

## Woman Appeal. A New Rhetoric of Consumption: Women's Domestic Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s

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## Chapter Nineteen

### Woman Appeal. A New Rhetoric of Consumption: Women's Domestic Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s

Fiona Hackney

When in 1926 two brothers from South Wales, William and Gomer Berry, struck a deal to acquire the entire business of the Amalgamated Press (AP), they took on the mantle of 'Britain's leading magazine publishing business,' after the untimely death of AP owner and press magnate, Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) (Cox and Mowatt 2014: 60–3). The continued importance of magazines aimed at the female reader for the Berry's empire was emphasised by William in his first speech as chairman, and in the coming years a host of new titles including *Woman and Home*, *Woman's Journal*, *Woman's Companion*, *Wife and Home*, *Woman and Beauty* and *Home Journal* were added to established staples such as *Home Chat*, *Women's Pictorial*, *Woman's World* and *Woman's Weekly*. The launch of over fifty titles by AP and its rivals Newnes and Pearson, and Odhams Press, put women and their magazines at the forefront of popular publishing in the interwar years. By the end of the 1930s Odhams Press, under the direction of its dynamic managing director Julius Elias (Lord Southwood), had usurped the AP's position with its innovative publication *Woman*, which brought the visual appeal of good quality colour printing to a tuppenny weekly, something that previously had only been available in expensive, high-class magazines. The interwar years witnessed expansion and consolidation, struggle and innovation as these publishing giants competed to command the lucrative market for women's magazines.

The buoyant market in operation in the 1920s opened new opportunities for women. Not only were more titles produced, but also more women were employed on magazines as writers, on the editorial side, in publicity, art departments, and in related businesses such as

advertising and retail, as female professionals were recruited to ‘appeal to women,’ and articulate their ‘point of view’ (Mosely 1926: 97; Greenby 1927: 201). Driven by commercial imperatives—women were considered to hold the purse strings of the nation—woman appeal, nevertheless, was envisaged in terms of understanding female psychology and a gendered perspective on life, in order to better represent and respond to modern women’s widening sphere of interests as mothers, wives, and workers: private individuals and public citizens. Such ideas underpinned the development of a service-style genre of consumer publication that, according to magazine historian Cynthia White, marked a ‘turning point in women’s publishing’ by offering the reader “‘intimate personal service’” with a secondary emphasis on entertainment,’ re-orientating women’s journalism away from the leisured, servant-keeping classes, and toward the middle ranks (1970: 96). Characterised by specialist writing that was both informal and expert, a more integrated approach to editorial and advertising, and an emphasis on visual communication, the service magazine had a domestic and ‘women’s interests’ focus and strove to strengthen ‘reader identification’ (96). For some magazines such as *Ideal Home* this included a free postal service putting readers in touch with, as Home Editor Julia Cairns put it, ‘authentic specialists’ in all subjects the magazine covered ‘from planning a house to making a soufflé, from tabling the new bride’s domestic time-sheet to getting together the nursery for the new baby.’ She declared, ‘I intensely desired that our magazine should be of practical use to the thousands of readers depending on it, getting ideas from it, trusting it’ (1960: 25).

In order to be of practical use those producing magazines had to know their readers—to understand their interests, tastes, views, aspirations, problems and anxieties. This demanded a closer relationship between producers and consumers and, as the pressure to expand circulations increased, it involved an expanded readership among what contemporary surveys termed the lower middle and upper working-classes (IPC 1932). Critics disagree about the

implications this had for readers. Press historian Joseph McAleer has described the new female readership (NFR) for magazines in terms of ‘a kind of escapism among working-class readers towards a middle-class ideal’ (1992: 81). Dan LeMahieu, meanwhile, has foregrounded audience agency in his analysis of commercial media in the period, arguing that far from dictating the cultural preferences of their public, cultural producers had to ‘bind themselves to the tastes of a diverse audience’ (1988: 19). This chapter argues that something more complicated than the simple appropriation of one class’s habits and ideals by another was taking place amidst the shifting power relations between those producing and consuming magazines in these years. Drawing on interviews with journalists and contemporary sources in the press and advertising, as well as oral history with women about their memories of magazine reading in the 1930s, it proposes that women brought distinct interests, needs and requirements, which were grounded in their lived experience and shaped their engagement with magazines.<sup>1</sup>

The increasingly hybrid environment of service magazines, moreover, as advertising became more integrated with editorial features and fiction, all of which used illustration or photography, in black and white and colour, signalled a new rhetoric of visual consumption shaping magazines as imaginative spaces in distinct ways. Many journalists and readers I spoke to employed the metaphor of the magazine as a window, which both ‘opened things up’ and mirror-like ‘reflected readers’ back onto themselves. The notion of the window-mirror became a central organising idea for me in understanding how the hybrid magazine environment worked as an imaginative space, shaped by the diverse, and sometimes competing, elements of, among others, its readers, editor, specialist writers, illustrators, advertisers, art directors and printers, all with their own protocols, interests and needs (Hackney 2012, 2017).

