Photographing “Government Girls:” Esther Bubley, Wartime Femininity, and the Office of War Information

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In June of 1943, photographer Esther Bubley suggestively photographed a group of young women sunbathing on a sidewalk outside Idaho Hall, a "war duration residence hall" part of the Arlington Farms complex the government built near Washington, D.C. for female workers (figure 1).* As part of a small series of photographs Bubley made of these women from different angles, this image shows five "government girls" soaking in the sun behind their dormitory-style housing. Their scantily clad bodies would not be noteworthy given their activity except for the fact that several of them are not wearing swimsuits. Instead, they have merely pulled off their dresses, which are either laid out beneath them – as is the case with the woman on the far left – or bunched up around their waists – as with the young woman sitting in the middle. Several of the women are lying in simple, white undergarments, and the young lady sitting up in the center has stripped off even that last layer above her waist. Although her back is turned toward the camera, her torso rotates around as she looks over her shoulder with a small smile on her face, and though her arms are raised together in some semblance of modestly, the curve of her right breast just barely becomes noticeable under her arm. Still, she remains apparently unconcerned that she is sitting there bare-chested in a public space, as do her scarcely more covered friends.

Although young men and soldiers visited Arlington Farms often, as evidenced by Bubley's other photographs, these ladies lay out indifferent to who may walk by. Only one woman looks up as Bubley works, her face expressing a flirtatious combination of curiosity and amusement as she shades her eyes from the sun. Moreover, the surrounding physical environment only emphasizes the evocative nature of this photo. The sensuality the young women's bodies arouse contrasts sharply with the hard lines and institutional feel of the building behind them and the concrete lying underneath them. As the women lay on the sidewalk, the unfinished, grassless yard around them accurately suggests that the construction of Arlington

* All illustrations can be viewed in the supplemental document uploaded with this thesis.

Farms only recently finished, further implying that these women just arrived to Washington and are, perhaps, already acting in ways they would not at home, embracing their newfound independence. In the same way, a face just noticeable in the upper left corner of the frame barely peaks out over the windowsill as if its owner does not want to be caught on film, thus raising the question of what it is exactly she is doing up there.

Just over a year earlier in February of 1942, Alberto Vargas – the Peruvian-born illustrator of the famous series of pin-ups called Vargas Girls – drew a portrayal of a lounging young woman, remarkable for her similarities to and yet dissonance from the central woman in Bubley’s photograph (figure 2). In Vargas’s illustration, the young woman is similarly underdressed, adorned in a Hawaiian theme, wearing only a short grass skirt with a hip-height slit and flower lei accessories. She is sitting down, leaning to her left with long legs sprawling to the right. Just as Bubley’s subject does a year later, this woman sits topless, with her naked back to the camera, the edge of her right breast visible as she turns to look over her shoulder. Still, Vargas’s singularly masculine perspective is made quite clear through the fantastical, disproportional aspects of his sexualized woman. Her seemingly endless legs come to small, fetishized feet. The curve of the woman’s chest suggests perfectly round, high breasts that are humorously large for her particularly small waist. The creamy quality of her skin is only made more noticeable by the clear, bright blueness of her eyes and the dark red she wears on her lips, both of which also add to the sultry come-hither expression she gives the viewer.

Although these examples from Bubley and Vargas illustrate a mere sliver of the diverse portrayals of women made during wartime, they also are suggestive of the complex and often contradictory ways American society viewed changing gender conventions as well as the noteworthy manner with which a little known photographer intervened in this visual cultural

moment. Bubley is perhaps one of the least recognized American photographers to come out of the Roy Stryker generation. She worked for the Office of War Information (OWI) – the renamed Farm Security Administration (FSA) – for just one year in 1943, but the resulting photography from her time there is striking. In it, she challenges the male perspective inherent in imagery of women like the Vargas Girl illustrations or wartime propaganda that male government officials and advertising executives almost entirely controlled. Critically, Bubley concurrently accepts and rejects various tropes from these contemporary depictions of women. In doing so, she comments on the role of young women in society in ways that defy both expectations of women in the early 1940s and her own reputation as a demure, female photographer.

Bubley's photography of women working and living in Washington, D.C. in 1943 distinctively depicts a woman's view of wartime femininity and female sexuality that is grounded in her status as a young woman who is, in many ways, a prime example of the young, single, white, women[†] she photographs. Reading Bubley's images in the contexts of her personal history, the broader social history, and the visual culture of her time allows for a fuller understanding of her photography that moves past the superficial and accesses a new visual record of wartime gender roles. As such, this article begins by setting the stage; it first places Bubley within the context of the thousands of young women flooding into Washington, D.C. to work government war jobs. This new group of "government girls" in the city upset gender norms, pushing society to try to control women's lives at home and work. Fear over female sexuality exploded, and government agencies tried to manage that social anxiety. Visual depictions of women in propaganda, and media at large, play a crucial role here. Imagery used to

[†] Although Bubley did make photographs of African American women, older women, and women who were married and/or had children, this paper will focus specifically on her portrayals of young, white women who were single and living alone or with friends in Washington, D.C. during the war. Thus, each time the women in Bubley's photography are mentioned, it refers to this particular group.

fight anxiety concerning changes in femininity mostly follows the dichotomy of the virgin and the whore, with the slight deviations. Next, this article analyzes Bubley's images to argue that her photographs and the women in them appropriated the sexuality imposed on them by mass media while also claiming sexual agency in rare ways that go beyond the newfound, sexual self-awareness and confidence scholars have long recognized as emergent in wartime America. Finally, it considers how Bubley's photography was – or was not – published at the time as a means of studying her legacy as an early female photographer who subverted conventional views of women in ways not generally seen until the 1970s.

This article thus works at the intersection of several historiographies. Few critical studies exist on Bubley's photography, but Bonnie Yochelson, Leslie Davol, Melissa A. McEuen, and Jacqueline Ellis are all notable scholars who have focused on diverse aspects of her photography from the 1940s through the 1960s and taken disparate approaches.[1] In contrast, many more scholars have studied both the complex transformations Americans' perceptions of femininity underwent during the war and the dominant imagery and/or propaganda depicting womanhood that both fueled and reacted to these changes. Starting with Betty Friedan's 1963 examination of heroine images in magazines, scholars and journalists have debated the causes and consequences of shifting views of womanhood. Maureen Honey, Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, Meghan Winchell, and Marilyn Hegarty all contribute to our understandings of the new role of women in society, shifting conventions of gender and sexuality, and the role of the state and media in all of these changes.[2]

Critically, Joanne Meyerowitz challenges Friedan's perception of a monolithic and repressive popular culture pushing women back into domesticity after the war, and Melissa A. McEuen builds off Meyerowitz in her examination of the relationships between society's

perceptions of ideal womanhood, the government, and American women. She emphasizes how women were scrutinized and sexualized in new ways, how society tried to "manage gender and sex along traditional lines" in reaction to rapid social and economic change, and how women were able to "find creative ways to empower themselves." Finally, Maria Elena Buszek traces the history of the pin-up from the 1860s through the late twentieth century and studies the ways in which women appropriated representations of their sexuality through this whole period, long before second wave feminist artists like Cindy Sherman did in the 1970s and 1980s.[3]

