

Thank You for Being a Fan

Forty Years of *The Golden Girls*

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It was electric. The Golden-Con costume contest was under way; Glenna Beaver, dressed as “Walkathon Sophia” in a pink velour sweatsuit, a matching pink headband, and the number 151 taped to the iconic straw purse, began her shuffle down the catwalk. She was surrounded by a smorgasbord of Sophias, including “Classic Sophia,” “Storybook Sophia,” “Brooklyn Sophia,” “Baby Sophia” (an actual infant), and two “Sonny Bono Sophias.” Dozens of Dorothys, Roses, Blanches, and Stans, meanwhile, cheered these Sophias on from the wings, waiting for their own categories to be called. Glenna started off slow, cagey, like a panther. But when the time was right, she pounced! The crowd was on its feet: “Sophia! Sophia! Sophia!” As she neared the end of the runway, she unclasped the latch on her purse, scooped out a fistful of Pep-O-Mints—carefully avoiding the Feen-a-Mint and the rain bonnet—and tossed them into the audience to uproarious applause. This Sophia didn’t hit a wall. She won.

Like trying to understand the preceding paragraph and its references to various episodes, the costume contest at the first-ever *Golden Girls* fan convention relied on an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the text. Attendees in the know found pleasure and joy in the costumes’ deep cuts and references to jokes, story lines, and episodes. More casual viewers and plus-ones deepened their own engagement with the show by learning about ardent fans’ most beloved moments, captured here in costume. Some forty years



Golden Girls fan Glenna Beaver competed as “Walk-a-thon Sophia” in the 2022 Golden-Con costume contest (*left*) and one of the Captain Jack Seafood Shanty Pirates in the 2023 Golden-Con costume contest (*right*). (Photo by Taylor Cole Miller)

after the show’s premiere, maybe now more than ever, *The Golden Girls* is a cultural phenomenon.

Picture it: television, 2025—the proliferation of fan sites, social media groups, thousands of official and homemade merchandise items, specially themed Caribbean cruises, a half-million-dollar fan convention, live drag shows, equity tours, camp sleepaways, theatrical releases of episodes, and even a yearly presence at Comic Con all serve as testaments not just to the enduring power of *The Golden Girls* but to an explosive rise in its popularity within the past five years. *The Golden Girls* was one of Hulu’s most watched shows during the first year of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the week after Betty White’s death, it was in the Nielsen ratings’ top ten acquired streaming shows.¹ We are living in the Golden Age—of *The Golden Girls*.

This collection is a decade in the making. As editors, both of us have long talked about, written about, and presented about *The Golden Girls* throughout our academic careers. We have included it in our syllabi, developed courses around it, and used it to demonstrate various media studies concepts. We continue to find *The Golden Girls* an extraordinarily rich resource for scholarly consideration in both our research and teaching, with new threads to tug, new audiences to discover, new insights on watching, and new ways to think about television’s present as well as its past. It also became a personal connection between the two of us, offering a language of friendship as we would reach out to each other in moments of needed comfort that we could always find in a quoted line or a cherished scene. We

inevitably come back to the same question in every conversation: In our field, why is there so little written about this show?

There are dozens of books on currently running “quality television” shows with a handful of episodes that, if we are being honest with ourselves, people will forget about in ten years. And maybe, to borrow from Sophia, jealousy is just “a very ugly color” on us, but reviewers rarely ask these authors to justify their objects of study as relevant—not their arguments but their entire objects of study. Relevancy, however, has become a common refrain in scholarly publishing in peer reviews of journal articles studying older shows. *The Golden Girls* premiered forty years ago and has never been out of syndication. A show about older women starring veteran actors whom TV execs once thought no one would ever want to watch again, a show that ended its original run three Bushes and two Clintons ago, continues to reach new, young audiences year after year, surging in popularity in the past five. And so, we wondered, What’s all that about?

