

“Glamor Girl Classed as TV Show Brain”: The Body and Mind of Faye Emerson

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FEW HISTORIES OF 1950S ENTERTAINMENT MENTION THE NAME OF FAYE Emerson, yet by the early 1950s she was well known in almost every arena of popular culture: actress in two dozen Hollywood films, Broadway performer, radio host, and newspaper columnist. Most importantly, she found her greatest success on television as the popular host of a string of eponymously titled interview programs in the early 1950s. She was frequently referred to as the “first lady of television” in this period, and friend Cleveland Amory noted, “Faye Emerson was the first television star created by television . . . I imagine every reference in those days of anything to do with television would have had to include Faye Emerson.”

Emerson attained national television fame with *The Faye Emerson Show* (CBS and NBC, 1950–51), a fifteen-minute interview show, and continued with *Faye Emerson’s Wonderful Town* (CBS, 1951–52), a half-hour variety program. Following a number of periodic quiz show appearances, Emerson became a full-time quiz show panelist on *I’ve Got a Secret* (CBS, 1952–58) and *What’s in a Word* (CBS, 1954), and a discussion moderator on such shows as *Author Meets the Critics* (DuMont, 1952). The latter programs indicate Emerson’s more cerebral characteristics, but her mind was certainly not her most publicized trait—her décolletage and chest were. Indeed, the low-cut evening gowns she wore when hosting her interview programs brought her national fame and considerable critical attention. Her visual image of vivacious beauty became one of television’s earliest icons; her son William Crawford claimed, “When a cartoon showed a small TV screen containing only a V neckline, the reader knew who was being talked about.”

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Myriad questions surface upon close examination of Emerson's entertainment career, but this article focuses specifically on the ways in which Emerson merged sexuality and intellect across her decade-long television career. Considering that she was described as both a "Blonde Bombshell" (Martin 24) and the "Smartest in Television" (Dean Myers) by separate newspaper headlines, how exactly could Emerson be defined by these twin positions during a period of popular culture that had no paradigm of a woman as both highly sexual and highly cerebral? How did publicity materials, and Emerson herself, negotiate this complicated balance? Finally, how might the complexity of Emerson's screen image explain the dramatic trajectory of her television career, from a level of popularity that nearly equaled Milton Berle's in the early 1950s to almost no visibility in the early 1960s?

Analysis of publicity materials, Emerson's television appearances, and archival documents reveals the answers to these questions. As this article will show, Emerson found great success on early television, and her sexuality and intelligence were key components of the publicity that helped fuel that success. But both aspects were carefully contained within the confines of the traditional television "personality," a concept of television stardom outlined by such scholars as Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann. Emerson's career subsequently declined by the late 1950s, when her "personality" became considerably more complex, her deep political inclinations emerged with stronger force, and her sexuality was no longer a dominant component of her image. Thus, only briefly did 1950s television make space for a woman who was both outwardly sexual and smart.

The Roots of a Television Career and a Controversial Image

Faye Emerson experienced a rather pedestrian film career at Warner Bros. as a contract actress from 1941 to 1944. Mainly appearing as a supporting actress in B-films, Emerson was never able to establish a consistent character persona that would enable the move to higher profile starring roles. In fact, she appeared in such a wide range of roles that the *Los Angeles Times* in 1945 touted her "chameleon-like adaptability" ("Quiet Life"). Although this was meant as a compliment, it actually indicated a major problem for Emerson: Warner Bros. was unable to establish a singular star image for her, and without a

consistent screen persona, it was difficult to match her up with leading roles. Thus, the publicity that praised her range actually masked a problematic industry status for Emerson. Her film career never rose above secondary billing as a result.

Both her entertainment career and personal life took a turn in 1943, when Emerson met and married Elliott Roosevelt, the son of the president. She subsequently retired from the screen in late 1944, opting to “make a career out of being Mrs. Elliott Roosevelt” (“Faye Emerson Quits”). Emerson’s marriage to Roosevelt took her to New York, and as she became more enmeshed in New York life, both socially and professionally, television too took on an increasing presence in the city. Especially because of her local celebrity, Emerson was in a prime position to begin a career on local New York television, then grow as the medium did. She became the narrator of a local fifteen-minute fashion program, *Paris Cavalcade of Fashions*, from August to December 1948, and then benefited from additional exposure when the show was distributed nationally to NBC affiliates throughout the subsequent year.