While building on all of the above historiography, this article also interjects it in two distinct ways. First, while agreeing with McEuen on the tendency of home front societies to attempt to "manage" gender and sex, it considers the depiction of wartime women in imagery made by a woman as opposed to that controlled by male policy-makers and media executives to show an alternative way in which women empowered themselves. Second, it reevaluates Buszek's account of the relationship between male and female portrayals of ideal femininity and sexuality during WWII. Buszek argues that "more women in the 'real world' began imitating" pin-up imagery, exploiting it for its representation of "womanpower." However, reading the pin-up in a broader field of imagery exposes the ways wartime depictions of women subtly resisted the potential for female strength and independence. Thus, I argue that women – like Bubley and her subjects – appropriated the sexual self-awareness and confidence illustrated in contemporary imagery but challenged the persistent male perspective of female submission.[4]

Wartime Washington and Women

As a young woman who migrated from the Midwest to Washington, D.C. just as the Second World War broke out, Esther Bubley was, herself, a perfect example of the women she

photographed. “Esther’s journey didn’t differ much from those of the bus-hailing, bus-terminal bench-napping, boardinghouse-snoozing or jitterbugging young women she would soon document,” Melissa Fay Greene notes, “she, too, was a modern young woman defying convention, setting off from the provinces for the capital to make her fortune.” Instead of making her too close to the subjects of her photos, however, this identification is precisely what allowed Bubley to make intimate, engaging photographs of female workers in D.C. during the war. Bubley knew how to photograph young women in their time away from work because she experienced the same changes and opportunities in her life as did her subjects. In fact, her status as a single woman is central to understanding how her photography functioned in the political and social environment of her time. Considering Bubley’s personal history within the broader social historical and visual cultural contexts of her time sets the stage for how Bubley challenges the dominant tropes found in wartime portrayals of young women.[5]

Born on February 16, 1921, in Phillips, Wisconsin, Esther Bubley was the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants. Louis and Ida Bubley had five children – Esther was the fourth – and they moved around a bit before settling in Superior, Wisconsin to run a general store and auto parts business. Esther knew early on, when she was four years old, that she wanted to be an artist. As a teenager, she began photographing children in her neighborhood and sold the images to their parents to make spending money. In high school, she worked as the yearbook editor, and at fifteen, Bubley won first place in a photography contest run by the *Superior Evening Telegram*. After high school, Esther attended Superior State Teacher’s College for two years before taking a job in a photo-finishing lab in Duluth, Minnesota in order to save money for one year of classes at the Minneapolis School of Art. At the end of that year, in 1941, Bubley followed her sisters Enid and Claire to Washington, D.C., where they found work as a nurse and

court reporter, respectively. Unable to find work as a photographer, Bubley went to New York, where she very briefly worked for *Vogue* and received a scholarship to take classes at the School of Modern Photography. By the spring of 1942, Bubley was back in D.C. working at the National Archives and, later, in the OWI darkroom. Determined to become a photographer for Stryker, Bubley spent her spare time making photographs around Washington. She focused on what she knew and subjects that were easily available – young women just like her.[6]

During the war years, women like Bubley from across the country flocked into big cities and experienced the relaxation of traditional means of control. Over 7 million new women – those who had not previously been wage earners – joined the 11 million women already in the workforce during the war years, and unmarried women, in particular, were willing to relocate anywhere that provided higher wages and job security. Hundreds of thousands of young women moved away from home to cities sometimes hundreds of miles away, which allowed them to escape their parents' watchful eyes. In fact, by the 1950s, white, unmarried women were more likely to be living away from their parents than with them. Moreover, the relocation of single women into cities combined with increased opportunities for jobs in conventionally all-male fields and an increase in the medium income for women by thirty-eight percent. The war thus provided women with the professional and social justification for leaving the confines of their parents' homes, reinventing themselves, exploring their sexuality, and finding confidence and autonomy. Social and sexual mores at the time loosened, and women grappled with both the problems and potential their own sexuality presented in the public sphere.[7]

Cities felt and reacted to the effects of the sharp increase in this demographic during the war – perhaps no more so than Washington, where rapidly growing government agencies needed office workers. Many Americans worried about how changing gender conventions threatened

both the war effort and society at large. The housing shortage that was intense in D.C. but existed in many locations around the country intensified these fears. The "duration" housing the government promised in the form of publically funded "girls' dormitories" in D.C. were not completed until 1943. Thousands of women arriving in the city in the spring of 1942 thus struggled to find places to live. In a phenomenon that clearly elucidates social fears concerning young women, female laborers were often barred from renting rooms in private houses in many cities; their "young and unattached" status made people suspicious of possible immorality. Landlords complained in Housing Questionnaires that female renters invited their boyfriends over too often, "became ill from abortions," and hung their "personal wash in conspicuous places." In one claim, a landlord accused a woman of apparently being a "dope peddler."[8]

Responding to social anxiety surrounding increasingly autonomous young women, landlords, the federal government, and mass media all attempted to manage or control the behavior and attitude of single women in cities. In Washington, D.C. boarding houses, for example, landlords imposed rules designed "to uphold the occupants' respectability and moral character." To this effect, women had to follow a "strict code of conduct" when entertaining, only visit with men in public parlors with the lights on and doors open, and come home by a set curfew each night. Many women complained to the Washington Housing Association that landladies were challenging their "sense of self respect" by refusing to "respect [their] privacy." Unfortunately, housing was difficult enough to come by that they rarely had a choice in the matter. Partially as a result of complaints by landladies, lists of "do's and don't's" that dictated women's behavior appeared in newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts, and the Women's Bureau sent prescriptive literature to women to try to make them act like "ladies" should.[9]

On a much broader level, the federal government worked with mass media in attempts to manage young women and allay fears of shifting gender norms by circumscribing women's roles in society through visual culture. Paradoxically, imagery that the government and media institutions disseminated was central in catalyzing changing gender conventions, fueling backlash against these changes, *and* responding to said backlash. First, propaganda upended gender norms by convincing women to 'patriotically do their duty' – i.e. to join the war effort and support the troops. Other propaganda images further wrought fear by portraying women as the perilous, sexual vixen that was threatening the military and, thus, American victory and freedom. In response, the government tried to quell social anxiety. They attempted to persuade women to return home as the war came to an end, but more implicitly, they relied on imagery that paralleled the art historical dichotomy of the virgin and the whore, thus denying women either strength and autonomy or respectability. Imagery that did not fit neatly in these tropes still depicted women following traditional, hierarchical norms that valued female subordination.

Critically, the upheaval of gender conventions began when the government allied with media during the war to increase the presence of women in the public sphere in unprecedented ways. Using the War Advertising Council – which advertising executives created in December 1941 to disseminated government propaganda free of charge – the OWI worked to bring public discourse into closer alignment with the country's needs – i.e. overturn early social resistance to the idea of women entering the labor force. When the government recognized the need for women's work, the OWI worked with the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson (JWT) to sway public opinion and mobilize women. For the former, they depicted women working as a patriotic duty of unselfish women who 'did their part for the boys.' For the latter, they attracted women to the labor force by rendering war work as glamorous, adventurous, and romantic. The

"new models of romantic fantasy" emphasized socially useful jobs, but the potentially liberating ideas were consistently couched in patriotism stressing the femininity and wholesomeness of women laborers. The glorification of the housewife further undermined the progressive idea of female agency. Propaganda emphasized women putting their families first and reminded them that jobs were "for the duration." When men returned, they would patriotically and dutifully go back to their "real" domestic identity.[10]

Although the success of this "womanpower" campaign is one of the main ways visual culture helped fuel the transformation in perceptions of femininity and female sexuality, the imagery of women joining the war effort ironically always limited the power it gave women. Today, Rosie the Riveter is perhaps the most recognizable icon from World War II and is often associated with the "We Can Do It!" posters that depict a hard working woman with her jaw determinedly set, lips pursed, and eyebrow arched over her confident gaze that challenges the viewer (figure 3). These posters, however, do not show the original Rosie of the 1940s; the link between the two is merely a modern reconstruction of Rosie's story, and the actual depictions of Rosie from the war demonstrate how imagery consistently reinforced hierarchical social values.[11]