Although it is a seemingly simple question, What’s all that about? has been a productive foundation on which to build *The Golden Girls: Tales from the Lanai*. The more both of us talked to other people about the potential of this collection, the more we realized how complex and multifaceted *The Golden Girls* is for many of its viewers in ways neither of us have read about. *The Golden Girls* is thus a model of a rich media studies text and a perfect object of study to demonstrate a wide variety of approaches to media studies. As we celebrate its fortieth anniversary, the cultural moment for an edited anthology about *The Golden Girls* has never seemed more urgent or ideal. About that beloved American sitcom, this book is a resource for scholars and students as well as dedicated fans and casual viewers fascinated by rich cultural television histories and portraits of audiences often unattended to by mainstream media outlets, large academic journals, or even fan communities. With twelve original chapters from scholars across the country and extensive original interviews with those who created the show, this book is a long day’s journey into the marinara of *The Golden Girls*—an immersive, engaging opportunity for readers to learn more about the show without having to board the actual *Golden Girls* cruise liner and launch themselves into the Caribbean.

This book accomplishes four primary goals: First, it reclaims the production history and contextual development of an older text understood today as an important cultural touchstone. Second, it opens *new* conversations about an *old* show, giving us an opportunity to think less monolithically about network audiences of the 1980s by examining a variety of different kinds of

viewers and audience cultures increasingly visible in the fragmented digital moment. Third, it offers a new model for a circuit of media culture approach to studying texts that considers the entire lifetime of a text a significant feature of its textuality.² And fourth, through its contributions, it models different methodologies that a student might take when researching any television text, not just *The Golden Girls*. Bringing together a diverse array of scholars, this collection does not speak with a singular voice but offers twelve different perspectives to render an extraordinary three-dimensional model of scholarly inquiry of an extraordinary American sitcom.

Divided into three parts, the chapters of this book collectively analyze *The Golden Girls*' production and context, audience appeal, and textuality so that together, this anthology provides an intimate portrait of the show's popularity and legacy and a model of a circuit of media culture approach to television research. The book also seriously investigates *The Golden Girls* as intersectional, considering how various aspects of its production and textuality made and continue to make it an important text for marginalized audiences, especially for Black, queer, and women viewers. Through a comprehensive survey of the show, its history, production, and allure with audiences, this collection reclaims and explores *The Golden Girls*, locating and analyzing its resurgent popularity in the present cultural moment.

The Relevancy Refrain: So, Why *The Golden Girls*?

Celebrating its fortieth anniversary this year, *The Golden Girls* was already an iconic American sitcom with longevity, and by this historical significance alone, it would be an intriguing case study worthy of attention and exploration. But its meteoric rise in popularity within the past five years has transcended the nostalgia and memory of its initial entertainment value, and that warrants a more in-depth investigation from a variety of different perspectives. Whereas most television studies work is either historical by design or tracking a series still in original production, in this book, we have the benefit of studying an older show in a newer context, demonstrating how the passage of time can become a meaningful feature of a text. The passage of time creates a text with newfound depth and invites critical analyses that unearth subtle nuance and thematic relevance that would have been overlooked in contemporary analyses, especially the show's wide-ranging appeal to diverse demographics that did not matter to network television

executives in the 1980s but that matter to them now in the age of demographic targeting. To open a collection of essays about *The Golden Girls* as a model of a case study for our field, in this introduction, we begin by investigating how the show originally emerged as an innovative and challenging project for a changing industry, then discuss its development as a compelling text whose narrative complexities have enriched over time, and finally explore the uncharted territories of its diverse audience base, offering critical insights into overlooked communities.

INDUSTRY AND PRODUCTION HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1984, the veteran television actors Selma Diamond (then on *Night Court*) and Doris Roberts (then on *Remington Steele*) stepped out on the stage of NBC's *Fall Preview Special* and traded banter on one of the network's most promising new dramas, *Miami Vice*. "We're here to introduce a show that takes place in the most wonderful resort in the world, Miami," Diamond jokes as the two take the stage. "The Land of Coppertone and corned beef, mink coats, cha-cha lessons, *The Jackie Gleason Show*—" "It's been canceled," Roberts interjects, shrugging. "Better him than us." When Diamond continues describing a show about sitting on the beach, Roberts corrects her: "No, no, no, honey, this show is not called *Miami Nice*. This is called *Miami Vice*." Although the skit was merely meant for two of the network's veteran stars to introduce two of its up-and-comers ("the gorgeous Don Johnson and the gorgeous Philip Michael Thomas"), the chemistry between Diamond and Roberts was electric, and *Miami Nice* sparked an idea for a show that eventually became *The Golden Girls*.