Although this hosting job tied her to the world of fashion and glamour, Emerson also soon became involved in the quiz show genre. In fact, she gained national notice with a December 18, 1948, appearance on the NBC quiz show *Who Said That?* when she guest-starred on the program with her husband and handily answered question after question as he merely watched in stony silence. The final indignity for Roosevelt came when he was unable to identify a quote from his own book on his father, and Emerson quickly chimed in with the answer. The publicity that followed the event revealed her earnest attempts to defend her husband; she was quoted as telling one reporter, “He’s busy and I have plenty of time to read the papers” (qtd. in Martin 129). But the couple separated and ultimately divorced in 1950, with Emerson explaining, “I was bad for his ego” (qtd. in Flynn). This incident was only the first in a succession of confrontations with males regarding her intellect.

Faye Emerson, Television Personality

Emerson’s national television stardom was cemented by a series of fifteen-minute late-night and prime-time network talk shows that she

hosted from 1950 to 1952, *The Faye Emerson Show* (for CBS) and *Fifteen with Faye* (for NBC). Not necessarily admiringly, *Time* magazine referred to *The Faye Emerson Show's* content as the "kind of chitchat that used to be heard only in beauty shops and over tea tables" ("Not Too Heavy" 57). Every episode was oriented toward a single theme: wigs, fencing, baseball, wrestling, ghosts, fashion, comedy writing, horoscopes, and so on. Most of the guests were either ordinary people or experts on an episode's topic, such as IBM employee C. C. Hurd, who explained the wonders of a room-sized computer that could calculate complex math problems in mere minutes (aired October 14, 1950). A few episodes touted more famous celebrity guests. One show featured Frank Sinatra (March 9, 1951), an episode on boxing brought forth Rocky Marciano and Jake LaMotta (November 28, 1950), and an episode focused on a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed theater presented the architect himself and playwright Tennessee Williams (October 19, 1950).

No matter the topic covered, from Broadway shows to the Korean War, each episode presented Emerson capably conversing with her guests and personably engaging with the viewers at home. Production materials indicate that the general framework for each episode was scripted; it was previously established where Emerson would stand on the set and how she would transition into the advertisements for sponsor Pepsi-Cola. But the actual interviews were almost wholly improvised, with only brief phrases and questions scripted out beforehand (*Faye Emerson Show* scripts). Emerson's ability to converse naturally and intelligently with each guest lent the show a level of authenticity and dynamism, indicating that Emerson took full advantage of the intimacy that was quickly coming to define the new medium.

Contemporary reviews credited *The Faye Emerson Show's* success to this charismatic intimacy, and they especially highlighted the importance of having such a sincere host able to communicate with a wide range of guests. For instance, Hal Humphrey, a prolific television critic for the *LA Mirror*, sketched the talk show television personality thusly:

[T]he Godfreys and Emersons approach TV and the viewer as if they were paying you a personal visit. They are not "on stage" in the sense that they were doing a show. This "we're-just-your-neighbors" type of thing has made for some awful nauseating TV viewing, but it also has produced a flock of video shows which are becoming solid

clicks under the stewardship of performers who have found that they have that TV personality. (“Some Have It”)

It was exactly within this context of TV personality that Emerson found television stardom. This “personality” concept has been explored by a number of scholars, including Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann. In *Make Room for TV*, Spigel analyzes the figure of the 1950s female hostess and contextualizes her within the relationship between 1950s television and domestic ideology. Using the example of daytime magazine shows such as *Today*, Spigel shows how producers wanted to appeal to the middle-class housewife, and did so through the “mixing of upper-class fantasy with tropes of averageness,” with the hostess addressing the viewer on her own level while encouraging consumer behavior (84). Spigel quotes one producer from the period:

Those who give an impression of superiority or “talking down” to the audience, who treasure the manner of speaking over naturalness and meaningful communication . . . or who are overly formal in attire and manners, do not survive in the broadcast industry . . . The personality should fit right into your living room. (84)

Spigel’s description of the kind of woman television producers sought out is telling: “the ideal hostess was decidedly not a glamour girl, but rather a pleasingly attractive, middle-aged woman—Hollywood’s answer to the home economics teacher” (84).