Original Rosie imagery demonstrates the media's attempts to get women to join the labor force while consistently illustrating markers of ideal, hyper-feminine but virginal, womanhood. Rosie was initially seen on the cover of a published song called "Rosie the Riveter" in 1942 and in a Norman Rockwell drawing on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943 (figures 4, 5). Messages steadily showed that regardless of military uniform, coveralls, or aprons, the model female worker had a well-made-up face and hair perfectly coiffed – even if under a welding mask. Her ideal feminine appearance is what made her a woman "worth fighting for." Thus, the original Rosie imagery has long eyelashes, pouty lips, and a pert nose. On the song

cover, her lips are a sumptuous red. In both images, Rosie's eyes are turned down in a demure fashion, and the lush eyelashes are only exposed because Rosie is not wearing her goggles, suggesting that being feminine is more important than being safe. Although Rockwell's Rosie has giant arms and is crushing a copy of *Mein Kampf* under her foot, over all, Rosie imagery illustrates the "mask covering the more circumscribed woman of peacetime America."[12]

A complementary example of the constrained woman Rosie represents is seen in a U.S. Employment Service poster in the "womanpower" campaign that states, "I'm Proud…my husband wants me to do my part" (figure 6). As with Rosie, this woman remains feminine despite her coveralls. She has rosy cheeks, ruby red lips, and a put-together appearance. Most importantly, she is wearing a wedding ring, and her husband is standing behind her, hands placed firmly on her shoulders, eyes cast down on her as if he is doting on her. Additionally, she says that her husband "wants" her to work, not that he supports her working, almost as if he is telling her to go work. This subtle difference in language shifts the meaning of the image toward a conservative end. In fact, even if his position in the image indicated him standing behind her decision to work, the idea that she needs his approval and cannot make decisions on her own is significant. It demonstrates the perseverance of conventional ideas of female submissiveness. Finally, the American flag in the background emphasizes how the government accentuated the patriotic nature of female work; the country needed society to accept women at work.[13]

Working in tandem with government propaganda of the "womanpower" campaign that gave women very little power, portrayals of hyper-feminine and highly sexualized women became increasingly prevalent in popular culture. Perhaps demonstrated most effectively by the explosion of Vargas Girl imagery in the early 1940s after first being seen in *Esquire* magazine, Vargas pin-ups "came to serve as an icon for the new, wartime ideals of women's sexuality…a

patriotic ideal for American womanhood." Vargas Girls and other imagery sexualized middle-class women's bodies in unprecedented ways, and erotic depictions of women became ubiquitous not only in military barracks but in homes and stores across the country. Although neither the virgin nor the whore, these women were represented a hybrid – an acceptable sexuality that was always circumscribed by male authority.[14]

Despite providing women with inspiration for their growing sexual confidence, these images ultimately circumscribed female strength by rendering women as the object of male desire. A 1944 calendar that uses a Vargas Girl as Miss February demonstrates this well (figure 7). The illustration shows a woman in an extremely suggestive yoga pose, shooting a saucy look at the viewer. A quip accompanies the drawing: "I'm learning some commando tricks / for keeping fit, they're dandy / and when you men come home again / they're apt to come in handy!" Although art historian Maria Elena Buszek uses this illustration as evidence of how bomber-nose art "underscore[d] the power" given to "modern" women and "symbolically reverse[d] the traditional roles of male/protector, female/protected," this neglects some of the visual nuances of the drawing as well as how the bomber art differed in key ways from the original illustration. The woman depicted surely claims some agency with her knowing look and the innuendo of learning sexual tricks. However, she is also portrayed in a completely vulnerable position. With her legs thrown over her head, she is exposed and powerless to anyone who approaches her. Moreover, the appropriation of this image for bomber-nose art reifies the woman's defenseless position (figure 8). When artist Tony Starcer painted this Vargas drawing on the side of a B-17 bomber, he placed her under a drawing of mountains and wrote "MOUNT 'N RIDE" along the side of the image. This caption entirely overturns the agency originally given to the woman, telling the viewer that this woman is 'ready to be taken.'[15]

Building off the Vargas phenomenon, the exploitation of the female body is made evident in visual culture ranging from advertisements for cleaning supplies, soda drinks, stockings, and cosmetics to Miss America pageants and leg competitions. A 1942 LUX soap ad demonstrates how imagery "condoned exhibitionism, voyeurism, and desire" while simultaneously rendering the woman "mut[e]… making her the model object of desire." The woman is unaware that she is being spied on, and her position on her back with her legs in the air suggests a sexual position, just as the Vargas Girl turned bomber art did above. Perhaps most famously, Betty Grable's pin-up pose – with her hands on her hips as she stands facing away from the camera, looking over her shoulder – is one that stresses vulnerability in extremely similar ways (figure 9). Grable's balance is compromised as she stands, body twisted around, in three-and-a-half inch heels with only one foot entirely on the ground. Posed in a bathing suit against a desolate, thus defenseless, background, Grable's derrière becomes the focus of the picture, purposefully prompting heterosexual fantasies while simultaneously stressing her powerlessness as an early example of rear-entry imagery. From propaganda urging women into war work through pop culture renditions of sexual and erotic women, the government and media helped push women into the public sphere in new ways but paradoxically kept women in the subordinate role to men.[16]

Entangled in this story are also the ways in which the government's use of imagery fueled the social anxiety emerging concerning women's behavior now that they were in public in more obvious ways. After driving women out of conventional roles, the government condoned and disseminated imagery depicting newly sexualized women by permitting it on government property – the bombers – and using it in propaganda created by government agencies. A 1942 poster responding to the spreading of venereal disease in the military demonstrates how the government, in opposition to imagery depicting ideal, patriotic, virginal womanhood,

simultaneously portrayed women as the whorish sexual threat (figure 10). The illustration of a sailor holding back his friend from engaging with an alluring, disproportionately curvaceous woman who is clearly meant to be a prostitute is shown under a message that reads, “A sailor doesn’t have to prove he’s a man!” Beyond saying that being a sailor inherently means being masculine and, thus, sexually aggressive, the underlying message of the poster is that it is the woman who is threatening; it is the “girl who infects,” and women who try to be sexually aggressive are immoral, diseased vixen. Likewise, the military’s approach to the soldiers’ social lives off the bases illustrates their perception that women had more responsibility for men’s sexual behavior than men did themselves. The government cooperated with the United Service Organization (USO) to open clubs near military bases for servicemen and told young female volunteers that they needed to nurture and comfort men who needed human contact to retain their humanity. Meanwhile, the government distributed chemical prophylaxis on military bases and said that “a soldier won’t go any further than a girl permits,” thus suggesting that all wartime sex was consensual and that the impetus was on women to be chaste “good girls.”[17]

The double standard apparent here demonstrates – just as the “womanpower” campaigns did – the maintenance of conservative gender roles and ideas of female sexuality throughout the war. Anytime strength, competence, and egalitarianism were possible in images of femininity, those ideals were overwhelmed by dependence, vulnerability, and conservatism. Male policy-makers, advertising managers, and artists controlled the imagery that shaped Americans’ perceptions of young, single women. Too often, therefore, “American women, as the message of public policy during the war years suggested, were treated as passive objects without a will of their own, lifeless pawns to be manipulated at will.” This is seen in images of both the virgin and the whore, but it is also seen in the completely static nature of the imagery. The women in pin-

ups and advertisements are portrayed frozen in time and space. Often on empty backdrops, in poses that resist any implication of movement, the women are objects to be acted on.[18]

It is this lack of female agency – in both how women were portrayed and who was doing the portraying – that Esther Bubley contests in her 1943 photography. Bubley makes her photographs in a historical and cultural moment in which social fears over changing gender roles emerged in reaction to the government pulling women into public space in new ways and government and popular imagery sexualizing the female body in an obvert and unprecedented manner. Despite governmental attempts at managing social anxiety, the relationship between society and single women was tense. Thousands of women entered cities like Washington, D.C., gained independence, and had space to redefine themselves. Esther Bubley was there in the midst of these transformations, ready to participate in and document the experiences of women in Washington, D.C. in ways that were politically charged, and it is impossible to grasp the full meanings behind Bubley's photos without grounding it this broader historical context. The experiences of single women across America were that of Bubley writ large, and this allowed her to see her subjects in distinct ways from the more prolific imagery circulating at the time.