With its four leads and their helpful gay houseboy, Coco, in place for its pilot, *The Golden Girls* "hit the ground running" in its original network run, blitzing into the Nielsen's top ten ratings for its premiere and staying there for six of its seven seasons.³ An unexpected success, even in its freshman season, with a weekly estimated audience of nearly nineteen million, *Miami Nice* was doing better than its forerunner, *Miami Vice*. The 9:00 p.m. EST Saturday-night time slot allowed families of all ages to watch the show in leisure, at a time early enough for those who were early to bed and those who were late to leave for a night on the town. But despite its ratings successes, by 1992, NBC began to eye another kind of viewer: the young. As had happened with the "rural purge" of television at the end of the 1960s—canceling still-popular shows like *Green Acres*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* because of the older audiences they attracted—the promise of a

new “quality” audience commodity in young viewers meant big changes in programming strategies as executives raced to create ever-edgier programming in the early 1990s, particularly at NBC.

NBC’s “face lift” was coined “granny-dumping,” an adopted phrase from a growing trend in the early 1990s of the literal abandonment of elderly relatives at Shady Pineses across the country.⁴ Shows still popular for NBC’s over-fifty crowd, like *Matlock*, *In the Heat of the Night*, and *The Golden Girls*, were dropped in favor of series targeting a younger demographic with more emphasis on “edgy” trends like nudity, violence, risqué language, and non-heterosexual characters. Then–NBC President Warren Littlefield vowed to “continue the successful transition from households to [a new] demographic focus” on young viewers.⁵ Surprised by NBC’s move, ABC and CBS picked up versions of all three of these shows through the mid-1990s. Even after *The Golden Girls* and its sequel were canceled, it went on to become one of the most successful series in broadcast syndication, as discussed in chapter 3. When Lifetime bought the exclusive rights to the show in 1997, the popularity of *The Golden Girls* picked up steam as the channel began airing dozens of episodes each week, more than it aired ever before. In 2004, when Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment began releasing the episodes in complete seasons on DVD, the show found a third generation of fans, and with the advent of streaming, *The Golden Girls* found yet more viewers, many comfort-watching their way through the pandemic. As a production of an independent studio (the Walt Disney Company) for a major broadcast network (ABC) and with three and a half decades of top-rated syndication under its belt, *The Golden Girls* is an exemplary object for industry histories and investigations of production cultures. Its robust performance across multiple generations of the television business illustrates changing formations in the industrial landscape that have shaped and will continue to shape television programming and syndication for years to come. Part of its staying power is in the time-tested episodic sitcom structure, but it is also in the compelling narratives and rich characterizations that the show built despite a fairly rigid narrative formula.

THE TEXT

While the premise of the show itself is probably its most groundbreaking feature, episodes of *The Golden Girls* often tackled topics that most contemporaneous television shows had been afraid or incapable of addressing, such as disability, class, menopause, chronic disease, and the failures of the myriad American systems of governance for the elderly. Early on, the show’s

eagerness to engage topics that other shows would not dare helped it reach both a mass and niche audiences. Through its fluid presentation of a variety of femininities (and thus masculinities), the comedy of *The Golden Girls* runs on a combustion engine of gender upheaval and social taboo. First, and most centrally, it is a comedy featuring an ensemble of women that emerged during a political and televisual era that erased much of the liberal feminist programming of the 1970s, including Bea Arthur's own series, *Maude*. The kind of cultural specificity that *The Golden Girls* originally faced as the political pendulum swung to the right in the 1980s resonates as timely with its audiences again in the 2020s. The shoulder pads, chunky earrings, and hairstyles may date the series, but its comedies and comforts are timeless. The show also brings a critical, intersectional gender questioning to cultural power in a much more complex way than traditional television programs do. After all, *The Golden Girls* is not just a series about women; it is about *older* women and their subsequent reconstitutions of family. The show's interrogations of gender create nuanced representations of womanhood and women's bodies that appeal to women looking for more complexity in their characters in both mind and body.