As Spigel’s description indicates, glamorous Hollywood stars were thought to be incompatible with commercial television, a claim that Denise Mann expands upon. In “The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television Variety Shows,” Mann assesses the tensions resulting from mixing the perceived glamour of Hollywood stars with the commercial and domestic nature of early television, especially given the ambivalence of 1950s society to representations of excess. She argues that counterposing the glamour of film stars to the genuine “everyday” image of indigenous television performers negotiated this conflict: “By contrasting the TV stars to their Hollywood counterparts, the believability and trustworthiness of the former were reinforced” (52). Mann then uses the example of Martha Raye, who left her film career to host a television variety program, to illustrate how Raye’s star glamour was downplayed

in relation to her Hollywood guest stars in order to bolster her credibility as a television performer and commercial pitchwoman (55–63).

These works present the compelling notion put forth by television of a rhetorical difference between the contrived, constructed, excessive image of the Hollywood performer and the genuine, sincere, natural image of the television performer. Given the nature of the talk show that she hosted and the manner with which she hosted, Emerson certainly exemplified the latter (and failed in her attempt to attain the former). However, additional consideration of the constant focus put on Emerson's sexuality and glamour in publicity might seem to contradict both Mann's account of television having to tone down visual extravagances and Spigel's notion of the necessity for "tropes of everydayness." Indeed, Emerson was frequently referred to as a "glamour girl" and a "blonde bombshell," and articles on Emerson contained such titles as "Faye Emerson's Got Glamor" (Durante) and "Glamour Girl of the Television Screen" (Adams 11).

Along these lines, perhaps the key aspect of Emerson's image, both praised and disparaged, was her breasts. She wore evening gowns designed by Ceil Chapman on her eponymous programs, particularly décolletage showing varying degrees of cleavage, as seen in Figure 1.



FIGURE 1. Publicity stills from *The Faye Emerson Show*. Courtesy of Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

JERRY DOYLE'S . . . TV CARTOONS



FIGURE 2. An undated *TV Digest* cartoon mocking Faye Emerson's fashions. Courtesy of Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

Considerable controversy resulted, because women in particular were said to fear the dangers of allowing such a display of sexuality to appear in the nation's living rooms. The controversy made for much newspaper and magazine commentary, such as the cartoon shown in Figure 2, which indicates marital arguments oriented toward Emerson's necklines.

A comment in the related article echoes how many journalists discussed Emerson: "there's one attraction about Faye that scores immediately aside from her visible asset (or 'assets—two of them')" (O'Hare 28). Critics took considerable delight in sly references to Emerson's bust. *New York Herald Tribune* columnist John Crosby wrote, "Miss Emerson, I'd be the first to admit, fills a ten-inch screen very adequately. Very adequately." And he noted, "*The Faye Emerson Show*, I assume, is aimed primarily at women, but I know men, including this one, who are helplessly fascinated by it for reasons which never occurred to CBS." In this sense, Faye Emerson's sexuality dominated her persona in the early 1950s. Never was she mentioned in the press and in fan magazines without a reference to some aspect of her sexual

image, particularly her cleavage, as she pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable for women to show.

Thus, Emerson's explicit sexuality and glamour might have been difficult to integrate with the image of the domestic everyday hostess "personality." But closer analysis of publicity material shows that Emerson's glamorous appeal was frequently presented as wholly natural and genuine, a strategy highlighted by a Pepsi-Cola press release, which promoted her as "dynamic and wholesomely natural." Such characterizations of her natural beauty in connection with her personality were consistent; one article described the "easy, friendly manner that is Miss Emerson's special charm" (Van Horne), and the woman's magazine *Cosmopolitan* praised her "sophisticated simplicity" (Debs Myers 109). An extensive profile by Judith Cortada in *Radio Best* mentioned her "uncluttered" home (63) and pointed out that her favorite foods were simple dishes, she wore simple suits, and she bought "good basic things" when shopping (64).