This chapter examines the new rhetoric of consumption through the lens of specialist journalism, and the increasingly integrated relationship between advertising and editorial in service magazines, arguing that it offered women, particularly the NFR, opportunities to engage with modernity in meaningful ways. It focuses on three characteristic magazines: *Modern Woman* (1925), *Woman's Weekly* (1911), and *Woman* (1937). Newnes' sixpenny monthly *Modern* typified the service magazine format with its liberal use of advertising and focus on domestic modernity—its strapline announced it as 'The Journal with the New Spirit of the Age.' An older style periodical, the AP's tuppenny letterpress *Woman's Weekly*, continued to achieve high sales and was characteristic of the 'women's interests' magazine in the 1930s; and Odhams' colour weekly *Woman* (1937) heralded the postwar, mass-market magazine. Each form the focus of the sections below, which examine expansion and innovation in the 1920s, followed by consolidation, an ethics of consumption, and the introduction of colour in the 1930s. First, it is necessary to consider the changed context in journalistic education, pay, and conditions that supported the growth of the female specialist writer, and service magazines.

### **'A very good job for a woman': Specialist Journalism and Advertising Women**

today is the day of the Specialist, and your only chance of breaking through into new ground is if you can contribute something new, or if not new, some new method of use, of presentation or of adaptation. (Cairns 1960: 13)

Attitudes to the woman journalist changed considerably in the first decades of the twentieth century. Whereas, in 1902 Mrs Belloc-Lowndes had addressed her column for female aspirants to those 'compelled to earn their own living,' by 1936 Emilie H. Peacocke, who edited the *Daily Express* woman's page, presented journalism as a serious business with significant rewards for women (1902: 127; 1936: 50–1). Specialist or expert journalism,

which involved what Cairns described as ‘a specialised knowledge of any subject which forms part of the fabric of everyday living,’ was central to this transformation (1960: 10). The specialist’s job was to inform and to inspire reader trust and confidence, ‘giving new zest to the hum-drum domestic round and making each day of duty one of adventurous life in the home’ (Peacocke 1936: 63). This section explores magazine journalism for women, with a focus on its characteristics, training opportunities, pay and conditions, including the interconnected growth of women in advertising. I argue that specialist journalism, in particular, promoted a new culture of consumption that put women’s everyday concerns, interests, dreams, and aspirations at the centre of modern life.

The establishment of professional training provided new points of entry into the profession for women. Initially intended to help men back into careers after the war, the pioneering University of London Diploma Course established in 1920 proved more popular with women, who made up more than half of its 400 graduates before it closed in 1939 (Hunter 1992: 689). Peacocke, a member of the Course Committee, argued that with qualifications women would no longer suffer ‘sex prejudice,’ but even she had to admit that a female reporter was still unlikely to get a ‘big story’ unless it happened to have a ‘feminine angle’ (1936: 90, 113). Others trained at Oxbridge or private colleges, and magazines advertised correspondence courses in journalism and commercial art. Miss Francis Low, author of many publications on journalism as a career for women, ran the South Molton Street school where future *Woman* editor Mary Grieve received what she later described as a ‘rigorous’ and ‘invaluable’ training (1964: 32–3). Costs, however, meant that for the most part women journalists were middle class (Altick 1962). Even then they could encounter family disapproval. Grieve recalled her father’s opposition to what he deemed an ‘unsuitable ambition’ for a woman (1963: 15).

A smoother entry was afforded to those with family in the profession. Mary Stott, who edited *Woman's Outlook* (the Co-operative Society's women's magazine) in the 1930s and went on to become women's page editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1957, came from a family of journalists who encouraged her choice of career (Hackney 2012: 63). Mary Dilnot, who began in 1939 as a young sub editor on *Woman's Weekly* and rose to be editor, was the daughter of *Answers'* editor George Dilnot. She observed: 'most, but not all [of those working on *Woman's Weekly* in the 1930s] had got there by knowing somebody who knew somebody' (64). The tried and tested route of secretary, now with typing and shorthand, remained productive. Starting out at *Woman and Home* aged eighteen as the editor's secretary's junior, Angela Wyatt became sub editor, then editor (65). Alice Head, reputedly the highest paid woman in Britain by the outbreak of the Second World War, began as a shorthand typist at Newnes' *Country Life* before taking up the editorship of *Woman at Home* aged twenty two, when the celebrated Annie S. Swan stepped down (Cox and Mowatt 2014: 66–8).