Although the women of *The Golden Girls*, as an ensemble cast, were and are perhaps the most exemplary case study of older bodies on the small screen, a number of earlier programs often featured iconic transgressive older women characters. *I Love Lucy's* crotchety Mrs. McGillicuddy; a whole crew of angsty ladies on *Bewitched*, including and especially the flamboyant mom Endora, the absent-minded Aunt Clara, the gossamer Esmerelda, and the nosy neighbor Gladys Kravitz; *The Jeffersons'* Florence; *Roseanne's* butch grandma Nana Mary and (sometimes) lesbian mother Bev; *All in the Family's* zany Edith Bunker; and the no-nonsense Mama from *Mama's Family*. However, whereas these other sitcom characters relied on fairly stable identities and expressions of gender, *The Golden Girls* frequently reconfigured the gender phenotype of its characters through a more complex seriality. Betty White's Rose Nylund, the naïve Scandinavian-Minnesotan with a library of unusual St. Olaf stories, vacillated on a spectrum between the sturdy farm girl and the glamorous Miami dame. Blanche Devereaux always proffered the dainty persona of a southern belle but subverted the purity, innocence, and age of the belle through her constant references to her late-in-life promiscuity and menopause. Bea Arthur's towering Dorothy Zbornak exuded masculinity through her booming low voice and take-charge attitude as the first among equals. But she also sang and performed tender musical numbers while blushing and batting her eyes at a long line of suitors. Meanwhile, her "Ma," Sophia Petrillo, was the devil-may-care Sicilian New York unruly

marm with no regard for self-editing within a culture in which women were expected to censor their speech (this is occasionally attributed to her having had a stroke).

Additionally, *The Golden Girls* was no stranger to explicitly LGBT material: Blanche's gay brother, Clayton, makes two appearances, coming out in one episode and introducing his fiancé in another; Dorothy's long-lost friend Jean falls in love with Rose; a slap-happy gay married caterer and his sensitive assistant plan Sophia's wedding; the lesbian lovers Pat and Kathy provide image consulting services; the gay artist Lazlo reveals the Girls' essence; Sophia thinks Dorothy's cross-dressing brother, Phil, might be queer; and a trans man named Gil Kessler runs for city council. Indeed, the original main cast of *The Golden Girls* featured a gay houseboy named Coco whom the network later dropped due, allegedly, to network concerns of homophobia. Much like the outcomes when film studios attempted to erase queerness and queer bodies from film in the era of the "Production Code," in NBC's attempt to erase gayness via Coco, *The Golden Girls* ultimately produced a much queerer space that offered more room at the table for a wide variety of sexualities and gender identities. What made the show itself especially queer was that each of these explicit characters and story lines represented moments of explicit representation walking onto and then right back off the set. They appeared just long enough to anchor conversations about other forms of sexualities and gender practices so the girls could voice their embrace, tolerance, and love, but they left quickly enough to return the series to a queerer sensibility and politics, where the queer familial bonds between the women superseded any relationship with other characters or male suitors. And this representation of same-sex love and friendship is part of what makes it so comforting and resonant, especially with marginalized viewers.