Bubley Before Stryker

In photography Bubley made in 1943 both before and after Roy Stryker hired her at the OWI, she commented on young women in D.C. – her peers – and their status as respectable women. She challenged conventional ideas of femininity by rejecting society's fears regarding the potentially promiscuous behavior of young women arriving in cities and rejecting the vulnerable, submissive role in which contemporary imagery placed women. In January 1943, in a personal project she hoped would convince Roy Stryker to hire her as a field photographer at the

OWI, Bubley photographed Dissin's boarding house, an old mansion converted into a twenty-one-apartment residence on Massachusetts Avenue. Both men and women lived at Dissin's, and although more of Bubley's photographs focus on women, she also documented relations between the two. Through many of her photographs, she brings the viewer exceptionally close to her subjects' lives, portraying them in their daily routines as well as in instances of rule breaking. Interestingly, Bubley makes both of these feel incredibly intimate, almost invasive. In doing so, Bubley followed contemporary trends depicting women as feminine, sexual beings, but as a female choosing how to portray women at this time, Bubley depicted femininity and female sexuality in specific ways that threatened both conventional ideas and modern representations of women as dependent and powerless.

In this first photograph from the boarding house, Bubley captures a young woman quietly listening to the radio in her room (figure 11). In the image, soft light flows in from a lamp sitting outside the upper left corner of the frame in an otherwise dim room. The lack of natural light coming through the window illustrates the fact that it is nighttime, and the clock perched on top of the radio informs the viewer of the late hour. The angle Bubley creates puts the viewer on the bed with the woman and forces the viewer's focus to follow that of the camera's lens. Skimming across the various objects sitting on the bed, the focus of the image draws the viewer in to rest solely on the woman's body and face as her attention is consumed by the radio, which, along with the clock, is just slightly out of focus. Furthermore, in her caption for the photograph, Bubley writes, "Washington, D.C. A radio is company for this girl in her boardinghouse room." Remarking that the radio keeps the woman company effectively implies that something – or, rather, some*one* – else could be keeping her company. Given the angle, perhaps the viewer could be this someone else. The posture of the woman's body only highlights Bubley's intimation.

Lying across the bed, with her arms raised above her head, the woman's back is slightly arched, which, when combined with the soft features of her face and her closed eyes, gives her an incredibly sensuous, almost seductive, appearance. Both the formal and compositional qualities of the photograph illustrate the multiple ways in which Bubley makes the viewer feel as if they are intruding on the woman's personal time, witnessing her in a private moment in the middle of the night when she is usually hidden away from the gaze of others.[19]

Even more invasive is a photograph Bubley makes of a second young woman at Dissin's boarding house (figure 12). Again presenting women in their daily routines, Bubley reveals a young woman in the midst of a shower, the water beating down on her head and neck. As she reaches over her shoulder with her right arm, her left hand, with its recently painted finger nails, grasps a bar of soap. Water droplets, made frozen by the camera, fall from her curly tresses. The curtain has been drawn back and hangs on the left edge of the frame, and Bubley's lowered position creates an angle that exposes the woman's closed eyes beneath her hanging hair as well as just enough of her right breast to make the photograph shift from suggestive to scandalous. Moreover, the dismal material surroundings of the young woman emphasize – through disparity – the youthful and soft physicality of her nudity. The ceiling above crumbles in this old house that has been transformed into apartments for somewhat transient residents during the wartime housing shortage. Even the shower stall itself feels temporary, placed there to accommodate the extra people living in the house despite the fact that it partially obstructs the window behind it. As in the previous photograph, Bubley's uses softer lighting in this image. The reduced contrast and increased tonal range in the resulting photo increases the feeling of intimacy by creating a supple impression of the woman's body, which also increases the sexuality present in this depiction of the woman bathing. The intimacy created by the lighting, then, clashes with the

viewer's sense of having intruded on this private moment produced by the angle in addition to the simple fact that the photograph was made in a bathroom.[20]

In each of these first two photos, Bubley forces the viewer to focus on the women's bodies, either suggestively or explicitly, in daring ways given the time period and given her position as a photographer hoping to get a job at the OWI. Although nudity has existed in photography since its inception, it is more often used in fine art photography. Nudity plays almost no role in the documentary tradition Bubley pursues in the 1940s. As such, Bubley challenged what was expected of her as a documentary photographer. In addition, she rejected conventional depictions of sexualized women as vulnerable. The angles she chose to use did not put her subjects in a powerless position. In fact, the women in these pictures were living their lives without regard to anyone else; unlike the pin-up of Betty Grable, they did not put themselves on display for male fantasy. Bubley and her subjects are in control of their sexuality, which Bubley depicts as natural, even inherent, but still respectable. There is nothing seedy about Bubley's women embracing their femininity.

In addition to the ways in which Bubley reveals women in moments generally kept off-limits from viewers, Bubley also photographs women in times of leisure, often as they relate with other residents at Dissin's. Many images portray women spending time together in each other's rooms, but others show relations between men and women. As single men and women co-habitated in the boarding house, the proprietor and landlady of the house – who are shown in various photographs in Bubley's collection from Dissin's – implement a rule that "forbids men guest to come into girls' rooms and vice versa," according to Bubley's captions. However, a group of three photographs from the collection, as well as many other examples, betrays how the residents regularly violated this rule, flouting the lack of enforcement in the house. Critically,

Bubley portrays young women not just as objects receiving male attention but also as active pursuers in the interactions between the men and women in the house.