A *TV Show* article even attempted to justify her glamour in this manner: "She's completely natural and unselfconscious, and makes no secret that she tints her brown hair gold because blondes show up better on TV" (Fredrik 42). And in a presumably ghost-written fan magazine article entitled "Just Be Natural," Emerson described first-hand her simple hairdo and make-up, appropriate for anyone at home: "The trick is that everything is keyed down to highlight mouth and eyes . . . a technique I use on stage, screen and TV. Fine for everyday too" (77). In another profile, Emerson similarly defended her choice of revealing dresses in the face of controversy, justifying the evening gowns as appropriate wear for evening gatherings with friends: "I wear on TV just what I'd ordinarily wear at that hour of the night" (qtd. in "Not Too Heavy" 57). Thus, while her beauty and glamour were constant features in press coverage, they were almost always recouped as natural, even ordinary, characteristics.

Certainly, that she hosted a talk show, thereby acting as "herself" and addressing the audience directly, lent her television persona a considerable amount of sincerity. Extratextual material on Emerson then perpetuated the same notion of unaffected "personality" that viewers gathered from her television program, and her glamour became just another component of that personality. Although she may have pushed the boundaries of acceptable displays of sexuality, she could still fit within a model of "Hollywood's answer to the home economics

teacher” by defining her image based on the concept of authenticity, not excess.

This image of personable authenticity subsequently became the norm for the 1950s talk show host figure, and later hosts such as Arlene Francis and Dinah Shore owed a great deal to the template that Emerson set forth in the earliest years of commercial television. She capitalized on the intimacy of the medium with her ability to improvise engaging repartee with a wide range of guests, and she exploited the sensationalism of her sexuality without allowing it to overshadow the sincerity of her identity. Mixing equal parts of glamour and naturalism, sexuality and intelligence, sophistication and intimacy, consistency and spontaneity, Faye Emerson successfully exploited the performative standards of early television and produced a model of talk show success for others to follow.

Transgressing Personality

As the decade continued, though, Emerson herself began to abandon this model and increasingly pushed the boundaries of what viewers allegedly would accept in their living rooms, due as much to what she said as how she looked. Since the end of her movie career, Emerson had been connected to the political sphere because of her marriage to Elliot Roosevelt. Her continuing friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, who considered Emerson an intellectual compatriot, was also indicative of her political persuasion; Emerson reportedly once said on the quiz show *Who Said That?* that “Churchill was the man of the 19th century—but the man of the 20th century is Eleanor Roosevelt” (E. Harris 73). In the early part of her career, she rarely spoke out about political issues, but her intelligence was always an element of her television persona because of her frequent quiz show appearances.

Indeed, although primarily known as a talk show host in the early 1950s, Emerson developed an additional role as a quiz show panelist, making frequent appearances on such shows as CBS’s *What’s My Line?* and ABC’s *Quick as a Flash*. Publicity about this facet of her career frequently portrayed Emerson as a curiosity who somehow combined both sexuality and intellect. In a 1953 newspaper article entitled “New Kind of Glamor Girl Classed as TV Show Brain,” Elizabeth Toomey wrote of female quiz show panelists, including Emerson,

Dictionaries beside mascara brushes and world almanacs next to reducing books—yes, a strange new kind of glamor girl is developing. She keeps up with current events and plays guessing games with her friends just for practice. She gets more kick out of adding an obscure word to her vocabulary than she does from a new hairdo. She's discovered a new way to become known to her public (and pay the rent) while she's learning to be a competent actress. It involves brains, not cheesecake poses.

