

Making Room for *The Brady Bunch*: The Syndication of Suburban Discomfort

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Introduction

The Brady Bunch, created by Sherwood Schwartz, is an American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) sitcom that aired on Friday nights from 1969 to 1974. The show was not a hit with audiences or critics in its prime time run; it became a popular culture icon only after it went into syndication in 1976. The Brady Bunch found its audience once it began airing on weekdays, during after school hours. It has now has been in continuous syndication in the United States and around the globe for the last four decades. Because of the show's popularity during its lengthy syndication, two generations of audiences share a common after-school legacy of watching *The Brady Bunch*. In spite of the show's saccharine storylines and bland representations of early 1970s white, middle class suburbia, the Brady family and their suburban home are deeply rooted in twentieth century popular memory.

The Brady Bunch was dismissed during its prime time run because it was oblivious to the profound social and cultural conflicts of the early 1970s. Four months after the show premiered in 1969, Richard Nixon became president; he resigned from office five months after *The Brady Bunch* was cancelled. The five years of the Nixon administration was a period of social and political upheavals

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in the United States and around the world. In syndication, *The Brady Bunch* earned its iconic status in popular culture precisely because the show masks, domesticates and sugarcoats anxieties about contemporary American life. Much of the pleasure in watching *The Brady Bunch* is not taking it seriously. “Other members of this generation understand what it means to love *The Brady Bunch*,” Generation X Mimi Marinucci writes. “It does not mean that we think that the show is good, or least not in any customary sense, and it does not mean that we buy (or bought) into the values it fostered.”¹ While fans mockingly adore *The Brady Bunch* series for its banal attempts to contain modern life, the Brady’s home is regarded with some reverence. Four decades of viewers have watched the Brady family live in their ranch style house. It is likely the most familiar suburban home in popular memory; it is so entrenched in popular culture that homeowners and realtors use the term “*Brady Bunch house*” to reference 1960s-1970s suburban homes. The iconic exterior of the Brady’s house, a 1959 split-level home in the San Fernando Valley, is the most widely recognized home in television history and has been a popular tourist destination for decades. For fans, the home that provided exterior shots for the series, is all that physically remains of the Brady house because the roomy two-story interior and backyard was a stage set that was taken apart after the series ended. The interior of the Brady’s home is spacious, modern, and well organized; it is a home fit for a successful upper-middle class architect, like Mike Brady.

Critics have dismissed the series and audiences have lovingly mocked *The Brady Bunch* because of its obliviousness to public life. To be sure, war, the oil embargo, the energy crisis, Title IX, Roe vs. Wade and the Watergate scandal never permeated the Brady home, but *The Brady Bunch* does address private issues concerning the home, domesticity and middle class suburban living. It is easy to undervalue and overlook these issues when we consider *The Brady Bunch*, in part because the Brady’s house is so familiar to us, but *The Brady Bunch* house is worth our critical attention because four decades of viewers have made themselves at home there. By uncovering the ways the Brady’s navigate their home, my aim is to bring to light how *The Brady Bunch* has contributed to our popular understanding of what it means to live in a suburban house.

Rather than investigating how architects and planners imagined suburban life, historian Annemarie Adams suggests that if we want to understand how people experienced postwar suburban homes, scholars must investigate, describe, and interpret the practices of the people that actually lived in them.² Of course, the Brady family nor their home exists apart from the series, but the Brady’s experiences of their house and their understanding of the spaces within

¹ Mimi Marinucci, “Television, Generation X, and Third Wave Feminism: A Contextual Analysis of *The Brady Bunch*,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 38 (2005) pp. 505-524.

² Annemarie Adams, “The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 5 (1995), pp. 164-178.

it are powerful representations of suburban life in popular memory. As Lynn Spigel explains cultural documents such as television shows, films, and magazines cannot reflect society directly, but they are a part of constellation of cultural meaning. "I look at mass media as evidence not for what people do, think or feel but for evidence of what they read, watch, and say. From this perspective, media products form an intertextual network--a set of related texts--through which people encounter statements about and images of their social world. These statements and images," Spigel writes, "form a horizon of expectations about that world."³ In this essay, I both describe and interpret the Brady family home by closely considering the ways the Bradys use their house in eleven episodes that span the series' five seasons. The episodes I chose to analyze focus on a problem with the house or a storyline that takes place primarily in the Brady home. I did not consider, in other words, episodes that are situated at a school or on family trips to the Grand Canyon or Hawaii. I interpret and detail the ways that the Brady family members live in and move through their house, so that we may have a deeper understanding of what the Brady's suburban home means in popular memory. In my analysis, *The Brady Bunch* home is a stage for middle class frustrations concerning the organization of domestic space. *The Brady Bunch* is likely neither the worst nor the best of popular culture, but the series has helped to shape popular memory, staging and then syndicating the competing desires for autonomy and interdependence inside the suburban home.