Once achieved, a staff position offered opportunities for relatively well-paid work. As a junior on the *Nursing Mirror* in 1925 Grieve considered her £3 5s a week a 'viable living wage' (1964: 42). Cairns, who by the mid-20s had graduated to an editorial position on Odhams' *Ideal Home*, earned 7 guineas a week and 'a salary approaching four figures' in 1927 when she was poached by Leslie Clark to work as House and Home Director on the AP's new up-market *Woman's Journal* (1960: 16, 27). Marked disparities existed. Odhams paid higher wages in the 1930s because it was a trade union house and the union chapels had consistently pressed for rises even in the face of the economic slump. In her early twenties in 1937 Peggy Makins, who went on to become the renowned agony aunt Evelyn Home, started work at *Woman at Home* at £5 a week, a good deal more than the £1 10s Dilnot received as a sub on *Woman's Weekly*, and something that compared favourably with the average male wage of

between £3 and £4 a week (Gardiner 2010: xv). When later she received a salary of £250 a year Makins felt 'plutocratic' (1975: 61); it was nevertheless a figure that fell far below the £500 a year that Virginia Woolf gave as a guarantee of independence in the 1929. Far from an unsuitable ambition, by the 1930s journalism was proving to be an excellent career, at least for some women.

Many specialists worked as outside contributors on a commission and non-commission basis. Arnold grouped women journalists into regular staff contributors whose work was commissioned but who worked outside the office, and freelance journalists who wrote on an infinite variety of subjects for different papers (1919: 34). The work could be steady and of long duration. The agony aunt at *Woman's Weekly* was a freelance who continued for years (Hackney 2012: 66). At *Woman and Home* all the subjects that involved 'doing,' such as compiling and testing out the instructions for knitting patterns and recipes were covered by freelancers (66). In her book on journalism as a career for women, monthly editor Myfanwy Crawshay claimed that freelancers could support themselves on earnings from articles or short story writing, potentially making £20 a week if they had energy, enthusiasm, and knew their markets (1932: 14).

It was the stimulating work environment as much as the wages that attracted many to the women's press. Newspaper offices tended to be ill-equipped for feminine sensibilities. Magazines, in contrast, employed a small, largely female staff. Cairns repeatedly referred to her team as a surrogate family (1960: 5, 39, 44). Dilnot was one of three female subs when she began at *Woman's Weekly* in the late 1930s, while Wyatt was part of a team of around twenty. Both enjoyed the variety of the work: editing articles, writing titles, sizing up photographs, layout, proof-reading, turning their hand to correspondence and answering the telephone. Dilnot affectionately recalled the relaxed but hardworking atmosphere at the *Weekly*:



We shared the same fiction and knitting department [with *Woman and Home* and *My Home*] and if anybody was out of a job it was quite common to go into another room and say, anything you want done, can I give a hand? ... We were always absolute workaholics ... the subs did anything ... It had a friendly atmosphere ... It was a very good job for a woman when I started ... And of course you a freedom. (Hackney 2012: 65)

Makins recorded her elation at being able 'to escape' to an office away from home, where it was assumed that any female must be at all times available for housework (1975: 35). Grieve found returning to the domestic routine of her family home so horrific after the excitement and independence of working as a journalist in London that she experienced recurring nightmares in which she relived the anxiety of being confined and having no work or, as she put it, 'no real life' (1964: 46). Freedom came at a price. 'There are no "cushy" jobs in journalism,' Arnold warned, a job that demanded 'all one's energies and all one's time' (1919: 34). Head demanded complete dedication, dividing young women employees into those who filled in time before marriage and those who put in overtime, 'because their occupation really means something to them' (1939: 194). An unofficial bar existed whereby women customarily left work on marriage. There were, of course, exceptions. Makins was encouraged to remain in post after marriage; she never wanted children. Cairns married twice but also did not have children. The modern ethos of professionalism did little to alleviate, and may even have exacerbated, the dilemma for women forced to choose between family and career.

Women's increased status in consumer journalism was accompanied by their employment in all aspects of advertising 'woman's point of view' (Bigham 1994; Hackney 2017). Author Elidor M. Briggs, who contributed careers features to *Modern Woman* in 1932, claimed that advertising was 'one of the most interesting and suitable kinds of work for

women' with salaries of £250–£350 per year and £500 in exceptional circumstances (Aug 1932: 30). The American J. Walter Thompson (JWT) agency installed a Women's Editorial Department entirely staffed by female copywriters and W. S. Crawford launched their Women's Department run by Margaret Havinden (Scanlon 1994). Magazine historian Jennifer Scanlon highlighted the 'missionary spirit' and 'social service goals' of advertising at JWT where women advertisers believed that they could 'improve the position of women' (1994: 171). In Britain, women such as Ethel Wood, a Director of the British Samson Clarke agency and lifelong advocate for women, and the social reformer, author and magazine *Agony Aunt*, Leonora Eyles, agreed (Wood 1925: 180; Hackney 2016).