In the first photograph, a clerk in the U.S. Navy reclines on his bed, ostensibly reading alone in his room (figure 13). The lack of natural light in the image points to the late hour of the day, and a bottle of Taylor's whiskey sits next to a glass on the topmost shelf of the bookcase at the end of his bed, ready to be consumed. Still, the photograph seems perfectly innocent at first sight – except for the fact that the very presence of Bubley making the photograph in this man's bedroom defies the rule set up to oversee and control the intermingling of men and women.[21]

The second photograph in the group, "Washington, D.C. In the hall of a boardinghouse," is a shadowy image in which the navy clerk from the prior photo is standing in the hallway, presumably outside his room with a young woman who came to visit (figure 14). The two converse in close proximity. The singular wall sconce situated between the pair provides the only light to the scene, forcing the viewer to focus on the two profiles studying one another as well as the way the man leans against the wall with his hips pushed forward toward the woman. A close look reveals how they offer each other timid smiles. Additionally, the deep contrast formed between the one light and the darkness that pervades well over half of the image as well as the angle Bubley creates by taking the photograph from around the corner gives the image an allusion of secrecy. It is as if the viewer is hidden in the dark, witnessing a scene that is supposed to be private, waiting to see if the couple will enter the bedroom despite the rule prohibiting it.[22]

Finally, the third photograph reveals a couple drinking and lounging in the same man's room (figure 15). Close analysis of the images makes it is unclear if all three photos are from the same night; the rearranged objects on the bookshelf at the end of the bed imply the images are from distinct days or times. Yet, the man is dressed similarly in each image: a light colored

button-down with a darker jacket and a tie. Likewise, the woman appears to be wearing a short-sleeved, cuffed shirt, and her hair is pulled up and off her face in each of the latter two images. Regardless of these details, the three images nonetheless demonstrate the plausibility – even probability – of a young woman knocking on a man's door before entering for a visit.[23]

In this third image, the couple relaxes on the man's bed, sharing a drink that is likely from the whiskey bottle on the shelf. As the man lies on his side, propped up by his elbow, the woman rests on the edge of the bed and leans against the man's shoulder, over which she drapes her hand. Given the way the woman is not quite sitting on the bed, it appears as if she was previously sitting in the chair seen on the left edge of the photo's frame. The chair likely got placed there only recently, as evidenced by its position blocking the dresser drawers and yet sits empty, as evidenced by the shadow being formed on the front of the dresser. Still, the woman is not sitting in the chair. Instead, she cuddles up to the man's side, and she fondly looks down at him. Critically, she is the one seeking out his attention. She came to his room, is leaning against him, and is gazing down at him despite his gaze and body turned elsewhere.

Bubley thus renders this young woman, as well as others like her, as the pursuer in relationships with men. Bubley's subjects were single women who moved to Washington for wartime work and found sexual independence in addition to the financial independence their work provided. Living on their own, they chose how to behave and which men they wanted, regardless of any rule a boarding house tried to implement. Moreover, if they wanted to let a photographer photograph them as they lay in their bedrooms – or even as they shower – they would do so. In contrast to contemporary imagery – like Rosie – portraying, on the one hand, women as demure, with downcast eyes, Bubley's women actively looked for relationships with men and took advantage of the freedom inherent in living on their own to act in ways that

rejected how society told them to behave in order to be ideal domestic women. On the other hand, Bubley simultaneously rejects contemporary images that depict sexualized women as either vulnerable or disease-ridden vixen. Her women were not sexual just to play into male fantasy. Nor were they unrespectable because they actively pursue men they desire.

Bubley's photography from Dissin's boarding house may seem to be exceptional, especially given her status in January 1943 as essentially an amateur photographer making photographs for herself, but it is not. Bubley began photographing at Dissin's because, in her words, "one of my sisters lived there, and it was easy to do." Her position among her peers allowed her to make the intimate, sensual photographs seen here. Furthermore, Bubley's photography from January perfectly foreshadows work she completed later the same year. Her project at Dissin's successfully convinced Stryker to promote her to field photographer for the OWI, where she worked for the remainder of the year. Because Bubley did not have a driver's license, Stryker assigned her to projects around Washington D.C. for the first several months, and these assignments' resulting photographs similarly illustrate Bubley's distinct ability to contest contemporary depictions of powerless women.[24]

Bubley at the OWI

The themes made apparent in Bubley's photography from Dissin's in are preserved in her work for OWI projects over the following months. Bubley photographed the daily routines of young women as well as their leisure activities and the ways in which women interacted with male acquaintances while on assignment in June 1943 at Arlington Farms and around D.C. in the spring and summer. Bubley was ostensibly documenting the wartime housing shortage and the female labor force working around the city. Similarly to Dissin's, however, Bubley portrayed

young, single women in these photos in remarkable ways that push past simple depiction of housing and women at work. She did not merely illustrate housing conditions created by the shortage or women at work. Rather, Bubley once again provides intimate looks into the lives of women who are confident with their sexuality, submitting themselves to no one.[25]

At Arlington Farms, Bubley once again follows women into the shower rooms and captures private moments on film. She shows two young ladies laughing with one another just as they get into showers in neighboring stalls (figure 16). The woman on the right leans out of her stall, holding up her towel with one arm as she extends her other, apparently either asking for or offering something to her friend. The friend smiles over her shoulder as she reaches to turn on the water. Her left hand starts undoing her housedress, while her bare leg peaks out. Although this image appears to be quite innocent when compared to the bathing picture from Dissin's, specific qualities of this photograph add to its evocative nature. The lack of shower curtains – and thus privacy – visible on these stalls stands out, particularly as light flows into the frame from the right, creating deeper shadows and lending a flair of intrigue to the scene. It is almost as if Bubley wants the viewer to question not only the absence of curtains but also the obviously close relationship between these women. Exactly how open are the women at Arlington Farms with one another? Precisely how much do they share, and just how comfortable are they with their bodies, specifically, or their sexuality, more broadly? Given how society attempted to regulate the behavior and sexuality of women during the war, this type of suggestive photography is all the more contentious.[26]

Bubley's other photographs at Arlington illustrate women in leisurely activities and are equally, if not more, provocative. The photograph first seen in the introduction of the young women sunbathing on the sidewalk outside Arlington Farms is a prime example (figure 1). The

women lay out in the sun with little to no clothing, unconcerned with who may walk by, despite the fact that young men appear around the housing development in many of the photographs Bubley made. The rather free way in which Bubley implies men and women act with one another here is reinforced in one last image from Arlington Farms that similarly focuses on the relations between female residents and their male visitors (figure 17). Bubley makes many photographs showing men and women playing games, mingling, and holding dances in the common areas at Arlington, but she also depicts women in perhaps the most overtly sexual situation thus far. This photograph depicts a man and woman, mostly hidden by darkness, making out on a couch. In the dim room, light comes not from the lamp sitting in the corner but, instead, solely from a second lamp outside the left side of the frame, which thus casts the faces of both the man and woman in shadow. As they kiss, the man leans toward his partner, wrapping his arms around her. More importantly, however, the woman's leg inches up as if she is about to throw it over his lap.[27]

Both the angle Bubley creates with her camera and the caption she writes for the image reify the agency she gives the woman depicted. Similar to earlier images (e.g. figures 11, 12, and 14) where the angle Bubley creates places the viewer in such a position where they are quietly approaching the subject, the couple in this photograph embraces, unaware of the visitor (i.e. the viewer) silently watching from the hall. The door stands open, but the way Bubley leaves the door and its hinges within the image's frame highlights the feeling of invading the couple after only just swinging the door open. Moreover, the position of the viewer stresses the lack of privacy afforded to residents and their guests at Arlington Farms and, more importantly, the lack of concern on the part of these women regarding the issue of privacy.

Despite the lack of privacy, this couple makes do. Significantly, this woman makes do. Bubley's caption says, "Arlington, Virginia. Girls entertaining their guests in one of the two card

rooms…More privacy is afforded here than in the main lounge." As with figures 14 and 15, in which a young woman is portrayed approaching the man, Bubley gives the woman in this photo the agency in this situation. The "girl" is entertaining her guest, the implication being that she not only chose to make out with the man but also brought him to the card room specifically for that activity since she knew it would allow for more privacy. She is not the passive participant. Rather, she is the active instigator, which Bubley's illustration of her enthusiasm supports.

