses must look to keep their roles-- commonplace in the entertainment industry--are vulnerable to legal challenge.” O’Neill also notes that while this case didn’t set any legal precedent, “Tylo is believed to be the first actress to successfully sue her employers for being fired because of pregnancy.”

Not everyone praised Tylo’s victory. In January 1998 K.S. Dutson wrote a letter to the *Las Vegas Sun* bemoaning Tylo’s court victory. Like the letters to the editor written about Lucille Ball’s televised pregnancy, or the internet fans of *Frasier* and Jane Leeves, Dutson had opinions about the decency of both of Tylo’s pregnancies. First, he believed that Tylo lied about not knowing she was pregnant when she signed her contract with SEG because, “My wife claims to know within days when she’s pregnant.” Second, Dutson believed, “[a]s an actress, Tylo should accept responsibility for keeping her body in the condition it was in when she was hired and not, ‘Oops! I’m pregnant.’” Third, “I didn’t see any body shots of Tylo during the trial in which she reportedly wore mini-skirts while nine months pregnant with another child. She supposedly did so to prove that she was ‘pregnant and sexy!’ Disgusting!” Finally, Dutson shames Tylo for her display of pregnant sexuality. “Even in this town of decadence, I think you’d be hard-pressed to find someone who thought a nine-month-pregnant woman strutting her stuff to turn you on wasn’t in rather poor taste.” Dutson’s comments feed in to the same misogynistic expectations of women’s sexuality and stereotypes of grotesque pregnancy as Tylo’s pregnant performance in the courtroom.

### **Conclusion**

In *Fight Back and Win*, Gloria Allred notes that “The entertainment industry pays close attention to the bottom line—and the bottom line is that it may now be too costly to fire actresses who get pregnant” (237). In January 2006 *General Hospital* actress Kari Wuhrer filed suit

against the ABC network for pregnancy discrimination, but by December 2006 the case was dismissed (*Kari Wuhrer et al. vs ABC Productions et al. BC345783*). In 2012 *Price is Right* model, Brandi Cochran, sued the show for pregnancy discrimination and was awarded \$7.7 million in punitive damages “after the jury in the case ruled that the producers of the show had acted with malice by not taking her back after her pregnancy” (Reuters Staff). Reportedly, Cochran said Tylo’s successful trial win encouraged her to file suit. (Reuters Staff). Clearly, Tylo’s trial and success has had an impact on pregnancy discrimination cases in the film and television industry. However, this does not mean that Tylo’s case fixed pregnancy discrimination in film and television.

First, it is very possible that other actresses after Tylo were fired for becoming pregnant but didn’t have enough of the resources that Tylo did to come forward. Second, Tylo’s case changed the way that pregnancy is discussed in the television industry by making television producers and executives more thoughtful and careful about the wording of their contracts. Tylo’s case did not miraculously cure the television and film industry from its misogynistic male gaze malady. Instead, Tylo and her court win showed the film and television industry that their contracts should be constructed and enforced with caution.

In addition to teaching a lesson to the television industry, Tylo’s court win brought public awareness to the problem of pregnancy discrimination in the United States. Hunter Tylo and Spelling Entertainment’s name and celebrity status brought attention to a case that at its core was a labor dispute. Kyle Smith, Craig Tomashoff and Paula Yoo’s “Spelling Lesson” was a three-page spread in *People* magazine that praised Tylo for her win and detailed a moment between Tylo and a fan at a restaurant on Christmas Eve:

Since suing—and defeating—Melrose Place producer Aaron Spelling’s company for wrongful termination from the show for getting pregnant, Tylo has earned a new set of

admirers and detractors. So when a woman walked toward Tylo's table, the actress, who stars on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, braced for the worst. "I just want to say thank you," the woman told Tylo. "I work as a nurse, and I'm pregnant, and I'm afraid to tell my boss." Tylo, 35, was delighted, especially when other women approached her that evening with similar words of encouragement. "I've been through a lot in the past year and a half," says Tylo. "But hearing from those women made it all worth it."