Mapping the territories of the Brady House

The Brady's house is a suburban fortress that is focused entirely inward. The house, with its three set of sliding glass doors, is visually oriented toward the private backyard. A tall wooden fence encloses yard; markers of public life—the sidewalk, houses, and the street--are not visible from either inside the house or the yard. The living room, dining room, and den are attractive, orderly rooms with Danish modern furniture. Stacked stone planters, color blocked light panels, and a large abstract painting accentuate the visual centerpiece of the first floor--the open and modern stairway. The well-equipped kitchen, the informal family room, and Alice's bedroom are also on first floor (there is no bathroom on the first floor). The second floor is not as graciously decorated as the first floor, though Mike and Carol do have well-appointed master bedroom (they have a master bath but we only see Mike and Carol walk to or from it).

The design of the children's rooms seems like an afterthought, compared to the other rooms in the house. Though Mike Brady is a successful architect, he is not able to resolve some of the spatial design issues that accompany having six

³ Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 15.

children. The children's bedrooms are more crowded than the other rooms in the house because there are three children in each room. The girls' room is predominantly pink and messy, with posters on the walls and clothes and schoolbooks on the floor; the boys' blue paneled room seems slightly more spacious and tidy, in part because Bobby and Peter sleep on bunk beds. The children share a bathroom. The Brady house does not have a basement, but it does have an attic that Greg adopts as his bedroom during the fourth season.



The Brady Bunch cast, 1973: Back row from left: Christopher Knight (Peter), Barry Williams (Greg), Ann B. Davis (Alice). Second row from left: Eve Plumb (Jan), Florence Henderson (Carol), Robert Reed (Mike), Maureen McCormick (Marcia). Front: Susan Olsen (Cindy), Mike Lookinland (Bobby). Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The first season of the Brady Bunch establishes the personalities of nine characters and introduces the familial conflicts that propel the storylines of future episodes. Because the series focuses on a family in their suburban home, the first season also develops the ways the Bradys use the private and public spaces of their suburban home. In the second episode of the series the Bradys map the communal areas of the downstairs: the living room is Carol and Mike's realm; the family room is the children's domain, and the kitchen area is the dominion of Alice. Members of the Brady family respect the rules of these spaces and places and do not trifle with them unless they wish to challenge them or resolve a conflict they are experiencing.

In the second episode, Mike and Carol are clearly in command of the living room. In the evenings, they sit in matching upholstered chairs and read. Sometimes Carol does needlepoint while Mike reads. The room is quiet because their children are elsewhere, and the large television console that sits on the floor is turned off, as it usually is. The Bradys watch the living room TV only when the family gathers there in the evening. Mike, Alice and the children, for example, eat popcorn and watch a show in the living room, later in the second episode. The six children and Alice's focus is entirely on the television show; Mike watches the television too, but he holds a book in one hand. During the postwar period, as Lynn Spigel explains, television promised to bring families together. "It was seen as a kind of household cement that promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated from the war," Spigel writes. "It was also meant to reinforce the new suburban family unit, what had left most of its extended family and friends behind in the city."⁴ The living room television is not a source of conflict for the Brady family. It is used only on occasion, as a way for the family to share leisure time during the evening hours.

Mike and Carol control the activities in the living room, but the children are largely in charge of the paneled and sparsely decorated family room. That means that they also manage the family room TV, which is a lesser model than the large living room console. While, the living room television is never cause for argument and is used only in the evening when adults are in the room, the children have access to the family room television after school. When Peter and Jan argue, during the second episode, about what to watch on the family room TV, they do not consider settling the conflict by one of them watching TV in the living room. The living room, then, is a room off limits to the children, but the family room is a mostly parent-free zone. The Brady children can quarrel in the family room with little adult interference. Carol, upon overhearing Jan and Peter's argument over what program to watch, comes to the family door but does not enter the room when she questions them about their disagreement. In a later

⁴ Lynn Spigel, *Make way for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 39.

scene, when Cindy and Bobby quarrel over a game of checkers they are playing, Mike comes to the door, but like Carol, he does not enter the family room and walk over to his two youngest children.