Service magazines were characterised by closer ties between specialists and advertisers, and a light, informal tone influenced by advertising. Lightness of style, Crawshaw assured, did not necessarily mean low standards, while 'rudimentary facts about housekeeping and other feminine matters,' were no longer sufficient; 'writing had to have "news value,"' another idea co-opted from advertising (1932: 27). The new style was designed to engage readers in an imagined conversation and participate in a cultural imaginary that referenced the aural-visual, commercial language of radio and cinema rather than literature and the written word. Even gossip was modernised. The 'modern gossip feature,' according to Peacocke, was a 'versatile, vital, stimulating, wholesome and healthy' branch of the journalist's craft, which imparted news about the 'phases of modern social life' in a 'chatty informative style' and 'friendly spirit' (1936: 28). Topics included: new houses and flats, original ideas in interior decoration, clothes and parties, celebrity babies, debutantes, trends in dinner-table talk, novel foods, witty sayings, comments of notable people on the affairs of the day and novel holiday plans. The 'heart-to-heart' talk with advice on 'problems and perplexities, emotional, philosophical, psychological, domestic, aesthetic

and financial,' additionally opened opportunities for women with their supposedly innate ability to empathise (1936: vii).

Writing about the American *Ladies' Home Journal*, Jennifer Scanlon argued that advertising women and journalists were in a 'paradoxical position' because, despite their belief in the power of consumer magazines to improve readers' lives, they achieved professional success and independence by encouraging women to become dependent consumers (Scanlon 1994: 171). The editors, journalists, and advertisers cited here, nevertheless, seem sincere in their belief in the woman-centred service that magazines offered by foregrounding readers' views, aspirations, desires, and concerns, and responding to them. Magazines and advertisers, as such, operated a commercial equivalent to the national service envisaged by Lord Reith at the BBC (Winship 2000). The key was to regulate the service in advertising and editorial, maintain standards, preserve quality, and retain reader trust. Editors faced new challenges as an expanding consumer culture in the 1920s funded a growth in the number of publications aimed at female readers, and advertising became increasingly integrated with editorial; a situation that precipitated new patterns of communication in magazines.

### **New Patterns of Communication: Advertising and Editorial in the 1920s**

National expenditure rose from an estimated £31 million in 1920 to £57 million in 1928 and the expansion in magazine publishing for women in the 1920s was driven by their ability to attract advertising (Nevett 1982: 145). The Newnes-Pearson group, which focused its efforts entirely on periodicals, was the AP's main rival between the wars and a situation of increasing 'oligopolistic rivalry' developed (Cox and Mowatt 2014: 65). Newnes, under the general management of Walter Grierson and with an advertising department directed by Alfred Johnson, held a controlling interest in R. S. Cartwright's publications including the

enormously successful *Country Life*, *Homes & Gardens*, and a stable of Leach-branded dress publications. Some of the latter were absorbed into a series of domestic service titles aimed at middle-class women; in 1925 *Leach's Newest Fashions* merged with *Modern Woman*, for instance. Pearson, meanwhile, targeted the working-class sector with romance papers and *Woman's Friend*, a popular magazine for housewives (White 1970: 97). Crucial to understanding the meaning and significance for readers of these service-style publications is an understanding of the new patterns of communication that emerged as, for instance, advertising became increasingly anchored to editorial.

The interwar years have been characterised as a time when advertising was reshaping the institutional structures of the media and changing its relationship with audiences. Publications were no longer regarded as products to be sold to readers but rather 'vehicles' organising audiences into clearly identifiable target groups that could be 'sold to advertisers' (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1986: 103). Sally Stein, in her analysis of *Ladies' Home Journal*, argued that this drew the reader 'closer to the marketplace' in ways that represented a form of 'supervised mobility' and 'entrapment' (1989: 146–9). Nevertheless, while publicity managers worked hard to sell magazine space in Britain, it is by no means clear that their publications only represented advertisers' interests. Editors were acutely aware of the need to maintain editorial integrity in order to retain reader trust and loyalty. They stressed the *service* magazines offered by informing readers and educating them to be critical consumers. Cairns, for instance, although an ardent supporter of advertising, which she considered 'the very lifeblood' of a publication keeping the editorial department 'well abreast of news,' firmly rejected any "quid pro quo" policy of endorsement (1960: 25–6).

The new patterns of communication also altered reading habits. Arguing that reading was 'formed and stabilised in the kind of matter provided by the magazine and the manner of its presentation,' the literary critic Q. D. Leavis believed that editorial designed like a poster

to 'catch the eye' promoted reading 'with the eye' rather than the mind and resulted in a 'passive,' compulsive, uncritical 'reading habit' akin to a 'drug habit' (1932: 13, 183, 8). Leavis's literary elitism aside, the compulsive nature of magazine reading she identified was confirmed by the women I interviewed, many of whom referred to how they 'took it all in,' one even claiming to read every word of advertising (Hackney 2012: 119). Far from an uncritical reader, such high levels of immersion seem rather to suggest the 'absorbed' gaze that Emilie Altenloh identified in her 1914 study of female cinema audiences, which film historian Patrice Petro ascribed to engagement with a gender-differentiated subjectivity and experience of modernity (1989 3–4). This suggests an attentive and knowing reader, rather than one who was passive and duped.