AUDIENCE

Many scholars have studied gender roles within domestic spheres and their mediation on television. We review issues of patriarchy, marriage, and childbirth that make demands on women's bodies and hail them into oppressed subject positions based on their gender. We discuss how women enter into and negotiate the expectations of heteronormativity as a time and a space—even how they might be complicit in their oppression. But what happens when they get chewed up by that very same system of power and spit out the other side? The Girls performed their expected gender roles in a white-hegemonic, heteronormative society correctly, but nevertheless



The Golden Girls. (Photo © Wayne Williams 1984–87. All rights reserved.)

they ended up outside of it just like so many of us. Their journey is our journey, and we have ultimately found comfort and identity in their exile. As some of the chapters in this collection detail, *The Golden Girls* deeply resonated—and continues to resonate—with Black audiences, queer audiences, and women audiences who similarly do not fit within all frames of power and are often searching for but not finding themselves on their television screens.

Fans, social media groups, and friends made during fan conventions sharing their viewing habits have become more visible than ever before, opening vast new sites of digital examination as social media departments scrutinize every this and that of their users. A growing trend of young users bingeing *The Golden Girls*, sharing the series, quoting it, and using it as a framework

through which to do their own identity work continues to incentivize television platforms, merchandise manufacturers, and fan culture industries to use *The Golden Girls* to attract younger people to their platforms, which is a bit ironic given that *The Golden Girls* was “granny dumped” for young audiences, as discussed earlier. As these “tales from the lanai” attest, the secondary lives of *Golden Girls* episodes continue to find new and different and often underserved audiences who have coalesced with mainstream fans to make *The Golden Girls* a 2020s phenomenon.

Tales from the Lanai

Taken together, the chapters and original interview portions of this book create a sustained portrait of a cultural touchstone through a circuit of media culture that models a new format for media studies books reclaiming rich older media texts, making scholarship and scholarly voices accessible and engaging for multiple audiences while deeply exploring a singular show. Not simply attending to *The Golden Girls* textually, this collection is divided into three parts, with the chapters primarily addressing the show through the corresponding circuit of media culture framework and interviews providing rich primary source context about the show and its stars. Although each of the chapters is about *The Golden Girls*, this collection is scalable for media approaches to other texts. Each of the chapters provide different methods to approaching a single media text, all loosely categorized into three sections in a circuit of culture approach: industry histories, text, and audience. Also included are the editors’ original interviews with behind-the-scenes figures, offering primary source examples for students and researchers.

PART 1: INDUSTRY AND CONTEXT

In part 1, authors Kate Fortmueller, Peter C. Kunze, Taylor Cole Miller, and Jessica Hoover discuss the television business, addressing the historical context of the show’s original production and how it has navigated—and continues to overcome—industry challenges in the decades it has remained on television. We start by immediately addressing the exciting surge of popularity that *The Golden Girls* has experienced in the past five years before backing up to contextualize that phenomenon with deep investigations of the show’s origins, technical approach, and marketability. In chapter 1, Fortmueller discusses the resurgent popularity of *The Golden Girls* during the

pandemic, focusing on its Hulu success story as part of the “comfort TV” trend. Despite changes in the media landscape and influx of new shows, Fortmueller argues that classic sitcoms found renewed attention, illustrating their cultural relevance and the role of streamers in leveraging nostalgia to gain subscribers.

Backing up to the beginning of the show, in chapter 2, Kunze’s historical investigation of Disney locates *The Golden Girls* as a significant property for the studio’s renaissance of the 1980s and 1990s, often unevenly attributed to its animation work and the release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989. Through a captivating portrait of creator Susan Harris, he argues that film and television comedies like *The Golden Girls* were central to Disney’s revitalization.

Kunze’s argument that the show was a key property for Disney is further elaborated in chapter 3, as Miller discusses the enduring popularity of *The Golden Girls* in syndication. Bringing attention to Disney’s investment in the show for reruns, Miller details how gender played a role in its marketing and viewership while noting the polysemic ways the show has been rebranded to appeal to different audience segments. He investigates the cultural impact of the show in syndication, emphasizing its role in viewers’ lives through the various marketing strategies used to sell it.