Lynn Spigel explains that the emergence of the term "family room" is an example of the importance attached to organizing space around family togetherness, but the Brady household uses the family room as way to segregate the children and their quarrels from the rest of the household.⁵In the episode "Room at the Top" Greg tells Bobby to leave the family room so he can have some privacy. Bobby, standing his ground, explains that "This room is for all of us, that's why they call it a family room, get it?" In "My Son, the Man," Greg is talking on the phone in the family room, when Bobby, Peter, and Cindy playing cowboys and Indians run through the room. Exasperated by the invasion of his privacy, Greg hits the roof when Jan walks in, blaring her transistor radio. Conflicts over the use of the family room are skirmishes that are easily resolved; sorting out more complicated dilemmas takes place upstairs, behind closed doors.

The Brady's downstairs is an expansive open space that is designed to accommodate family members during their leisure hours. But those spaces do not seem big enough for the Bradys. They barely fit in the living room when they watch TV. Marcia and Jan sit in the same chair; Peter sits on the stone fireplace, Bobby sits on the floor, and Alice, Greg, and Cindy share the couch. Only Mike has his own comfortable chair to sit in. There is not enough room for Carol even to be in the room. The children argue over how to use the family room, in part because there is not enough space to accommodate their different desires. The downstairs with its wide-open design is a little claustrophobic for the Bradys. Their home is never big enough.

Upstairs/Downstairs in the Brady House

Given that Mike and Carol's marriage has resulted in three adults occupying the house, Mike, but particularly Carol and Alice, must establish their new household roles. In the first season's episode, "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore" the Bradys must confront the systemic changes that have taken place as a result of Carol and Mike's marriage. In doing so, they must also renegotiate the space within their home, so to create and maintain familial cohesion. Alice has been Mike's paid housekeeper, but she has also nurtured Mike and mothered his three boys for seven years. Now Carol desires to take over the mothering of Greg, Peter, and Bobby because she is their new stepmother.

Alice and Carol momentarily vie to care for Bobby when he enters the kitchen with a scraped knee, at the beginning of the fourth episode. But wise

⁵ Ibid.

Alice quickly ascertains that it is Carol that should care for her new stepson. Standing in her kitchen, Alice tells Bobby “you might get a better deal *upstairs*” – suggesting Bobby go upstairs with his new stepmother, so she can take care of him. Following this incident, Mike comes to the kitchen and asks Alice to sew a button on his shirt. While her first impulse is to sew the button on her boss’s shirt, she explains to him that she is too busy and suggests Carol could sew on the button. Mike tells Alice that this is a good idea and leaves the kitchen, yelling for Carol as he heads to the stairs.

The emotional and domestic labor that Carol and Alice must now share leads to a reorganization of the space within the home. The iconic Brady stairway separates Carol and Alice’s domains. Alice ushers the Brady family upstairs, so that Carol can privately care for her family, particularly Mike and the boys. Typical of the postwar suburban home, the upstairs is composed of a hallway that leads to the family’s bedrooms and bath. Unlike the wide-open spaces of the downstairs, the rooms upstairs are private. The second floor hallway of the Brady home is a series of closed doors, for the upstairs in the realm of privacy and safeguarded conversations.

Upstairs, family members knock before walking into a room. When Marcia, Jan, and Cindy desire to speak to the boys about the threat of Alice leaving the Bradys, they knock on the boy’s bedroom door and wait for the “Come in” before they enter. When the girls have a private meeting with their mother in their bedroom, they shut the bedroom door before their discussion begins. The second floor affords privacy enabling the Bradys to have a family meeting about Alice, without her overhearing. With the six children sitting on their full sized bed and Mike and Carol standing over them, they create a strategy that will convince Alice to stay.

The Bradys put on a performance of domestic chaos and incompetence to convince Alice that they need her. The night Alice plans to permanently depart from the Brady home, Marcia and Carol pretend to forget a cake for Marcia’s club meeting. Mike pretends he cannot find his tuxedo and black tie; Peter feigns that the dog Tiger has run away. Cindy and Bobby demand Alice resolve a tug of war over a checker set, and Carol runs out of time to make the kids dinner. After Alice intervenes and prepares dinner, Carol, dressed in pink chiffon ruffled dress serves Sloppy Joes.