Advertisers themselves were eager to raise professional standards in order to be recognised as a 'respectable' profession (Nevett 1982: 150–6). Numerous professional organisations were established, including the Women's Advertising Society and the Institute of Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising (1927), and new scientific methods of market research were introduced. While illustrated monthlies, in particular, depended increasingly on revenue from advertising, advertisers did not have it all their own way. They depended on the reputations of the publications in which they advertised to establish their ethical credentials, and magazines offered services such as reader profiling. Publishers applied pressure for the regulation of agencies and were reluctant to divulge reliable estimates of net sales circulations, the one thing that advertisers craved. The advertising executive Arthur Richardson attributed this reticence to a combination of conservatism and the fear of lost revenue if circulations were revealed (1925: 423–4). Partly as a means of side-stepping the net sales issue, publishers and their publicity managers modernised their service to advertisers by introducing charging systems for allotting space, improved typographic and display facilities, and advertisement guarantees to guard against unscrupulous and dishonest

practices. These services were also intended to assist readers by controlling the reliability of advertised products and improving the appearance of magazines.

*Good Housekeeping* led the way with a home management section under the direction of Mrs Cottington Taylor and in 1924 a British version of the American Good Housekeeping Institute, which housed laboratories and kitchens to test the quality of products advertised in the magazine. Advertising was rejected if goods were found to be substandard and the coveted Good Housekeeping Institute Seal of Approval provided British consumers with their ‘first effective source of consumer advice and protection’ which, according to Alice Head, helped generate both circulation and advertising revenue (Cox and Mowatt 2014: 68). Others followed suit. Cairns was charged with equipping a model kitchen to test recipes when she joined *Woman’s Journal* in 1927 (1960: 28). Philip Emanuel, advertising director at Odhams, produced a scheme with the slogan, ‘All round value and a square guarantee for a straight line’ that promised to refund readers who suffered loss when answering advertisements for goods in the Press’s publications (*Woman* 1 Jan 1938: 33). The practice, nevertheless, was not without its detractors. Although advertising executive Ethel Wood considered guarantees a sign that the press was taking responsibility for the advertising it carried, Richardson viewed them more cynically as ‘window-dressing’ (1925: 120; 1925: 514).

The new science of consumer psychology claimed to further enhance the efficacy of advertising by helping advertisers understand and respond to human motivation. In a series of articles in *Modern Advertising* Frank Watts, a retired psychology lecturer, argued that advertising must both arouse instinctive impulses (through “‘Short-Circuit” Appeals’) and elicit rational, conscious judgements (via “‘Long-Circuit” Appeals’) (1925: 103–4). Adverts, he argued, needed to produce ‘conviction’ in consumers as a necessary preliminary to buy and this was best achieved by organising thoughts and feelings about an idea through specific ‘sentiments,’ such as: the sentiment of ‘science’ (proofs of hygiene), ‘value’ (quality,

durability) or ‘efficiency’ (economy) (1925: 375–7). Watts, moreover, cited studies evidencing the benefits of particular modes of display including: illustration for holding the attention of ‘picture-minded persons’; location on the upper sections of pages for effective recall; and the ‘attraction value’ of placement on the front or back covers, and next to relevant ‘news matter’ (1925: 246, 245). Next matter placement drove the development of service departments run by specialists, while the technique of ‘turn pages’—breaking up fiction and features with adverts and running them through the magazine—became standard procedure, despite readers reported dislike of the practice. Addressing these concerns, Cairns underscored the economic value of ‘next matter,’ which could be charged at a higher price, and emphasised the value of pictorial advertising to the ‘over-all appearance’ of the magazine (1960: 42). Makins agreed that interweaving editorial and advertising risked irritating readers but saved money (1975: 181). Magazines, with their purportedly close relationship to readers and unique combination of rational (editorial) and emotional (fiction) appeals, provided a perfect environment for a new language of communication that combined authoritative information with fantasy and escape, something that editors were aware of and ready to develop.

<Insert Figures 19.1 & 19.2 here, quarter page for each located next to each other, black and white>