Finally, it is intriguing that Bubley's caption says, "girls" and "guests," insinuating that there is another couple in this room, perhaps behind the door. Although the card room is more private than the main lounge, according to Bubley, the women cannot get total privacy with their men. This likely means, like at Dissin's, the women were not allowed to have men in their rooms, which should be reassuring. However, the suggestion that two women take their male guests to the same card room to "entertain" them regardless of who else is in the room or who else is watching from the hall is more provocative than comforting. And in fact, a second Bubley photograph from the OWI file verifies this suspicion. The subsequent image in the file is a photo Bubley took from inside the room in which both couples are seen – and both are making out.

In all of the photographs Bubley made at Arlington Farms, she pushes against the expectations placed on her by the OWI. Her assignment was to photograph the wartime housing shortage, which likely included the results of the shortage – i.e. the newly constructed governmental housing. However, Bubley stretches this as far as she can. The vast majority of her photographs focus less on the housing and more on the women living in the housing, what they do, and how they act. She raises suggestive questions and portrays young women in provocative ways, once again putting the impetus on the women in their interactions with men and

challenging social perceptions of the young, single women as she went. She shows middle class white women as independent and in control of their sexuality.

Moreover, Bubley's photographs often depict young women as surprisingly untroubled despite the ongoing war. The women may have moved to Washington specifically because of the war and live in housing built specifically because of the wartime housing shortage, but their daily lives and interactions show them relaxing, finding ways to amuse themselves, and exploiting their single, unsupervised lifestyles. Bubley similarly depicts women in activities outside Arlington. Although some of her photographs show young women at work – either as female streetcar drivers or workers at Western Union, for example – Bubley is clearly equally concerned with showing women in activities outside of work.

Many photos depict couples dancing the jitterbug at local clubs like the Elk's Club. The women are usually dressed up with their hair done, ready to hit the town. In one, a woman twists her hips to the music, dressed in a short, flowing skirt that flairs up as she moves (figure 18). Her heels and sheer pantyhose with their seams running down the backs of her legs make her clothing sexier than they might initially appear, while the expression on her partner's face adds to the sensual feel of the image. His closed eyes and slack jaw, as well as his apparent oblivion to his surroundings, makes the jitterbug even more sexual than its reputation already implies. Bubley's juxtaposition of the sexuality depicted in the photo and her tongue-in-cheek caption noting the jitterbug as "the cleanest dance in town" helps clarify her intentions. She seems determined to show women as they are in reality instead of how society perceives them to be, and their relations with men – dancing and otherwise – provide Bubley with prime material for this goal.[28]

Beyond dancing at clubs, Bubley illustrated young women going to bars, drinking, and picking up men. In April of 1943, she photographed at the Sea Grill Bar and Restaurant in

Washington. A photo from here of a young woman sitting alone at a booth has become one of Bubley's most famous images (figure 19). Ellis uses it in her study as evidence of the loneliness women in Washington experienced. However, when combined with other photos Bubley made at the Sea Grill, it is not loneliness that is most apparent. Rather, women are depicted overwhelmingly as being adventurous, free-spirited, and out for a good time.[29]

In the photo of the woman sitting alone, she initially appears a bit forlorn. The harsh light coming into the image from the left casts her shadow against the wall and window, making her seem as if she is on the outskirts of some happening party occurring to the left of the frame. Her aloneness is highlighted by the long length of the booth, the emptiness of which is stressed by the small, crunched up napkin to the far left and the purse and envelope she has laid down next to her. The sad expression on her face adds to the depressed mood the photo evokes, as do her eyes, which focus on the lighted area to the left, and her body language. Her shoulders are just slightly stooped, and her arms are crossed in front of her on the table as if to ward off anyone approaching. Furthermore, the young lady nurses the remainder of a beer while smoking a cigarette, apparently unaware of both Bubley making the photograph and the man turned to peer through the window shades, watching Bubley watch the woman.

Despite the many ways in which Bubley constructs loneliness in this image, both her caption for the photograph as well as later photographs from that night belie the sadness. For this image, Bubley writes, "Washington, D.C. Girl sitting alone in the Sea Grill, a bar and restaurant waiting for a pickup. 'I come in here pretty often, sometimes alone, mostly with another girl, we drink beer, and talk, and of course we keep our eyes open--you'd be surprised at how often nice, lonesome soldiers ask Sue, the waitress, to introduce them to us.'" Quoting the young woman in the photo, Bubley demonstrates how sadness is not what drives this woman to the bar. She says

she comes to the bar often, usually with a friend, implying that Bubley caught her on one of the more rare nights where she is alone. More significantly, she tells Bubley how she and her friends come to the bar specifically to find men. They keep their eyes open, on the look out for nice soldiers. Although she says the soldiers are lonesome, she makes it sound as if she is not.

Further supporting the fact that the sad mood made by the above photo is the exception to the rule that Bubley usually depicts women having fun while out on the town are two photos of this same woman from later that evening. In one, she is moving through the bar, smiling, apparently ready to approach a soldier. In the next, she is tucked into the corner of a booth, still smiling, with soldiers on either side of her (figure 20). The woman is having another beer and smoking another cigarette with her new companions. They laugh as they "exchang[e] life histories," according to Bubley. The photograph is interesting in how it seems to put a spotlight on the young soldier to the woman's right and her head as she turns to listen to him. The seemingly older soldier to her left is in the shadow a bit more. Still, he is engaged in the conversation. Critically, Bubley writes of the image, "Washington, D.C. Girl who has picked up two soldiers since coming into the Sea Grill alone. They are drinking beer and exchanging life histories." It is the "girl" who "picked up" the two men, not the other way around. Bubley again gives the woman the power in the relationships. She is the pursuer who came to the bar, looking for men, and she picked them up.[30]

Bubley's Legacy

Bubley has yet to be recognized as an artist who subverted expectations society placed on her despite the fact that, in many ways, she is the forerunner to feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s. As a young woman, Bubley photographed her peers in defiance of contemporary imagery

of women as the ideal, selfless patriot, threatening sexual aggressor, or exposed and defenseless sexualized object. Like her subjects, Bubley refused to bow to pressure that told women what to look like or how to act. Building on Maria Elena Buszek's demonstration of how young women during the WWII era appropriated the sexual self-awareness and confidence of pin-up imagery, I argue that Bubley went one step farther, explicitly transgressing stereotypical images of women in similar ways to postmodernist photographers Cindy Sherman or Barbara Kruger, who did so three decades later. Rather than being remembered as a cutting-edge photographer, however, Bubley's reputation is that of a shy, reserved woman whose photography predominantly focused on family subjects, children, and other topics given to woman photographers.

Her publication record from the 1940s arguably provides the best explanation for the skewed perception of her and her work. Starting in 1943 and 1944, magazines mostly published photographs Bubley made portraying children and human emotions. In May of 1944, *Minicam*, a photography magazine, published one of Bubley's photographs from her bus trip in an article about the state of salon photography in America, a story completely unrelated to the tone or perspective Bubley was attempting to portray in her work. Interestingly, they chose a photograph of a young girl, maybe ten years old, sitting on a bench in a bus station waiting room. The girl's hands are in her lap, her feet dangling off the bench, and her big, round eyes look up, just over the upper right corner of the photo's frame. She perfectly portrays innocence and vulnerability. Next to the girl, however, is a sign that says "for ladies only." The racial connotations of this photograph are clear; "ladies" in the 1940s only referred to white women, never black. However, the magazine did not pick up on this message or the way in which it contradicts the light-hearted tone of their article. They title the photograph "Lone Stranger" – it is unclear what the magazine is trying to say with this – and write of Bubley that she has "left the OWI where she did domestic

photo-reporting." Domestic, here, seems to imply a focus on women, children, and families, as Bubley's reputation would suggest. There is no mention of how Bubley portrayed women in less than "domestic" situations or the ways this image is not "domestic."[31]