The words of thanks and encouragement that Tylo received from other women is a marker that on its surface, Tylo's success was seen as a symbol for women's rights. In her book, Gloria Allred pushes readers to view Tylo as that symbol and to learn from her success.

The press coverage that celebrity cases attract helps educate the public and potential wrongdoers about women's rights and the ability women have to vindicate them. Few people are taught their rights in school. Most people learn about them through the media—through television shows such as *Law and Order* and televised trials such as O.J. Simpson's. It isn't the way it should be, but that is the way it is. The media often portray women as powerless and in need of men to rescue them. This is another reason why I want the public to see women like Hunter fighting back against injustice. They inspire women to tap into their own courage. (237)

Putting self-congratulations aside, Allred is writing about the power of performance to educate.

Tylo's celebrity gave her more social and economic power to fight against pregnancy discrimination than the average American woman. Her celebrity gave her a stage on which to perform and thereby educate the public. Performance is a space of showing and education. Tylo's performance educated the public about the problem of pregnancy employment discrimination and educated women that there was a way to fight against it. However, her performance is complicated in that while fighting against pregnancy discrimination, she played into the stereotypical and misogynistic forces that put her in the courtroom in the first place.

The potential consequences of Tylo's sexualized pregnancy performance in the courtroom are problematic for future pregnant actresses. In her courtroom pregnancy performance, Tylo modeled normative standards of body image beauty throughout her pregnancy. She created a version of pregnancy performance that is incredibly hard to cite, and if



taken to the extreme could be used to deny actresses the ability to work while pregnant. Tylo's courtroom pregnancy performance set impossibly high standards that less scrupulous television producers can point to as an example of a pregnancy that pregnant actresses in their employ should cite. It puts enormous pressure on pregnant actresses to regulate their own pregnant bodies in such a way as to put minimal responsibility for pregnancy accommodations on the television production company. Tylo's pregnancy performance during the trial created a potential future in which a pregnant actress is told that she can be employed while pregnant as long as she maintains a physique that fits within the normative standards of beauty. While Hunter Tylo's pregnant courtroom body was exceptionally fit, the bodies of pregnant actresses should not be viewed as exceptions but exemplars, providing accessible test cases for working out a nation's thoughts and feelings about pregnancy in the domestic workforce. As Goldberg said to the jury in his closing argument, "If you get pregnant, you roll with it. Your employer rolls with it. That's America" (Fleeman).

## Conclusion: A Pregnant Pause

The previous case studies of this dissertation have illustrated the complications of accommodating an actress' pregnancy. For Lucille Ball, a whole new way of producing television had to be invented. The accommodations made to hide both Kerry Washington's and Jane Leeves' pregnancies failed, and Hunter Tylo was fired from a job because Spelling Entertainment Inc. didn't want to make any accommodations. Their example might convince some readers that the best and least complicated solution is to incorporate an actress' pregnancy into the narrative of the television show. However, as Katey Sagal's stillbirth illustrates, it is not that simple.

Sagal starred on the FOX primetime sit-com *Married with Children* as Peggy Bundy for eleven seasons. During her tenure, she became pregnant three times. Her first pregnancy was written in to the show but unfortunately in her seventh month of pregnancy, Sagal gave birth to a stillborn baby girl. The show's writers wrote in a deus-ex-machina that erased Sagal's pregnancy from the narrative of the show. This first pregnancy experience made Sagal and the *Married with Children's* production team extremely cautious. During her second and third pregnancies, Sagal's pregnancies were not only not written in to the narrative of the show, but Sagal's character was written out of the majority of episodes. Her pregnant body was removed from view.

Like the rest of the case studies of this dissertation, Sagal's pregnancy performance and subsequent pregnancy loss were firsts for television. Sagal experienced a very sudden and extremely public tragedy. Sagal had no way to predict or prevent it from happening, and no way to privately mourn the loss of her child. Her loss was then compounded by the stress of having to negotiate how *Married with Children* was going to narratively handle Peggy's pregnancy. It has

never been made clear either in interviews or in Sagal's memoir, *Grace Notes*, the specific details of how the decision was made to make Peggy's pregnancy a dream. Sagal has never said that she asked the producers of *Married with Children* to create the dream narrative or if the producers and writers came up with that idea on their own. No matter how the decision happened, it still further complicated Sagal's incredible loss.