To round out the discussion of industry and context, in chapter 4, Hoover analyzes the flashback episode structure, using specific episodes like “The Way We Met” and “A Piece of Cake” to highlight how flashbacks deepen character connections and demonstrate how the show departs from conventional sitcom tropes that stereotype women characters. She explores the industrial benefits of flashback episodes for networks and producers while discussing how such structures deepen the narrative of sitcoms for audiences. Hoover’s analysis of a television trend typical of 1980s TV considers how producers and writers negotiate the demands of the business with the artistry of screenwriting, offering a transition to a discussion of the text in part 2.

PART 2: TEXT

In part 2, authors Claire Sewell, Ashleé Clark, Andrew J. Owens, Jared Clayton Brown, and Beth L. Boser take a more traditional textual analysis approach to *The Golden Girls* but offer very different perspectives. Building on the context of part 1, we start by first contextualizing how the press and other media engaged with the show and its stars before shifting to chapters that offer a closer textual analysis of episodes. In chapter 5, Sewell explores the interplay between tabloid culture and the show, discussing how *The Golden*

Girls' characters, story lines, and actors were intertwined with tabloid headlines. She argues that tabloid journalism's intersection with the show's narrative sheds light on the cultural significance of both in the broader context of American society.

In chapter 6, Clark discusses how the show explores the characters' relationships with food and body image in the context of 1980s diet culture, mirroring social pressures on women's appearances across history. Utilizing episodes with weight-related story lines, Clark notes how the show challenged norms by relegating dieting narratives to secondary "B" plotlines and using characters like Dorothy to voice opposition to diet culture while emphasizing the significance of the *Girls'* comfort food, cheesecake.

The show finds numerous ways of addressing headline social issues without such episodes feeling like a departure from the feel of the series. In chapter 7, Owens discusses the series's portrayal of the HIV/AIDS crisis in media, focusing on how *The Golden Girls* tackled the issue in its episode "72 Hours." He explores the show's significance in challenging stereotypes and educating viewers while addressing how the episode broke norms in its representations of fear and prejudice among the leads, ultimately showcasing how television shapes perspectives of important cultural moments.

More directly discussing the *Girls'* sexual lives, in chapter 8, Brown examines how *The Golden Girls* challenges stereotypes about older women's sexuality and aging. He argues that the show's portrayal of sexually active and empowered older women confronts prevailing cultural norms, reshaping perceptions of female sexuality. Such representations of the *Girls* stand in contrast with earlier TV portrayals in which older women, though often fierce, were typically desexualized in favor of coding them as moms and grandmas, a helpful preface for the final chapter in this section.

In chapter 9, Boser shares a deeply personal story about caregiving and fertility struggles to contextualize how *The Golden Girls* became a kind of salve for her. She sought out the show by initially aiming to avoid overwrought media narratives about motherhood but instead found a surprisingly complex engagement with motherhood mediated through its characters. In her autoethnographic essay, Boser dissects the show's challenge to ideas about traditional motherhood by exploring how the characters navigate the tensions of postfeminism and intense maternal expectations. Boser's chapter provides deep textual analysis while considering how new kinds of audiences might find differing meaning in the show, contextualizing the final three chapters in part 3.

PART 3: AUDIENCE AND RECEPTION

In part 3, authors Alfred L. Martin Jr., Ken Feil, and Eleanor Patterson build on the earlier discussions of the industry and textual aspects of the show to discuss the significance of *The Golden Girls* with audiences. They investigate three different groups of marginalized viewers over the lifetime of the show and, in so doing, offer meaningful insight into how even studying an older show can still provide new insights into how people interact with their televisions. In chapter 10, Martin explores what he calls the show's implicit Blackness by delving into the experience of Black women as fans of *The Golden Girls*. Through a focus on the show's programming, its production practices, and how Black fans engage with the series, he highlights themes like alternative kinship and celebration of joy that Black fans find in a series even in the absence of explicit representations of Blackness.

In chapter 11, Feil examines how *The Golden Girls* fits into various forms of queer camp culture, highlighting the show's portrayal of aging divas engaging in bad manners comedy. He traces how the sitcom navigates camp tropes, humor, and sexuality while forging a camp community among its characters and (queer) viewers and argues that the show resists normative constructs, uses humor to challenge stereotypes about age, gender, and sexuality, and operates within the context of the 1980s in response to new social and political climates.