When Peter and Bobby run into the kitchen and spatter mud on Mike’s tuxedo, Alice relents and tells Mike and Carol she will stay-- because any family that would go to that much trouble pretending they needed her must really want her to stay. The Bradys’ performances construct as Alice as a cook, cleaner, laundress, errand runner, referee, and pet caretaker. With Carol now overseeing the emotional wellbeing of the family and the private spaces upstairs, Alice can focus on managing the public spaces downstairs. Alice’s domain includes the kitchen and her bedroom (also a laundry room area), which is adjacent to the

kitchen. The kitchen design, which opens up to the family room by way of swinging doors and a pass through, allows Alice to more easily survey the children's activities in the family room. The kitchen (and the family room and the dining room) also has sliding glass doors that open up to the patio and backyard, allowing Alice to easily monitor the outdoor space that is primarily used by the children.

"Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore" is the last episode of the series to consider the family's histories prior to Carol and Mike's marriage. It also establishes Alice and Carol's new responsibilities and their spatial domains within the Brady house. Following the second episode, Alice and Carol seamlessly share the labor within the home. Carol rarely cleans, goes to the grocery store or prepares meals. Because she is not a domestic laborer and does not work outside of the home she has the time and energy to focus on the emotional wellbeing of her blended family. Similarly, Alice is free to manage the house and be friends with the children because she is not responsible for mothering them. Together, Alice and Carol manage the work that many real mothers, suburban or otherwise, must do alone. The fact that Carol does not have a career or even a part-time job enables her plenty of opportunity to care for her six children, be a loving wife, and always be carefully and stylishly dressed and coiffed. Marinucci speculates that Alice could likely get along without Carol's help and that Carol "...respects the boundary between feminine and masculine roles, devoting time and energy to the details that set her apart as an exceptional wife and mother."⁶

The Brady kids rarely help with cleaning, cooking or shopping during the series; when they are home they spend their time talking on the phone, watching television, talking to each other and doing homework in their bedrooms, or playing in the backyard. Mike's salary and emotional support, along with Alice and Carol's seamless division of domestic effort enable the Brady children to attend to their private interests, activities and concerns. The Brady household runs like a well-oiled machine when everyone sticks to the gendered family script. Problems arise and things get precarious when someone resists the script and threatens change. When the children wrestle with their identities, sometimes it is expressed as dissatisfaction with the house. It seems that when a Brady is trying to change, there does not seem to be *enough room* for such a transformation. The Brady house is a static space; efforts to transform usually bring disappointment and sometimes pain.

⁶ Marinucci, p. 515.

Space and Privacy in the Brady House

Though the Brady home has four bedrooms, a den, a family room, a living room and a fortress of a backyard, the family is regularly frustrated by their lack of privacy and space. In the first season's episode "To Move or Not to Move" Mike and Carol consider buying a larger home to better accommodate six children and three adults. Early in the episode, Greg walks into Marcia's bedroom because she cannot hear him knocking (she is playing a record loudly). She is upset that he barged in, in part because she is wearing only a slip. Carol overhearing the conflict comes into Marcia's bedroom and demands to know the problem. Greg explains that he needed to use the bathroom, but it is locked from the inside. The bathroom, which curiously has no toilet, adjoins the girls' and boys' bedrooms. The six children share it, and throughout the series, the bathroom is a regular source of complaint.

But in this episode, Carol pays attention when Marcia and Greg both grumble that two bedrooms and one bathroom (sans toilet) are not large enough for the six siblings. Later, when Carol broaches the subject of a larger house with Mike, they overhear Greg pounding on the bathroom door upstairs. Jan who is brushing her hair is oblivious to his demand to open the door so that the boys can brush their teeth before they go to bed. Mike, remarkably, finds a larger home, the next day, but ultimately the family relents and they take their cramped house off of the market.

But that is hardly the last of the spatial conflicts that the Bradys experience with their home. In the second season's episode entitled "My Son, the Man," Greg, now in high school, asks his father for a room of his own. He explains to Mike that, "I am a man now and a man needs his privacy." Later the same evening, Mike and Carol discuss the possibility of Greg having a room. Carol says, "I guess he is growing up." She suggests the garage, but Mike objects because it would require major construction. When Carol proposes the attic, Mike laughs and says it would be perfect if Greg were 2 ½ feet tall. Then Carol suggests the den, but Mike objects and suggests the family room, Carol says, "the family room? That's where I do my sewing and the girls practice their dancing there and besides where would all the kids play?" Mike relents and tells Greg he can use his den as his bedroom. He explains he will move his things into the family room (this new setup is never shown in the episode, however). When Greg exclaims that he is excited to make the den his "own scene," Mike tells his son that he cannot get "silly" — no nails or paint on the walls.