The woman's magazine *Cosmopolitan* in fact questioned if her mental acumen was not exaggerated by the press simply because no one could believe "that a young woman with so fetching a figure reads books and worries about the future of the world" (Debs Myers 37). Such an assumption is clear in critic Frank Conniff's comment about Emerson, "It isn't everyday that you see a high IQ in a low-cut gown" (qtd. in E. Harris 73). Similarly, in an article entitled "Beautiful, Breezy Faye Emerson Has Brains, Too," author Marjorie Mols quotes *Who Said That?* host Robert Trout as saying, "Men respect Miss Emerson and it's not just because she dresses up a television screen. They're respectfully scared of her brains."

As the tenor of these comments indicates, such intelligence was eyed with a strong measure of suspicion across the decade. The *New York Times Magazine's* C. Robert Jennings took up this issue in a 1958 article, "Quiz Shows: The Woman Question," trying to discern why so few women appeared as contestants on quiz programs. One of the article's sources, Dr. Ernest Dichter, a New York motivational researcher, explained one reason: "The woman who knows a lot of data is somehow queer. She wants to affirm herself in other ways because she is suspect if society knows this is all she has collected" (65). The article also presented interviews with three female former quiz show winners, and all three denied a characterization of themselves as "feminist champions striking a blow for equality" (65).

Importantly, both industry publicity and comments attributed to Emerson signify attempts to soften her image as an intellectual so that she would not be perceived in this emasculating way, quite akin to the ways in which she tried to soften the impact of her glamour. For instance, Val Adams's *New York Times* feature article on the actress stressed that Emerson's intelligence was never overwhelming to audiences at home: "Although she has definite ideas and positive opinions, she expresses them in a nice easy way rather than the 'now get this!'

manner of an army sergeant, a common failing of many career girls who try to sell their intelligence” (11). Adams further emphasized that Emerson herself believed that her level of intellect was “good, but not unusual” and had more to do with “a probing interest in almost everything that takes place anywhere” than true “intellectual prowess” (37).

Outward expression of any such prowess could be problematic for Emerson, as evidenced by a complaint letter she read on the May 18, 1951, episode of *The Faye Emerson Show*. Emerson had expressed concern in an earlier episode that the Korean conflict would escalate further (March 5, 1951), and the letter writer felt that this position revealed Emerson’s ignorance of the US government’s view of the war, particularly its claim that the conflict would be over shortly. The letter included the admonition, “Better stick to the plunging necklines, Faye; politics is not for little girls.” Emerson responded to the letter thusly: “Politics is everybody’s business, and I’m certainly not a little girl. [I will keep broaching political topics on the show], but I will try not to jam my opinions down your throat.” Clearly, Emerson was aware that she at least had to qualify her displays of her intelligence and quash any brashness in order to maintain her broader popularity, much as she had to contain her sexuality within acceptable parameters.

One of the most notable instances of her doing exactly that came out of her position as moderator of the program *Author Meets the Critics* from January to October 1952. The title of the program indicates its premise: an author discussed his recent book with a panel of intellectuals, and the moderator tried to keep the conversation both engaging and civil. Emerson presided over one particularly contentious episode in which Senator Joseph McCarthy appeared to discuss his book, *America’s Retreat from Victory*. The debate among McCarthy and guest critics Leo Cherne, executive secretary of the Research Institute of America, and Ralph de Toledano, a supporter of McCarthy, quickly descended into angry attacks and fevered interruptions, such that *Life* titled its article on the episode, “TV Panel Makes More Noise Than Sense.” According to *Life*’s transcript of the volatile episode, Emerson’s input was largely limited to such comments as “One at a time, gentlemen,” and “You’re our guests—please behave like guests” (102). Certainly, in her capacity as a moderator, she likely was not expected to express a viewpoint. However, one could not imagine her later in her career acting “charmingly helpless,” as *Life* described her moderating effort (101).