Sagal became pregnant in the Spring of 1991. She was finishing the fifth season of *Married with Children* when she told the coproducers of the show, Ron Leavitt and Michael Moyer of her pregnancy. Leavitt and Moyer decided that writing Sagal's pregnancy into the narrative of the show would make sense and Sagal agreed (Sagal). On September 8, 1991 season six of *Married with Children* premiered with the episode "She's Having My Baby: Part 1." In the episode, Sagal's character Peggy Bundy revealed that she was five months pregnant. Keeping in line with the crass, envelope pushing, style of the show, Peggy's husband Al Bundy, played by Ed O'Neill, was annoyed by the news and couldn't remember having the sex that caused Peggy's pregnancy. In classic *Married with Children* writing, Al didn't remember because Peggy took advantage of him when he passed out from drinking.

At almost eight months pregnant, in October 1991, Sagal's pregnancy became troubled. At a routine checkup, she discovered that for no apparent reason, she had lost all of her amniotic fluid. Her doctor put her on bedrest and she was written off the next four episodes. In episode seven of the sixth season, "If I Could See Me Now," Sagal does not make an appearance as Peggy. Her children, Kelly and Bud, played by Christina Applegate and David Faustino respectively, say that Peggy is upstairs in her bedroom in a food coma and Sagal's pre-recorded voice is heard coming from the bedroom saying "I'm hungry." While on bedrest and after

recovering from the loss of her child, Sagal's absence from the show was explained as being too lazy to come out of her bedroom, out of town at Mardi Gras, and out shopping.

When Sagal returned to the show in episode eleven, "Al Bundy, Shoe Dick," she only appeared in the very beginning and very end of the episode. Originally airing on November 24, 1991, six weeks after Sagal's stillbirth, the episode began with Al and Peggy lying in bed. Peggy is covered by the bed linens up to her chest and her stomach is obscured. Peggy tells Al that she wants to be a two-income family so he needs to get a second job. They both go to sleep. The next scene is Al walking into a private detective agency where he gets a job as a janitor but then is mistaken for a private detective. He solves a case that earns him \$50,000. At the end of the episode Al wakes up and Peggy, now dressed in a different nightgown than earlier, tells him that he was having a dream and did not make \$50,000. She then gets up from the bed to go to the bathroom and Al sees that she is no longer pregnant. Al calls his children in to the bedroom and asks them in a whisper if Peggy or Marcy is pregnant. The children make repulsed faces and Al realizes that he just dreamed that both women were pregnant.

The aftermath of Sagal's loss was also very public. December of that same year, Sagal did an interview with *TV Guide's* Susan Littwin in which she talks frankly about the loss of her child. Sagal recounted the story of her emergency trip to the doctor and giving birth to her stillbirth daughter. "I was in labor for 32 hours, and then, finally, they had to give me a C-section. I can't believe I'm talking about it" (16). While no one could have predicted this unfortunate event, and no one could have prevented it from happening, the trauma that Sagal went through was intensified by reliving it for entertainment news and television audiences. Sagal made a choice to participate in the *TV Guide* interview. However, what is unclear is how

much of her decision to participate was because she wanted to and how much of it was because television audiences and entertainment magazines expected her to.

### **The “What if”**

As these case studies have shown, there is no fool proof way for a television production to accommodate an actress’ pregnancy. If the pregnancy is written into the narrative, devastating loss can occur. If the pregnancy is hidden using pregnancy camouflage conventions, audiences play a game of “spot the bump.” If the actress is fired or written out of the narrative, she loses a pay check and valuable, career advancing, screen time. But, what if we change the premise of the question? What if instead of asking “how can television production companies and pregnant actresses better accommodate their pregnancies?” we ask “how can television audiences better accommodate the pregnancies of television actresses?”