Greg's new bedroom is decorated with cheap decorations such as a strobe light, mobiles hanging from the ceiling, posters, and a mattress on the floor. After Carol sees it for the first time she exclaims to Mike, "it is amazing how quickly it went from Danish modern to American disaster." But Greg does not see it that way. Cultural historian Jason Reid explains that the postwar suburban teen

bedroom was "...one of the most important sites of leisure in the home, an exclusive, almost sacred space in which teens were expected to shape their identity and distinguish themselves from the rest of the family through various acts of consumption."⁷ Along with having his own room, in his efforts to be a man, Greg buys new clothes and refuses to go on the family camping trip. His brothers and sisters snub him because they are hurt and annoyed that Greg is isolating himself from them. After the girl, Greg has a crush on rejects him, and his new high school friends do not include him in their weekend plans, Greg feels disheartened and lonely.

Mike, who discovers that Greg's attempts at autonomy have failed, convinces his son to come along on the family camping trip. Once Greg realizes he is not yet a man, he stops valuing his privacy so much and turns toward his family. He quickly moves back to the bedroom that he shares with his two little brothers. His disappointments lead him back to the family and interdependence. In the final scene of the episode, Mike, who is still the only man in the family, has taken back his den. The strobe light, posters, mobiles have disappeared. Mike is working on a set of blueprints that confuse Carol. Mike tells her that he got to thinking about the rest of their children reaching high school age and says jokingly, "Here is our house with eight bedrooms." In the Bradys' suburban world, *making room* for independence is an ongoing frustration that even a successful architect like Mike Brady cannot resolve.

Two seasons later, Greg is once again frustrated with his lack of privacy and reaches his tipping point when a college friend comes over to the house for a visit. Bobby barges in and turns on the television when Greg and his friend are talking in the family room. When Bobby refuses to leave, they go upstairs to the boys' bedroom, but Peter is there and he wants to stay so he can listen to their conversation about girls. "Why should I leave my own room," Peter says to Greg, "if you want privacy go in the garage." Peter's comment about an exile to the garage is followed by the laugh track, suggesting that the writers thought the garage was a funny and odd space for Greg and his friend to inhabit. Later in the episode "The Hustlers", the Bradys put a pool table in the garage, temporarily transforming the garage into a gendered space for boys and men to gather.

Greg asks Mike if he can move into his college friend's apartment. "I really need the privacy, Greg complains. "A guy my age needs a room of his own. I've got Peter and Bobby in my hair all of the time." Mike says no to Greg's proposal, but does decide that Greg can move his room to the attic. In season two, the attic was not an option for an additional bedroom because the ceiling was only 2 ½ feet. But by the end of season four, the attic ceiling was 8 or 9 feet—

⁷ Reid, Jason, "My Room! Private! Keep out! This Means You! "A Brief Overview of the Autonomous Teen Bedroom in Post-World War II America," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5 (2012), pp. 419-433.

certainly high enough for Mike and Greg (the tallest members of the family) to move around easily.

The problem with Mike and Greg's plan is that Carol also promises Marcia that she can use the attic for her bedroom. Marcia, who is in high school, explains to her mother that, "when a girl gets to be my age, she really needs a room of her own." Carol thinks the attic is ugly and she also worries that Marcia will feel lonely in the attic. Marcia explains, "That is the whole point. I'll have privacy." Peter and Bobby are thrilled that Greg is moving to the attic and enthusiastically help him move his furniture to the third floor. Jan and Cindy, on the other hand, tell Marcia that they will miss her, and Jan offers to give Marcia her part of the closet if she will reconsider.

To resolve the attic dilemma, Mike and Carol agree that Greg should get the attic because Marcia can have it the following year when Greg goes to college. Upset by her parents' decision, Marcia complains to Greg that, "a girl needs more space. There's never any room in my closet or my drawers. I can't even use my hair dryer when I want to." Marcia's reasons for wanting her own room change slightly when she articulates them to Greg. She tells her mother she wants privacy; she tells her brother she wants more space to do her hair and store her clothes.

Greg wants the attic for privacy, not just extra space, but he sees how upset his sister is and gives the room to Marcia. Peter and Bobby do not want their big brother to move back into their room, however; so, Peter and Bobby arrange a series of fake phone calls for Marcia. To take the calls, Marcia has to walk down two flights of stairs three different times only to discover that there is no one on the phone. Marcia thinks Greg is responsible for the prank and tells him that he did it to bug her—"so maybe I'd give up the attic out of pure exhaustion."