And finally, in chapter 12, Patterson charts the transformation of drag performance centered around *The Golden Girls* from a subcultural expression to mainstream entertainment. Featuring one of the last known interviews with the famed San Francisco drag queen Heklina, she discusses how the extensive planning, marketing, and staging work of *Golden Girls* shows highlight the business aspects of drag alongside the performances themselves. She explores how television shows help drag performances attract diverse audiences and generate social media buzz for subcultural fan communities, offering a blend of familiar TV humor with the excitement of queer drag while providing cover to face down homophobia and intolerance.

Ultimately, this book provides readers with a comprehensive exploration of a television show that transcends eras and offers a versatile blueprint for approaching other television touchstones. This anthology goes beyond nostalgia, exploring the intricate layers of industry dynamics, textual complexities, and audience relatability that have made *The Golden Girls* as culturally relevant and resonant today as it was during its original broadcast run. Through its diverse array of scholarly voices, this collection reclaims *The Golden Girls* as a model for media studies analysis by presenting its rich

historical context, thematic depth, and intersectional relevance. Through its discussions of industry, text, and audience, this anthology not only commemorates the enduring legacy of *The Golden Girls* but also underscores its pivotal role in challenging norms, amplifying marginalized voices, and forming into a modern-day marvel. This book thus creates a testament to the enduring power of television as a cultural artifact and a catalyst for critical scholarly inquiry.

Beyond its scholarly dimensions, this collection also deeply explores a show about four women who, through the “miracle” of a room-available ad on a grocery store bulletin board started out as housemates and became a family. Remembering their time together, as Dorothy moves out in the final season, she says to the Girls, “It’s been an experience that I’ll always keep very close to my heart. And that these are memories that I’ll wrap myself in when the world gets cold, and I forget that there are people who are warm and loving . . . You’re angels, all of you.” And for so many, in the end, that story is the same, a beautiful portrait of how *The Golden Girls* changed our lives. Picture it: Four friends, once alone and misunderstood, now together and blessed, circling a table with a cheesecake and holding hands while smiling with tears in their eyes—lovingly singing, “Thank you for being a friend.”

Notes

1. Tony Maglio, “‘Golden Girls’ Cracked Nielsen’s Top 10 Acquired Streaming Shows in Week After Betty White’s Death,” *The Wrap* (blog), February 3, 2022, www.thewrap.com/golden-girls-ratings-betty-white-death-hulu-streaming/.

2. Since at least the 1970s, scholars have considered disparate spheres in studies of media and culture, including social relations, industry and production, text and distribution, and reception practices. Scholars like Richard Johnson and Julie D’Acci have been critical of a tendency in that work to focus on only one of the four spheres at a time, which risks depoliticizing the object of analysis from questions of power. As proposed by Paul du Gay et al., a circuit of culture approach provides a blueprint for analyzing cultural phenomena like products or practices that circulate through five interconnected nodes: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. In this book, we utilize a simplified version of this approach for a media text specifically (a circuit of media culture), to demonstrate an accessible way for scholars, students, and everyday viewers to think more critically about media texts. Although each chapter of this book leans into one area, all focus on all the interconnected elements of a circuit of media culture approach—production and context, text, and reception—that together make for a rounder analysis. See Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (Sage, 1997); Richard Johnson, “What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?,” *Social Text* 16 (1986–87): 38–80; Julie

D'Acci, "Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities," in *Television After TV*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Duke University Press, 2004).

3. Tim Brooks, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows 1946–Present*, 9th ed. (Ballantine Books, 2007), 1691.

4. Stuart Elliott, "NBC Likes Young Viewers, Judging from Its Fall Plans," *New York Times*, May 13, 1992, sec. D, 18.

5. Daniel Cerone, "Television: The Fountain of Youth Equation," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1992, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-06-07-ca-258-story.html.