Even more innocuous are the photographs published in *Minicam's* June 1944 edition and the May and June 1944 issues of *US Camera*. All of these take intriguing photographs by Bubley and make them as bland as possible. In June 1944, *Minicam* used several Bubley images in an article titled, "Take a Bus…," which urged fellow Americans to travel by bus. It tried to use Bubley's photos to inspire its readers travel with a camera and photograph the country and its people themselves. In six photographs made by Bubley, the focus is always on the faces of the people, their facial expressions and emotions. Similarly, the June 1944 issue of *US Camera* publishes "Children by Bubley," a whole article on the ways Bubley depicts children in her photography. In seven photographs, at least twelve children are shown. By specifically choosing to focus on portrayals of children and emotionally evocative imagery, the editors of these articles implied that this was Bubley's specialty, especially since they encouraged readers to follow in her footsteps. They apparently saw Bubley as an expert in all things "domestic" and almost entirely ignored her other work. Women in provocative situations were nowhere to be seen.[32]

In fact, only one photograph from all the photography she made of women at Dissin's, Arlington Farms, and around the city was circulated at the time, but the publication changed the details in intriguing ways. In July 1943 – the earliest publication of Bubley's photography – *Minicam* published an article called, "Wartime Washington," which was full of photographs from around D.C. One of these photographs was a Bubley image discussed earlier of a couple making out at Arlington Farms (figure 17). This photograph was a perfect example of the agency Bubley afforded young women who made their own decisions regarding who they spent time

with and what they did with their bodies. *Minicam*, however printed it with the following caption: "Where may a soldier take a gal for a few quiet moments? He's here today and gone in ten minutes. The lobbies of most hotels decorously offer upholstered dim lit corners." This upends the power Bubley gave to the woman, instead redistributing agency back to the man in the physical relationship depicted in this photograph. He took his "gal" to the dark corner. *Minicam's* message blatantly disregards the captions Bubley provided for her photographs from Arlington Farms. Even though the magazine portrayed a young women in a sexually suggestive situation, it did so only after placing her back in the passive role that maintains gender hierarchies desired by male policy-makers and executives at the time.[33]

The lack of publication of Bubley's photography of women can be attributed to both timing and the propagandist aims of the OWI and Ad Council. Bubley only worked for the OWI in 1943, for one year, just as it was reaching the end of its tenure. She moved on soon after Roy Stryker resigned as head of the photography program and followed him to Standard Oil to work for their public relations documentary project. In 1944, the photography unit of the OWI disbanded, ending future chances for Bubley's photography to be circulated. Moreover, Bubley's images did not generally follow the goals of the propagandist machine during the war. When the OWI wanted to show a united country mobilizing behind the war effort, including young women dutifully doing their part to support the troops, Bubley instead portrayed women taking advantage of the independence offered by war jobs. They were not obediently submitting to constructs of ideal womanhood. Rather, they embraced their economic and sexual autonomy and showed little concern about the growing social anxiety over their behavior. Regardless of the reasons for Bubley's minimal presence in contemporary publications, it contributed to the

creation of Bubley's reputation as a photographer of "domestic" subjects as well as the neglect of a distinct visual archive of information on WWII era gender norms.

Conclusion

Bubley's young women were simultaneously respectable and sexual, and they refused to bow to the pressure society exerted on them to be submissive. The women may have moved to D.C. looking for work, but in doing so, a new world opened up to them. They learned to be independent, assertive, passionate, and comfortable with their sexuality when away from their homes, and through her photography, Bubley did likewise. The photographs Bubley made around Washington D.C. in the spring and summer of 1943 portray young, single women as carefree, independent, and looking for fun. They are comfortable in their own skin, expressing themselves in liberating ways and actively pursuing men in ways not expected of them in the 1940s. Living with other women just like them, they have taken control of their lives, and defy conventions of femininity and sexuality.

Just as these young women challenged social norms, so did Bubley subvert expectations of her and contemporary imagery. Bubley came to be recognized as a quiet photographer who focused more on capturing the emotional and expressive qualities of her subjects than making strong social or political statements with her work. In 1943, Stryker assigned her to photograph the wartime housing crisis as well as women at work in the wartime effort around Washington D.C. But that is not what she brought back on film. She focused more on the lives of the women living in the housing and more on how they acted outside of work than she did on the housing itself or women's new roles in work environments.

Bubley portrayed women in sensual and intimate ways and depicted sexuality in both suggestive and explicit ways that belie typical portrayals of women by the OWI and popular culture. Even as government propaganda and mass media unhinged gender norms by sexualizing women and pushing women into the public sphere, conventional values of hierarchical gender roles and the sexual objectification of women who were dependent and vulnerable persisted in propaganda and popular culture. Women were the glorified, virginal housewife, the coy sex kitten, or the immoral, whorish threat to men. Female sexual agency and respectability were always mutually exclusive. Bubley consistently subverted these stereotypes.

Imagery that positively depicted women's sexual agency in the mid-twentieth century was rare, but Esther Bubley's photography allows us to study gender and womanhood during WWII with a new perspective. Illustrating women not only appropriating the sexuality the mass media imposed on them but also rejecting tropes of sexual submission prevalent in the same visual culture, Bubley's photos mark her and her peers as predecessors to the feminist movement seen later in the century. She captured women imitating sexual imagery but controlling and asserting agency over their sexuality, and it was, perhaps, this action that made 1940s society in America so worried. It was not just that women were seen as sexual in more explicit ways than before but that they were claiming power. Social anxiety seems to stem more from women asserting agency over their sexuality – and maybe, thus, their identity and role in society more broadly – than from women living as young singles without supervision. As such, Bubley's distinct visual record of "government girls" living in D.C. during the war pushes scholars to rethink not just Bubley as a photographer but the mid-century upheaval of gender norms at large.

Notes

[1] Bonnie Yochelson offers a comprehensive account of Bubley's life and career in *Esther Bubley: On Assignment* (New York: Aperture, 2005); Leslie T. Davol studies the relationship between public and private spaces and uses Bubley photography throughout her article, "Shifting Mores: Esther Bubley's World War II Boarding House Photos," *Washington History*, 10:2 (Fall/Winter, 1998/1999), 44-62; Melissa A. McEuen analyzes Bubley's photography from a 1943 road trip through the Upper South and Midwest, studying the way Bubley portrayed race relations in her chapter, "Exposing Anger and Discontent: Esther Bubley's Portrait of the Upper South during World War II," in *Searching for Their Places: Women in the South Across Four Centuries*, Thomas H. Appleton, ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 243; Jacqueline Ellis studies Bubley's portrayals of women in 1943 in her article, "Revolutionary Spaces: Photographs of Working-Class Women by Esther Bubley 1940-1943," *Feminist Review* 53 (1996): 74-94, at 81, 93. She considers Bubley's subjects as working class women and compares them to depictions of the working class from early FSA photographers. For other studies of Bubley see the following: Andrea Fisher wrote about Bubley's photography, succinctly commenting on the "self-conscious sensuality" of Bubley's women in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the U.S. Government, 1935 to 1944* (New York: Pandora, 1987). John Mason also briefly explored Bubley's approach to photographing women. In a blog post titled "Esther Bubley's Erotic Photography," he wrote, "'erotic' is the wrong word for most of these images. They do, however, deal forthrightly with sexuality. More so than any other FSA/OWI photographer, Bubley explored wartime changes in the social geography of sex." See the post on his blog, *John Edwin Mason: Documentary, Motorsports, Photo History*, September 25, 2009, http://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/ 2009/09/ester-bubleys-erotic-photography.html; Melissa Fay Greene wrote the introduction to *The Photographs of Esther Bubley*. Akin to Yochelson, Greene provides more narrative than analysis, albeit Greene does so in a manner that comes across as a poor attempt at replicating Jack Kerouac's introduction to Robert Frank's *The Americans*. See Greene, "Introduction."