Indeed, as the 1950s continued, Emerson was less willing to express her opinions in a "nice easy way," and she let her political orientation guide her actions both on and off television screens, thereby going well beyond the publicity image of a mere "TV quiz show brain" who collected reams of innocuous facts. She campaigned fervently for Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson in the mid-1950s (Henderson), and she became involved in industry politics through the television performers' union, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), where she openly battled the anti-Communist faction called Aware, Inc. (Harvey 180–91). Emerson's son William acknowledged that she realized that expressing strident opinions and challenging the union heads would cost her jobs and money, but her frustrating experiences within AFTRA in particular compelled her to begin openly airing her opinions (Susskind).

For instance, she appeared on a number of talk shows in the mid to late 1950s, frequently debating such conservative figures as William F. Buckley. In one appearance on Steve Allen's *Tonight!*, Emerson and television critic John Crosby debated Aware founder Vince Hartnett and president Godfrey P. Schmidt about blacklisting issues. Hartnett reportedly got so angered at Emerson's positions that he physically confronted her backstage after program's taping (Erickson). She also generated a great deal of controversy in 1957 while hosting a brief segment on a local New York show with Mike Wallace called *Newsbeat*. Wallace read the news for the bulk of each episode, and Emerson filled the final five minutes with a segment called "The Woman's Touch," which consisted of musings on women's issues and current events. On one segment, she argued that the United States should open up a dialogue with China, and for this, both newspapers and the ordinary public heavily criticized her ("Faye Emerson, Happy Anonymity"). One letter to the editor in 1957 snidely commented, "surely a session of Congress will have to be called to weigh the remarks of such a learned and distinguished stateswoman who I am sure will go down in history."

Emerson also began to speak out on feminist issues in the latter half of the 1950s, including her desire to see more women employed in the television industry. In 1957, she lamented that only men had covered the previous two political conventions, and she referred to this as "a deplorable situation" (qtd. in D. Harris). She also briefly hosted a New York program in 1956 called *Women Want to Know*, and generated a great deal of controversy with the premiere episode's topic, sex

education. Charles S. Aaronson authored an editorial in *Motion Picture Daily* blasting Emerson and the show for the topic, “which has no conceivable place in such a mass medium of wide dissemination as television,” and cynically noted that having the “glamorous Faye Emerson” moderate the discussion was “little less than the height of folly.”

A Career in Decline

By the late 1950s, Emerson’s national popularity had ebbed considerably and the frequency of her television appearances declined precipitously. Interestingly, most critics credited her downfall to a decline in her sexual expressiveness, particularly in terms of the climbing of her neckline and the expansion of her waistline. In relation to the former, an industry-imposed Television Code had dictated a change in costuming, and some cynical critics felt that this doomed certain actresses, with Emerson frequently used as evidence. A 1953 *North Hollywood Valley Times* editorial read as such: “Chances are Miss Emerson and her advisors are bending over backward in an effort to get away from cleavage. If so they’d better straighten up a bit, at least to a happy medium, for the best interests of the actress.” Additionally, Emerson fought weight gain throughout her career, and by the mid-1950s, she seemed less concerned about controlling it, to the point where critics began making disparaging comments. *TV Star Parade* penned in 1956, “somebody should call a meeting about her figure—the lady is really getting to be a plump dumpling.”

Importantly, no critics reference Emerson’s increasing political outspokenness as a reason for the decline in her career. However, I would argue that the frequent references to her breasts and her changing physical image were a way to mask these viewpoints. Just as Charles S. Aaronson could dismiss Emerson’s ability to address a serious political issue because of her beauty, reviewers could easily reduce her to just her breasts and body image, thereby dismissing her political positions without even raising them. Quiz show host Gary Moore, a close friend of Emerson’s, specifically identified critic Jack O’Brien as a reviewer who repeatedly commented negatively on Emerson’s displays of cleavage. In Moore’s mind, the staunch right-winger O’Brien did this because in his capacity as a television reviewer, he was not in a position to criticize her politics; he could, however, chastise her for the physical image she presented on television.