By the end of the 1920s sixpenny monthlies such as *Modern Woman*, which depended on advertising revenue to supplement sales, were integrating editorial and advertising as composite images in an early form of the advertorial. A two-page spread consisting of an article by the magazine’s housekeeping expert Warwick Holmes facing a full-page advert for Goblin vacuum cleaners is characteristic (Figures 19.1 and 19.2). The two were given visual coherence through a symmetrical design, whereby the line drawing of a fashionably dressed saleswoman in the ad on the right mirrors the photograph of a similarly attired demonstrator

in the editorial on the left, and connects the headline: ‘What the eye don’t see ...’ (editorial) to “‘The dirt you can’t see is the worst’” (advert) (Apr 1930: 63–4). Significantly, both editorial and advertisement employed the tropes of advertising in terms of appealing to fear and the sentiment of science, drawing on contemporary anxieties about the ‘dust germ’ theory of disease promoted by exponents of the new housekeeping (Binnie 1929: 131). Whereas Holmes’ editorial focused on rational appeal and the sentiment of value, offering the reader a thorough appraisal of the vacuum cleaner (no products named) as ‘an investment, with a dividend payable in 50 percent more comfort and leisure,’ the advert, which was staged as an informal conversation, foregrounded more emotive social anxieties and ‘instinctive impulses’ for ‘self-display’ (Watts 1925: 374). “‘I thought, like you, that cleaners were all right for shops and restaurants, but that people like us didn’t need them. Now I know better,’” the saleswoman opines. A free booklet written by the Good Housekeeping Institute’s Mrs Cottington Taylor appended to the advert completes the combined offer of rational and emotional appeals.

By addressing the ‘woman who does her own housework’ as well as those with ‘staff’ and selling ‘electric and non-electric models,’ *Modern Woman* aimed to be inclusive, targeting readerships within an expanding middle-class (Apr 1930: 63, 64). Electrical labour-savers, like the domestic servants they gradually replaced, were a primary signifier of middle-class status. Yet, unlike servants, electrical appliances also signalled the excitement of a fast-paced and technologically innovative modernity, something that had far wider appeal. The design historian Adrian Forty has used the term ‘millenarian spirit’ to describe a discourse that connected electricity with progressive values of liberation, efficiency, health, comfort, economy and informality in the period (1986: 190). He argues that as a phenomenon principally manifest in commercial culture (in the press, marketing and product design), it introduced a new psychology of modernity which radically altered how people imagined their



lives. With their pages of integrated light, bright pictorial advertising and informative editorial connoting emotional and rational appeals, service magazines in the 1920s held up a mirror for readers that both reflected aspects of their lives and offered them a window through which they might imagine themselves differently, modernised and improved.

### **Colour and Class: Mass Weeklies in the 1930s**

In June 1935 AP Director William Berry was still promoting the value of his ‘nearly a hundred monthly and weekly periodicals,’ offering ‘unique coverage of this market’ to those advertising goods for women. The strategy of flooding the market with new titles, had stalled in the mid-1930s and publishers needed to develop new strategies. Visual appeal was one of them. American publications such as *Vogue*, with its use of illustrations employing clever design layouts and display advertising, were heralded as ‘a shaft of bright illumination’ and a progressive force in British publishing (Cox and Mowatt 2014: 63, 69–72). Advertising rather than cover price was the main engine for generating revenue for these ‘high class’ magazines, which were rigorously targeted at an elite and wealthy readership. For advertisers, mainstream publishers and many readers, however, ‘class papers,’ as advertising expert H. W. Eley explained, referred not to social class but rather to ‘specialist-interest publications’ that appealed to ‘special classes of people ... [whose] interests and point of view are known’ (1932: 99, 100–101). No class of people were more powerful, in this respect, than women. I will demonstrate how two mid-range high-selling weeklies, the AP’s *Woman’s Weekly*, which employed traditional letterpress, and Odhams’ new colour-gravure, *Woman* (1936), tackled the problem of attracting advertising while building audience, and how this complicates assumptions about the undesirable effects of advertising in magazines.

Pressure became intense as the rapid growth of newspaper sales drew advertising revenue away from magazines. Advertising managers had to promote their publications’

unique capabilities (Eley 1931: 91). Philip Emanuel at Odhams underlined the value of visual appeal, arguing that the longer lives, multiple readerships, and leisured context in which periodicals were read facilitated a ‘more intimate and detailed job of selling’ where even lengthy copy would be received with interest and in a sympathetic frame of mind (1934: 85). Paul Redmayne and Hugh Weeks, in their contemporary guide for the profession, instructed advertisers to gauge the class of person to which a paper circulated from a publication’s ‘environment,’ namely the ‘general tone of the editorial matter’ and the ‘amount and “class” of extant advertising’ (1931: 157). In a pressured market a magazine’s environment became a key factor in establishing its value for advertisers *and* readers.

This was finely calibrated. Within the broader rubric of specialist interest women’s magazines, Eley identified five categories: house and garden, housekeeping, women’s interests, fashion, and miscellaneous. The first two included a further three sub-groups, organised according to their ideal readers’ spending power and cultural interests: shilling monthlies such as *Ideal Home* that connected with the material structure and embellishment of the home and *Good Housekeeping* which dealt with its ‘working side’; sixpenny monthlies such as *Modern Woman* and *Modern Home* that were suitable for advertising ‘articles of lower price and quality’; and tuppenny weeklies such as *Home Chat*. ‘Women’s interests’ publications such as *Woman’s Weekly*, meanwhile, dealt with the ‘lighter interests’ of women and girls, attracting adverts for toilet preparations, dress materials and accessories, clothing, imitation gems, beauty treatments, food, and medical preparations associated with ‘beautiful complexions and slimness,’ as well as a ‘spice of “housekeeping interest”’ (1932: 100–104).