When Peter and Bobby finally confess that they did it because they liked having more room for themselves, Marcia decides to give the attic bedroom back to Greg. As a result of Peter and Bobby's phone call prank, Marcia realizes that her new living arrangement gives her too much space. Two flights of stairs separate her from the phone that is on the first floor (Carol and Mike have a phone in their bedroom, but the Brady children do not use their parents' room without permission.). Greg, who apparently is not concerned with the distance from his room to the telephone, finally has his privacy—at the end of the episode, he is asleep in his attic bedroom, with his surfboard resting next to the bed.

Most of the Bradys are not outwardly frustrated with their lack of spatial autonomy. Carol, who manages the family's emotional needs, is not desirous for a room of her own, not even a small sewing room. Alice and Mike, the only two paid employees in the family, already have rooms of their own, and besides Mike is only at home on weekends and in the evenings. He lives only part of his life at home. Marcia thought she wanted privacy, but she really just wanted more space for her clothes and a place to brush her hair. Her sisters were sad to see

her move out, and even offered her more space in the closet if she would change her mind. Carol was worried Marcia would be lonely in a room of her own. The guys, on the other hand, value privacy and spatial autonomy. Mike safeguards his den. Greg relentlessly campaigns for his own room, and his brothers are ecstatic when he moves out. To be a man in the Brady family requires navigating both the private and public spheres. Because Brady men must live in both worlds, their need for domestic privacy seems to be greater. Unlike the women in the family, men have a hard time being entirely comfortable at home, particularly when there are too many other family members around.

Gendered Spaces and Places in The Brady Bunch

There are clearly demarcated spaces for men and women in the Brady home and when boundaries are crossed, difficulties and personal frustrations ensue. In the first season episode, "The Grass Is Always Greener," the still newlyweds, Mike and Carol, agree to switch parental roles one Saturday morning. Carol will oversee baseball practice in the backyard, and Mike will help Marcia with her cooking merit badge in the kitchen. When Mike tells the boys that their "mother" is going to help with baseball practice on Saturday morning, Greg exclaims, "Dad, she's a girl. A female." When Carol tells Marcia that her "daddy" is going to help her with her cooking badge, Marcia says in protest, "Mom, Alice won't even let Dad in the kitchen."

Though Carol and Mike both prepared for their new roles by reading books about baseball and cooking respectively, they both fail miserably when they cross over into one another's domains. During the boy's backyard practice Carol confused third base for first, fell when she went to catch and bat the ball, and landed on her buttock, sliding into home base. Carol is physically exhausted and embarrassed by how difficult it was to coach the boys in the backyard. Before Marcia begins working on her cooking badge, Mike tells Carol to stay out of the kitchen (this should not be a problem because Carol rarely cooks, goes grocery shopping, or even sets the table). He also tells Alice she can have the afternoon off, but she asks if she can stay and watch.

Under the supervision of Alice, Marcia, Jan, and Cindy, Mike has as much success in the kitchen as Carol has in the backyard. His first blunder is overbuying at the grocery store, and then he drops a carton of eggs and cleans up the mess with a half of a roll of paper towels (rather than a mop). He makes another mess when he tries to use the electric mixer, and then falls on the floor when he is reaching for a bowl on a high shelf. He slips and falls again when he is mopping the floor. Like Carol's backyard endeavor, Mike is tired and sore after his adventure in the kitchen. They are both so worn out that they have a difficult time passing the milk and the rolls at dinner, and can barely walk up the stairs to their room after dinner. Carol and Mike finally confess to one another that they

found their new roles difficult and they learned their lesson — the grass is always greener in somebody else's backyard.

The next morning, Carol complains that she has to help Marcia with her sewing badge, and Mike complains he has to help the boys practice football. When Alice suggests that they trade roles again, they both exclaim, "No!" The competent Mike and levelheaded Carol are so unsuccessful crossing over into one another's gendered spaces, that they experience physical pain and exhaustion. At the end of the episode, they have learned their lesson; men are in charge of the backyard, and women rule the house, even women with fulltime housekeepers.

When Carol leaves the confines of her home and backyard, and tries her hand at writing for a magazine in the second season, she discovers, once again, that domesticity is the key to her success and happiness. At the beginning of the episode, "Tell it Like it Is," Mike awakens at two in the morning and discovers Carol is not in the bed. Concerned, Mike looks for her in the both of the children's bedrooms, and then walks down the stairs, peering in the direction of the family room and kitchen. When he sees the light coming from the den, he walks suspiciously into his office (who would be in *his* den?) only to discover Carol sitting in a chair, writing. Mike tells her, "I looked all over the place, except the dog house, for you."