As the pregnancy performances of Kerry Washington and Jane Leeves have shown, television audiences are excellent at exposing the pregnancies that television producers and writers want to hide. What could happen if television producers, writers, and pregnant actresses stop trying to hide them? How would an actresses’ experience of performing while pregnant change if there were no expectations about either incorporating or hiding the pregnancy? What kind of new and exciting performances could take place if writers, producers, and actresses were not limited by convincing audiences that pregnancies didn’t exist or that pregnancies were planned all along? What would happen if audiences abandoned television believability and accepted the visibly pregnant body without explanation? What if?

### **Going Forward**

As I conclude this dissertation project, I have more questions than answers. This work has barely scratched the surface of the available television pregnancy performance archive, and

there is much more work that needs to be done before theatre and performance scholars begin to understand how these pregnancy performances impact United States pregnancy discourse in general. I began this dissertation project by trying to answer the specific question, “how does watching pregnant actresses labor on television impact, intervene into, and change pregnancy discourse in the United States?” The problem with that question is that it is too big and too little foundational work has been done on pregnant performances to rigorously answer it.

The work that I have presented here is much smaller in scope but equally as compelling. The case studies of this dissertation illustrate that television performance in general is a ripe site for investigating the creation and dissemination of a national discourse. The lack of supporting documents in the archive shows that as a phenomenon, pregnant performance has long been undervalued as performance labor. Before I started this project, I took for granted the work involved in accommodating pregnant actresses. At the end of this project, I now see how those accommodations have been so ingrained in how United States television audiences read actresses’ bodies that they are practiced outside of the television set on the bodies of everyday women.

By doing this research, I now have a clearer path of how to begin answering my initial research question. It will take much more foundational work and involve different types of research methodologies. Going forward, I want to add an ethnographic element to my research. Very little commentary on pregnant television performance is available. I believe conducting ethnographic interviews with fans of the respective shows, fans of the actresses, and possibly the actresses themselves would be very illuminating. Furthermore, conducting interviews with women who have experience working while pregnant will provide insight into how pregnant television performances seep into and sublimate or uphold United States pregnancy discourse. I

am excited by the possibilities of this research. A lot of work can still be done in this area of theatre and performance research.

### **The Final Push**

Incorporating an actress' pregnancy into the storyline has potentially disastrous consequences for both the show and the actress. While Sagal chose to be absent from her show for her final two pregnancies this decision took Sagal's laboring body off screen. Because of her pregnancies, Sagal received less screen time than her co-stars and appeared in fewer episodes. Every episode that Sagal did not appear in cost her financially as she, like the majority of television actors and actresses, was paid per episode. Sagal's decision to stop working while pregnant is a reality that many domestic laboring women are forced into by their employers because of the perception of what their pregnant bodies are capable of. It is this perception of the laboring pregnant body's limitations that caused the passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 and its continued belief that brought Peggy Young to the Supreme Court in *Young v. United Parcel Service* in 2014.

The television industry has yet to demonstrate the perfect solution for keeping pregnant actresses employed while also maintaining television believability. The case studies of this dissertation have shown that either the actress or the narrative, and sometimes both, will suffer because an actress becomes pregnant. However, what the television industry has demonstrated, is how a business can accommodate the needs of its pregnant employees. Hidden or visible, the television industry accommodates the pregnancies of its actresses so that they can continue working; and when it doesn't, as in the case of Hunter Tylo, it loses a lawsuit. By no means do I believe that the television industry is perfect in this regard or that its treatment of pregnant bodies is uncomplicated. It is impossible to know which pregnant bodies never made it to television or

the courtroom because they were not big enough stars or unaware of their rights. Nonetheless, I do believe that providing a national platform for pregnant bodies to be seen working by millions of people is significant despite its complications.

In an interview with *TV Guide* post stillbirth, Katey Sagal remarked, “there is a part of me that wishes I had had a child when I was younger. I think, ‘wow this would have been interesting if I had done it in my 20s.’” However, as Susan Littwin points out,

in her 20s, [Sagal] was traveling the world with bands. Sagal is ready now but she’s waiting for luck to catch up with her. She says that she always thought her life would calm down as she got older, but it hasn’t turned out that way. “It’s more like being on a roller coaster, only you can’t get out of the car” (16)

Sagal questions the timing of her reproductive choices. She believed that eventually the right time would come along, and she would get pregnant. However, for Sagal, the roller coaster of life never stopped at the “right time.” This interview comes only two months after Sagal lost her child and this interview is a space in which she can perform her loss for the public.