[2] Betty Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, *Women and War: The Changing Status of American Women from the 1930s to the 1950s* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990); Meghan Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Marilyn Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

[3] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Journal of American History* (March 1993) 1455-82; Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, and Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[4] McEuen, *Making War*, 5; Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 187.

[5] Greene, "Introduction," 9.

[6] For biographical information on Bubley found here and throughout the paper, see Beverly Brannan, "Esther Bubley (1921-1998)," Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/bubleyintro.html, hereafter cited as Brannan, "Esther Bubley," LOC; Yochelson, *Esther Bubley*; Roy Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In This Proud Land: America 1935-1943, as Seen in the FSA Photographs* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1973); S.W. Plattner, *Roy Stryker: U.S.A., 1943-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Miles Orvell, *American Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[7] Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 127-8; McEuen, *Making War*, 1, 102; Myron P. Gutmann,Sara M. Pullum-Piñón, and Thomas W. Pullum, "Three Eras of Young Adult Home Leaving in Twentieth-Century America" in *Journal of Social History* 35.3 (2002) 533-576, at 554; Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls,* 213-5.

[8] McEuen, *Making War*, 102-9; Mercedes Rosebery, *This Day's Madness: A Story of the American People against the Background of the War Effort* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 42-5.

[9] McEuen, *Making War*, 102-9.

[10] Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 28-36, 48-51; McEuen, *Making War*, 2-3, 11, 16-7, 102-3; Diedrich, *Women and War*, 22, 31; Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 214-5.

[11] For popular conceptions of Rosie the Riveter, see, among others, Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Women at War: The Women of World War II – At Home, at Work, on the Front Line* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Assoc., Inc., 2002), 27-9; Nancy Baker Wise and Christy Wise, *A Mouthful of Rivets: Women at Work in World War II* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994). For the distinction between Rosie the Riveter and "We Can Do It!" posters, see Lincoln Cushing and Tim Drescher, *Agitate! Educate! Organize! American Labor Posters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster" in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* (Winter 2006) **9** (4): 533–569; William L. Bird and Harry R. Rubenstein *Design for Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 78. For scholarship considering the contradictions in Rosie imagery, see, note 16. For information on J. Walter Thompson, see McEuen, *Making War*, 1-3.

[12] Tony Marcano, "Famed Riveter in War Effort, Rose Monroe, Dies at 77" *The New York Times*, June 2, 1997; McEuen, *Making* War, 2, 53-7, 61-4, 91-3; Page Dougherty Delano, "Making Up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture," in *Feminist Studies* 26 (Spring 2000): 33-68, at 45. For other scholarship studying Rosie imagery in nuanced ways, see, among others, Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 155-60; Winchell, *Good Girls*, 1; Diedrich, *Women and War*, 6-8. The study of Rosie imagery is part of a larger historiographical debate – beginning in the 1970s and 80s – on the significant of World War II in changing the course of women's history. William Chafe if on one end of the argument, asserting that the war accelerated the movement of women into the labor force. See William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 181. Karen Anderson agrees with Chafe that the war was a turning point but ultimately concludes that the labor force was only seen as a secondary status for women, and the war did not have a significant progressive impact. See Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 8-11. Leila Rupp says the war had no permanent impact on women's participation in the labor force. See Rupp, *Mobilizing Women,* 176. Susan Hartmann contends the war set the foundation for the second wave of feminism, but she also notes forces at the time undermining the potential to shift gender roles. See Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 216. McEuen is the most recent addition to this debate, arguing that the government and corporate America deliberately constructed notions of feminism during the war, holding true to traditional beliefs about gender roles. See McEuen, *Making War.*

[13] "I'm proud ... my husband wants me to do my part See your U.S. Employment Service" John Newton Howitt. - United States. War Manpower Commission , funder/sponsor United States. Office of War Information , funder/sponsor - [Washington, D.C.] : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944. – LOC. POS - WWII - US .F34.J71 1944 (B size) [P&P]

[14] Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 208, McEuen, *Making War*, 4.

[15] Buszek identifies figure 7 as Miss July from the 1944 calendar, but the original calendar page shows her to be Miss February. For Buszek's interpretation of this image and argument regarding bomber-nose art, see Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 212-3. For a brief historical account of the "Mount 'N Ride" B-17, see "Photo History – 91st Bomb Group (H)," http://www.91stbombgroup.com/photo_history/mount.html.

[16] McEuen, *Making War*, 79-89, see also, Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls*, 12, 187, 208.

[17] Winchell, *Good Girls,* 106-20

[18] Honey, *Creating Rosie,* 3-7; Hegarty, *Victory Girls,* 128; Deidrich, *Women and War,* 8.

[19] Figure 1. "Washington, D.C. A radio is company for this girl in her boardinghouse room," Esther Bubley, January 1943, LC-USW3- 038309-E.

[20] Figure 2. "Washington, D.C. The shower bath in a boardinghouse," Esther Bubley, January 1943, LC-USW3-038318-E.

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[21] Figure 3. “Washington, D.C. A clerk in the U.S. Navy Department reading in his room in a boardinghouse,” Esther Bubley, January 1943, LC-USW3- 038306-E [P&P].

[22] Figure 4. “Washington, D.C. In the hall of a boardinghouse,” Esther Bubley, January 1943, LC-USW3- 038327-E [P&P].

[23] Figure 5. “Washington, D.C. A boardinghouse rule forbids men guest to come into girls' rooms and vice versa,” Esther Bubley, January 1943, LC-USW3- 038305-E [P&P].

[24] Yochelson, *Esther Bubley*, 7-8.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Figure 6. “Arlington, Virginia. Girls in two of the long line of showers at Idaho Hall, Arlington Farms, a residence for women who work in the U.S. government for the duration of the war,” Esther Bubley, June 1943, LC-USW3-026005-E.

[27] Figure 8. “Arlington, Virginia. Girls entertaining their guests in one of the two card rooms, at a residence for the women who work in the U.S. government for the duration of the war. More privacy is afforded here than in the main lounge,” Esther Bubley, June 1943, LC-USW3-026020-E.

[28] Figure 9. “Washington, D.C. Jitterbugs at an Elk's Club dance, the ‘cleanest dance in town.’” April 1943. LC-USW3-023097-E.

[29] Figure 10. “‘Washington, D.C. Girl sitting alone in the Sea Grill, a bar and restaurant waiting for a pickup. "I come in here pretty often, sometimes alone, mostly with another girl, we drink beer, and talk, and of course we keep our eyes open--you'd be surprised at how often nice, lonesome soldiers ask Sue, the waitress, to introduce them to us,’” Esther Bubley, April 1943, LC-USW3- 021005-E [P&P].

[30] Figure 11. “Washington, D.C. Girl who has picked up two soldiers since coming into the Sea Grill alone. They are drinking beer and exchanging life histories,” Esther Bubley, April 1943, LC-USW3-021032-E.

[31] “Oh Sweet Fancy…Out to Lunch,” *Minicam* (May 1944) 36-7.

[32] “Take a Bus…,” *Minicam* (June 1944) 58-61; “Children by Bubley,” *US Camera* (June 1944) 22-23.

[33] “Wartime Washington,” *Minicam* (July 1943) 15-21.