Mike gets irritated when Carol refuses to tell him what she is writing. His frustrations grow the next morning when Carol does not come down for breakfast because she is getting ready for a mysterious early lunch in town (with Mr. Delafield, the editor of the magazine *Tomorrow's Woman*). After Carol meets Mr. Delafield at the restaurant, and he orders lunch for both of them, their conversation turns to Carol's writing. When she is explaining to Mr. Delafield that all she's ever written is letters and that she is a "rank amateur," Mike appears at their table. For a moment, Mike seems suspicious of Carol and Mr. Delafield, but after he sits down, he realizes his wife is not having an affair but has secretly been working on a story about their family for *Tomorrow's Woman*.

Mike is not at all angry with Carol for keeping her story a secret; in fact, he supports her by setting up a table and typewriter in his den. Somewhat reluctant to use her husband's space, Carol says, "This has always been your den, dear." Mike replies, "Listen, I am the proudest husband in town, and you can have this whole den to yourself *until you are finished with your article*." Mike bravely gives up his den for two weeks (each version of the story took her a week to write) and Carol works diligently on her story. But a week after she gives it to Mr. Delafield to read, she gets a rejection letter.

Mike takes it upon himself to meet with Mr. Delafield for coffee at a restaurant to see if he can help Carol get another chance at *Tomorrow's Woman*. Mr. Delafield explains that Carol's story was a little too real. With the world as complicated as it is, he explains, *Today's Woman* readers like to read happy,

pleasant stories. Mike suggests that Carol be given a chance to revise her story, and Mr. Delafield agrees. Carol is angry when she finds out what Mike has done, not because he intervened, as if she was one of his children, but because she is hurt and disappointed that her story was rejected. Though she resists it, Carol rewrites her story.

Mr. Delafield loves Carol's new positive spin on the family, and wants her story for the following month's issue. Carol and Mr. Delafield schedule a tea at the Brady home, with *Tomorrow's Woman's* promotional team and photographer. Unfortunately, Carol gets the time wrong, and is not prepared when they arrive an hour earlier than she was expecting them. When they arrive, Carol is wearing a robe and has curlers in her hair. The children argue with one another in front of the promotional team; Peter has a black eye, and Greg announces he has poison oak. Just when it does not seem it could get any worse, Mike comes home with two bunches of flowers in his arms, and he collides with Alice, who is carrying a tray of sandwiches.

The promotional team tells Carol that her real family is nothing like the one in her story. Mr. Delafield agrees, but surprises Carol by telling her that he will publish her first version. Despite the fact that the first story she has ever written is going to be published in *Tomorrow's Woman*, Carol tells Mike that she wants to break the typewriter so she never has to go "through this again." It is not entirely clear what Carol has been *through*. Sure, some sandwiches fell on the floor, but Carol is getting published in a national magazine, and her family loves her and supports her writing career. She did not even have to cook for the family or clean the house while she wrote her story. In the final scene, Carol, who has given up writing, serves Alice dinner on a tray. At the end of the episode it is Alice who has no house, children or husband of her own, who sits at the typewriter, working hard to tell her story.

While the Bradys rarely concern themselves with the social, cultural, and political issues of the early 1970s, in the second season, the women's liberation movement does manage to infiltrate the Brady home. When a local reporter interviews Marcia about women's lib, she tells him that it is not fair that boys put girls down and that girls should do something about it. She immediately regrets that she has spoken out, and she tries to prevent her family from watching her interview. Usually such an effort would not be difficult, for the Bradys never watch the news, but as luck would have it, Marcia witnesses Bobby, Peter, Greg, Alice, Carol, and Mike watching her on the evening news. After her interview, the boys laugh at the idea that girls can do anything boys can. Tauntingly, Greg tells Marcia that he would like to see her prove it.

When Marcia asks Mike and Carol if they are angry with her for speaking out, they assure her that they are proud and supportive of her. But later, Mike confesses to Carol that some of the things the women's liberation movement wants are "pretty far out." Carol replies, "Well, I've never gone out marching,

but I do believe in some of their causes.” They attempt to settle the debate with Alice, but always the diplomat, she refuses to take sides and instead puts rolls in the oven.

That night Marcia surprises Mike, Greg and the rest of the Frontier Scouts, when she appears at their council meeting and announces that she wants to become a scout. “Oh well, I don’t think I understand,” says Stan, a scoutmaster. Mike, who is also a scoutmaster, takes his daughter aside and says, “Marcia, not that women’s lib business again.” But she refuses to back down. Mike and Stan, scour the Frontier Scouts manual, but finally Stan announces to the troop: “Fellas, I am afraid there is nothing in the regulations that says a Frontier Scout has to be a boy. I am afraid we’ve just always assumed it was for boys.”