Contemporary readership surveys indicate a shift in the 1930s away from older format domestic magazines such as *Home Chat* toward ‘woman’s interests’ titles such as *Woman’s Weekly* (McAler 1992: 81). *The Times* claimed a circulation in excess of 500,000 for the *Weekly* in 1926 (6 June 1936: 19). This suggests a growing readership among those who

identified as young, modern women rather than with older notions of class-differentiated domesticity. In 1932 *Woman's Weekly* was the most popular weekly read across a range of social groups (middle, lower middle, upper working-class and working class) with a slightly higher concentration amongst those with incomes between £200 and £500 a year (IPC 1932).<sup>2</sup> Whereas, *Modern Woman's* liberal use of advertorials suggests a dependence on income from advertising, in the high-selling *Weekly*, advertising had to be carefully managed to retain reader confidence. Editorial endorsement, in particular, was highly controversial. Angela Wyatt considered the practice unethical, declaring that it would never have happened on the *Weekly's* sister paper *Woman and Home* where circulation figures (350,000 per month) attracted advertising. Mary Dilnot recalled a strategic compromise at *Woman's Weekly* whereby editorial gave hints but stopped short at printing product names; this was a practice intended to preserve editorial integrity, lessen offence to other advertisers, and enhance a sense of shared knowledge between magazine and reader (Hackney 2012: 87). Such strategic thinking is also evident in the placement and distribution of advertising in the wider environment of the magazine.

While around a third of *Woman's Weekly* was taken up with advertising, a percentage that remained roughly stable throughout the interwar years, such practices as next matter placement meant that advertisements became more integrated with editorial (Hackney 2012: 90). Close analysis of a typical issue from 1933, nevertheless, reveals how an ethos of controlled and even critical consumption prevailed (25 Feb 1933). This was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, features and fiction lead the way, predominating in the first half of the magazine (twenty four pages). Secondly, while advertisements are organised around the editorial text they reinforce it's message and, being grouped in three key stages—a tripartite organisation—they together constitute a coherent narrative arc within the geography of the magazine. The five full-page illustrated adverts that proceed 'Woman's Weekly Whispers,'

the opening editorial, represent the first stage and underscore the paper's ethos of realistic aspiration with their focus on low cost fashionability, health, tasty treats, free offers, and the latest dress patterns. The adverts for health tonics, face creams ('The Pond's Way to Beauty'), Skippers sardines ('tasty for tea'), and items for making or adapting clothes such as shoe dyes and the Singer sewing machine, which interweave with the serial at the centre of the magazine, signify the second stage, reinforcing the stories ethos of difficulties faced and rewards achieved, and translating it into the sphere of readers' everyday lives. Finally fourteen of the twenty two pages in the last third of the magazine are filled with small ads which, with their promise of cures for double chins, epilepsy or 'women's trouble,' signal readers' real life challenges and, as such, contextualise 'Mrs. Marryat Advises,' the agony page. The brightly optimistic opening editorial, with its endless suggestions for how to live life with 'dignity-and-dash' wearing a frock made from remnants or a *Woman's Weekly* pattern, contrasts sharply with letters about unemployment, 'lonely evenings' or a boyfriend who 'got the sack for his sauce' that populate the problem page (285, 335). Read together, such correspondences and contradictions shape an uneven environment that both reproduced reader problems and offered hope.

This complex relationship is also evident in the serial, 'Wanted a Lady's Maid,' which straddles the magazine's front and final sections, bridging the gap between fashionable fantasies and real life dilemmas. Penned by the popular romance author Laura Lady Troubridge, the story transports the reader into the world of its heroine Mavis Deane, lady's maid to Mrs. Gerald, 'one of the richest women in London' (335). In stark contrast to the ethos of controlled consumption prevailing elsewhere in the magazine, whereby pleasure had to be earned through careful economy and ingenious application, Mavis's job involved close contact with an abundance of material pleasures, something that is immediately made clear by the bi-line which, framed in the form of a job advert, announces:

“A Hundred Dresses to Care for –Thousands of Pounds’ Worth of Jewellery to Cherish – The Finest Lingerie to Launder *and* Mend”... From a Villa in the South of France to a Shooting Box in Norfolk, the Lady’s Maid Follows her Employer’s Trail of Pleasure ... (294)

While her wealthy employers’ careless pleasures are predicated on their maid’s endless work, her pleasures, much like those of the magazine reader, were vicarious—experienced at a distance and second-hand. As the story unfolds, Mavis’s moral authority as honest, abstemious and hardworking, is set against the behaviour of her so-called social superiors, in particular the over-indulged Clarissa whose drunken antics, the maid reflected, reveal a ‘pagan, materialistic soul’ (296). ‘Wanted a Lady’s Maid’ articulates the moral compass of the magazine. It teaches readers that real satisfaction lies in a life where qualities of goodness, loyalty and caring are valued above material things. By presenting the narrative from the maid’s point of view and exposing the invisible work necessary to support a leisured upper-class lifestyle, the story serves both as a critique of class and unbridled consumption. At the same time, details of fabulous dresses, jewels, and exotic locations allowed readers the pleasure of escapist fantasies which, experienced in close proximity to the achievable pleasures presented in advertising, forged a fluid cultural space to imagine the ethical dilemmas and moral values associated with a modern culture of consumption (Giles 2004: 126–9).