Della Pollock discusses pregnancy loss and asserts that, “[w]hile taboos against talking about birth are beginning to erode ... they remain strong—and seem even to be getting stronger—against talking about so-called failed births” (5). Sagal’s interview about her pregnancy loss was a way for her to both publicly mourn but also share her story in a space where stories like hers are not commonly shared. Sagal’s tragedy exposed a national audience to the tragedy of pregnancy loss. Unlike the rest of the women of this dissertation, Sagal’s televisual pregnancy performance was interrupted and remained incomplete.

The women of this dissertation have all performed their pregnancy stories on a national scale. Through the performances of their stories, I and other audience members have watched as their pregnancies have positively or negatively impacted their ability to work. In some cases, their growing pregnant bodies worked against them and in others, their baby bumps fit right in.



All of their pregnancy performances illustrate how pregnancy can be accommodated in the work place, and all of their pregnancy performances debunk the myth of the “right time.”

This question of reproductive timing has haunted me throughout my graduate school career. I have had countless conversations with mentors and colleagues discussing the merits of waiting until after I am done with course work or ABD. Should I wait until I have written the majority of the dissertation or until after graduation? I have spent hours thinking about what the consequences of going on the job market pregnant would be. I have strategized with mentors the best dates for conception, as if I have any real control, so that if I *do* go on the market pregnant, I would not be visibly pregnant. I have even calculated the length of time it would take me to get tenure against the ticking of my biological clock. I am intimately familiar with the question, “when is the right time to be pregnant?”; and through all of the conversations held in office hours, at coffee houses, in conference sessions, or over drinks at the hotel bar the answer always is, “there is no right time.”

For women like myself and the actresses of this project, the desire to work and have children appears to contradict current United States pregnancy discourse. In 2017 several key announcements were made regarding the pregnant body. First, *National Public Radio* teamed up with *ProPublica* for a six-month long investigation on maternal mortality in the U.S. and they discovered that, “more American women are dying of pregnancy-related complications than any other developed country. Only in the U.S. has the rate of women who die been rising.” (Martin, Montagne). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released 2016 data that showed “the number of births fell 1 percent from a year earlier, bringing the general fertility rate to 62.0 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44” bringing the United States fertility rate to a historic low. This decline caused some demographers to panic because if a fertility rate sinks too low, “there’s a

danger that we wouldn't be able to replace the aging workforce and have enough tax revenue to keep the economy stable" (Cha). Finally, in December 2017 this decline in fertility prompted House Speaker Paul D. Ryan to deliver a speech in which he called for an increase in the birth rates of the United States, "We have something like a 90 percent increase in the retirement population of America but only a 19 percent increase in the working population in America. So what do we have to do? Be smarter, more efficient, more technology. . . still going to need more people" (Emba).

These three discussions of the pregnant body in United States discourse illustrate how the pregnant body is viewed abstractly. The pregnant body is a statistic. In 2017 the pregnant body was unproductive. However, entertainment television broadcasts a concrete image of the pregnant body that is capable and laboring. The pregnant body of the television actress is active and accommodated. By accommodating the pregnancies of actresses, the television industry showcases the potential of the pregnant laboring body.

The women of this dissertation and the television industry show that there doesn't need to be a "right time." Pregnant television actresses are valuable employees and valuable employees can, and should, be accommodated. From Lucille Ball, to Kerry Washington, the weekly broadcasting of their pregnant bodies at work was a contemporaneous intervention into United States pregnancy discourses. The endless reruns of *I Love Lucy*, *Frasier*, *Scandal*, and *Married with Children* serve as a visual record, an archive of pregnant labor. While not perfect, the television industry is a high-profile example of an industry that has figured out how to accommodate its pregnant workers. When faced with the question "when is the right time to be pregnant?" the United States television industry answers, "between the commercial breaks."

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## **Vita**

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