Marcia has to pass a field initiation test before she can become an official Frontier Scout. The test takes place in the mountain wilderness, far removed from the comforts of her suburban home. On the hike to their campsite, Marcia lags behind the rest of the troop. In fact, Marcia takes *too long* to do everything on the scout trip. Even though she passes the initiation test by setting up her tent, building a fire, administering bandages and digging a hole, the scouts are not impressed because it takes Marcia too much time to finish the tests. When Greg grows impatient watching his sister set up her tent, Mike reminds him that there are no time limits. But Marcia’s final test, a hike by herself in the forest, does have a time limit. At the campsite, Greg cackles, assuring the other scouts that Marcia will never finish her test in time. “Listen you did blaze a proper trail for her to follow, didn’t you?” Mike asks. “Oh, sure Dad,” Greg replies, “of course some of the marks I left may be a little small.” Mike shows dubious ethical judgment (as both a father and a scoutmaster) when he takes Greg aside. He accuses his son of giving Marcia “a hard time,” but does not mention the fact that Greg cheated by sabotaging the initiation test.

In spite of the fact that Greg rigged the test, Marcia arrives back at the campsite with a minute to spare. When Greg reluctantly goes to her tent to tell Marcia that she is an official Frontier Scout, he finds his sister fast asleep. He says, “How do you like that? Most guys would be jumping around, yelling their heads off. My kooky sister goes to sleep.” It seems Marcia’s victory for women’s liberation comes with provisos; a girl can do what a boy can do but it requires more effort and time. The night of Marcia’s Frontier Scout initiation, Mike asks Carol if Marcia is ready to go. Carol says, “Oh she’ll be down in a minute, you know it always takes girls longer.” Carol, Mike and Greg are stunned when Marcia walks down the stairs wearing a short, bright blue jumper instead of her Frontier Scouts uniform. She tells them that she is not going to the initiation ceremony. “Chopping and tracking is nice, I guess, if you’re a boy,” Marcia explains. “It really is. I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it even though I’m a girl.”

Mike and Greg are mystified, but Marcia does not try to explain it further. She makes her preference clear when she looks at her mom and says, "Oh, did the new fashion magazine come yet?" "Sure, it's up in my room," Carol says, "I'll show it to you." As mother and daughter ascend the stairs, to the realm of privacy and emotionality, father and son look at one another with disbelief. "I don't understand women at all," Greg says. "Well," Mike explains, "it's a woman's prerogative to change her mind." Greg asks, "Who said that?" Mike answers "I don't know, but..." together father and son finish the sentence, "it was a woman."

Mature or young, married or not, Brady women *can* be successful outside of the home, but they prefer to keep a private and domestic focus, even if it is a static and sometimes uncomfortable space. When Brady women brush up against public life, they may feel temporary exhilaration, but frustration, exhaustion, and disappointment quickly follow. Their discomfort leads to retreat. Brady men, on the other hand, must learn early on to straddle both the private and public spheres, whether they want to or not. To be a man in the Brady household means never entirely feeling *at home*. Their discomfort can never entirely be relieved, but a room of their own certainly helps.

Conclusion

To be sure, this essay may not address Annemarie Adams' call for scholarly accounts of the ways *real* people lived in and experienced their postwar suburban homes. But by paying close attention to how the Brady family lived in and experienced theirs, we can more easily understand the ways *The Brady Bunch* has contributed to the "horizon of expectations" about suburban living during the last four decades. *The Brady Bunch* house, I have argued, is an iconic suburban home and it important to take it seriously as a representation of domestic space and suburban life. At first glance, *The Brady Bunch* home seems like an open amiable space where the goofy Brady family lives. But by paying closer attention to it becomes clear that the Brady home is a place of discomfort. Situation comedies, as George Lipsitz explains, use narrative devices that inhibit closure, which can expose contradictions to the patriarchy, capitalism, and the state. "As long as people's needs and desires remain unsatisfied, the prospects for narrative and ideological closure are always incomplete," Lipsitz writes. "As the old people used to say in the days of slavery, 'You can hide the fire, but what you gonna do with the smoke?'"⁸ Surely, the interior set of *The Brady Bunch* was never designed to represent a static and claustrophobic space. Yet when we look at the smoke instead of the fire, the Brady house is sort of like a well-policed border

⁸ Lipsitz, George, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 96.

crossing. There is always the threat that the house will batter its occupants if they attempt to cross over without permission from the guards.



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