In the case of *Woman*, launched in 1937, a ‘growing body of readers [were] highly sceptical of editorial integrity,’ according to future editor Mary Grieve. As a result she was careful to differentiate advertising’s task of selling goods from the ‘job of editorial,’ which was to ‘create an interest in current products, to inform and educate on new developments, new fashions,’ providing the reader with a ‘background of knowledge and discrimination’ when shopping (1964: 106–7). Nevertheless, when the circulation figures promised to

advertisers failed to materialise after the first few months of publication, the magazine was saved by the introduction of a 'new policy' that combined lighter editorial matter such as fashion, fiction, and knitting, with a more aggressive commercial remit, something that Grieve claimed, put readers 'wants and habits' at its heart (1964: 103–4). One casualty was the publication's highly respected, ex-*Vogue* fashion editor, Alison Settle. She was replaced by Anne Edwards who, with a background in advertising, was deemed to 'have the splendid gift of knowing women as they were, not as they were thought to be' (1964: 104).

<Insert Figure 19.3 here, full page colour>

Such thinking suggests the ethos of advertising advocated by Ethel Wood who associated 'woman appeal' with a pragmatic understanding of the realities of women's lives, both their challenges and dreams. Wood outlined a number of 'selling appeals': 'educative,' 'price,' 'style,' 'humour,' 'romance' and 'confidential'. While 'educational copy' was reserved principally for expensive labour-saving appliances and considered to instil higher standards of living, 'romance' was acknowledged to be most successful with the mass of consumers (1927: 213–14). Demonstrating her detailed knowledge of consumers, she advised 'indirect economy' and 'leisure' rather than the 'time saving' appeals that were most often used for electrical appliances, if advertisers wished to appeal to a mass market (1927: 213–14). Economists Bowden and Offer later confirmed consumer preference for leisure and 'time-using' goods, attributing this to the low economic value placed on working-class women's time as a result of their low-paid and temporary status in the labour market (1996: 268). Full-page colour adverts, printed on Goss gravure printing presses at Odhams' new plant at Watford, for expensive labour-savers in *Woman* were replaced with those for items such as cigarettes, chocolates, and radios that were associated with leisure and pleasure, and employed the drama of colour to evoke romance and emotional appeal (Figure 19.3).

Whereas, editorial led the *Weekly*'s ethos of controlled and critical consumption, advertising

predominated at *Woman* where a new language of visual communication evoked a world of sensual pleasure that was not only meaningful in terms of readers' circumstances, but also connected with their dreams.

## **Conclusion**

Publishers faced severe problems by the end of the 1930s. Newnes and Pearson consolidated to make economies and the AP's financial performance was in serious decline. According to press historians Cox and Mowatt, '[t]argeting a well-defined audience on behalf of advertisers became the key to producing a successful magazine' and the most important target audience remained women (2014: 66, 72). *Woman* gained an enormous following in the decades after the war and demonstrates how strategies changed and a new visual rhetoric in advertising and editorial became the predominant means of appealing to, and connecting with, readers in meaningful ways. Angela Wyatt recalled the interwar years as a unique period when, despite the importance of advertising, for publications with solid circulations at least the ethics of editorial still held sway. The implementation of new codes of practice, legislation and control, moreover, meant that advertising was becoming respectable, something that a 1938 Mass-Observation survey confirmed (Nevett 1982: 160–8; 1938: 20–33). Asked about their attitudes to advertising, respondents acknowledged concerns about its 'dangerous influence,' but tempered these with perceptions of it as a 'useful and necessary' force, which introduced new foods and products that 'improved the physical condition'; they regarded it as a 'communal service' to 'inform people' and 'benefit them' (20–2). As one respondent put it, in the classed language of the day, '[a]dvertising is an enormous educational force giving everybody ideas above their station' (21). Driven by pressures to expand but also to serve their readerships, magazines in the interwar years offered a space for women to imagine lives beyond the strictures of such notions as 'their station,' and the means to put their ideas into practice.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of readers' reception of magazines see Hackney 2012 and 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Working-class women in receipt of less than £5 a week, for instance, had incomes of £250 a year and constituted about three quarters of all households (Bowden and Offer 1996: 252).