As such, Emerson's identity as a sexual object essentially dominated her television persona and her representation of femininity. Even though she was a politically minded intellectual, and was eager to display fully this aspect of her personality by the late 1950s, she was ultimately reduced to a sexual object and a glamour queen. Fittingly, *TV Guide* responded to Senator Margaret Chase Smith's serious suggestion that Faye Emerson was "the type of woman needed in the nation's capital" with a comical projection of the results. They predicted that she would campaign on the "Plunging Neckline Platform" and give an inaugural address presenting "a hard-hitting attack against those Paris designers who were plotting to bring back the high neckline" ("If Faye Emerson Were President" 9).

Such dismissive depictions surely frustrated Emerson throughout her television career; friend Dennis Patrick said, "if I ever saw a woman who would like to take two tits and throw them out a window somewhere, Faye Emerson would have done it." A fascinating article that Emerson penned for the men's magazine *Esquire* indicates as such (this article was not ghostwritten; archival materials indicate that she did write it herself). In "Eggheads Make the Best Lovers," Emerson explained that she found men with brains much sexier than men with brawn, particularly because they treat women with so much more respect. She wrote,

We women have an inferiority complex about our minds, built in from the time we were in our rompers. We've all been told that although we were adorable and curly-haired and dimpled and the future-mothers-in-law of men (note: not of daughters!), we were mentally inferior to the male of the species. And when we grow up and meet a man who treats us with respect, he instantly captures our attention. The odds are high that he will be an egghead because only eggheads are smart enough to have figured out that women are people and not just amorous props. (66)

One would imagine that she felt the same about television as she did about men with brawn.

Once her expressions of political opinion and insight extended beyond the confines of the easygoing average "personality," Faye Emerson's television career was over. Although publicity and on-screen presentation could reshape both cleavage and an encyclopedic knowledge of trivia into "tropes of averageness," no model of authenticity

could accommodate the politically outspoken woman on television. She either had to be reduced to an image of passive, natural glamour or be eliminated. Emerson would no longer tolerate the former by the late 1950s, and thus experienced the latter; she appeared on TV only twice in 1961 and but once in 1962.

She did continue her involvement in political issues, though, most notably traveling on her own to Washington, DC for the 1963 civil rights march. In a move that surprised many, even her closest friends, Emerson left the United States only six weeks later, ostensibly to travel around Europe. She told the *New York Post* before she left, "I just want to think and study and write and put my feet up and assess my whole life" (qtd. in "Faye Emerson, Happy Anonymity"). Tired of the demands of her celebrity, she also insisted that she would happily rid herself her contrived image: "the first thing I'll definitely do is cut off my hair, let it grow to its true color, whatever that is! I think there'll be a little silver in it. This, now, is the way people expect me to look, but it isn't really me." No longer willing to accept the restrictions, assumptions, and conventions of television, not to mention those of American society itself, Emerson took her breasts and her brains to Majorca, Spain, where she stayed until her death in 1983.

Though Faye Emerson was very popular in the early period of television, her TV career was relatively short, and she is rarely mentioned alongside names like Berle and Benny today, despite having nearly attained their level of stardom at the time. In their recent article on 1950s hosts Arlene Francis and Ruth Lyons, television scholars Marsha Cassidy and Mimi White point out that many influential women from this period are ignored in "official" television histories, and these omissions obscure our understanding of the power and agency that women might have had on early television.

The elision of Emerson from historical discourse is especially significant, then, because the birth of her television career reflected the early development of one of television's longest lasting genres. Talk show historian Bernard Timberg describes the late 1940s and early 1950s as an era of experimentation in the television talk show, and a period in which some of the principal standards of the genre were established. Faye Emerson embodied both of these characteristics. Whereas later female hosts like Arlene Francis were isolated to daytime once the evening viewing hours were firmly established as the realm for masculinized programming by the mid-1950s, Emerson thrived in her

late-night and prime-time slots during commercial television's earliest years. As such, her initial success epitomizes the fluidity of early television, just as her later failure illustrates what was lost after the networks consolidated their power over the medium. But although Emerson herself was left behind, the traits she established as essential to the success of the television personality lingered for decades to come. Emerson succeeded only briefly as a neatly packaged personality, and that she could not truly be herself on 1950s television clearly underscores the constructed nature of this representation that was of such consequence to early television and the talk show format.

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